

Food practices in early childhood services

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The Queensland Department of Families, Youth and Community Care, has funded the development of a food and nutrition resource for use in a variety of early childhood services. This book has a working title of *Food Foundations for Children* and will be published towards the end of 1997. It is based on the theoretical model for food and nutrition education developed by the National Nutrition Education in Schools Project (1). *Food Foundations for Children* provides food and nutrition information and ideas for the carers of young children and also contains a cross curricular approach to young children's food learning with many suggestions of 'hands on' activities for young children. It encourages the development and practising of decision making skills in children with regard to their own food selection and preparation.

As part of the evaluation of *Food Foundations for Children*, an initial survey was conducted to establish baseline data about food practices in early childhood services across Queensland. This did not include details of menus but addressed issues such as whether the service had a nutrition policy, the environment of food provision and whether children were involved in food preparation and decision making. The types of services surveyed were, Child Care Centres, State and Catholic preschools, community kindergartens, Family Day Care schemes and School Age Care programs. Surveys were sent to 100 members (selected at random from lists of these services in Queensland) of each of the five types of services. Response rate was from 71% to 94%. Selected results are tabulated below:

	Services with nutrition policy (%)	Parents involved regularly in food decision making (%)	Parents involved in food prep. (%)	Children involved in own meal prep (%)	Children involved in planning food prep. experiences (%)
Child Care Centres	100	46	89	71	63
School Age Care	59	15	22	62	59
Family Day Care	91	67	31	64	51
State and Catholic preschools	73	25	93	55	60
Community kindergartens	100	15	90	58	60

After *Food Foundations for Children* is published, there are plans for professional development workshops to assist with the implementation of the resource in services. A second survey of food practices in early childhood services will be conducted six months after the workshops and comparisons will be made with the baseline data reported here.

1. Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services. Food and Nutrition in Action. 1996;50