



Medway Council

Shortlisted for Family Learning to Support Health and Wellbeing

The Food and Nutrition team in the Public Health department of Medway Council works closely with local families – as well as other professionals, such as health visitors and childcare providers, dieticians, and child services – to reduce health inequalities and improve children's start to life. They do this by offering engaging cookery programmes and providing child-based support around food and nutrition.

One such programme, Food Adventures, supports children who are considered 'fussy eaters' to help them extend their diet and eating behaviours in a positive way. Families had previously described how stressful and worrying it is to deal with fussy eating on their own without the reassurance that they are supporting their child in the right way – which is where the service steps in.

Fighting fussy eating!

Food Adventures' Fussy Eating Service is an 11-week course set in a fun and relaxing environment which uses play, stories, games and food exploration to encourage children to explore and feel more confident and comfortable around food. The use of these activities provides fun experiences that improve outcomes for children's eating habits.

From group picnics, to water play, to playdough reconstructions – each and every activity is linked to food. Children also have the chance to recreate stories with food and toys, plant and grow food, cook recipes and sing and dance as a group, which are all supportive in effective learning at the same time as meeting the aims of improving fussy eating.

A child's autonomy is a key element of the programme, with children being encouraged to make their own lunch at their picnic by letting them prepare, cook, lay the table and serve their own meals.

Rich resources for families

Whilst providing fun and interactive activities for children, the programme also offers information and support to parents on a healthy lifestyle and the course teaches evidence-based strategies to deal with fussy eating. These cover individual topics such as using positive language, how to improve mealtimes and what a healthy diet looks like.



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Further to this, families are given information packs, top tips, rewards charts and a place to note and track their child's progress using a 'pirate map'. Various resource sheets can become activities for the whole family to get involved in – such as a shopping list template, recipe sheets, and colouring sheets focusing on healthy eating.

Parents also benefit from the opportunity of being part of a community of families which are going through the same experiences as they are – providing mutual support and sharing their own learnings with each other.

Making positive changes

This service is making a huge difference to the families in Medway, as well as having an impact on the broader population health of children in Medway. It's an important local service which provides a solution where there was previously a gap in support and opportunities for children struggling with food.

As a result of the programme, a positive change in children's eating patterns and the families' confidence has been noted. Pilot data showed a 69% decrease in fussy eating behaviours, with 87.5% of attendees noting a visible increase in the enjoyment of food.

Further to this, the experiences of participating families are helping to shape the programme for future cohorts of children and families, creating a continuous feedback loop to further improve our tools and services and seeking to improve the eating behaviours of more children in Medway.