

BANGOR FOOD AND ACTIVITY RESEARCH UNIT

Implementing the Food Dude Healthy Eating Programme

August 2007

This document is intended to outline the processes involved in implementing the Food Dude Healthy Eating Programme on a large scale.

The Bangor Food and Activity Research Unit (BFARU)

The BFARU is a non-profit making research group based at the School of Psychology, University of Wales, Bangor, UK. Professor Fergus Lowe and Dr. Pauline Horne are the Unit directors. Over 15 years of extensive research, the BFARU has developed the Food Dude Healthy Eating Programme, which greatly increases the quantity and range of fruit and vegetables that children will consume as part of their regular diet. The BFARU has now developed a stand-alone package to enable primary schools to implement the programme themselves across the full age of pupils. This is available to schools provided that sufficient funding is in place to cover the costs of the materials, foods and implementation.

The Food Dude Healthy Eating Programme

The Food Dude Healthy Eating Programme is specifically designed for use in primary schools to increase 4-11 year old children's consumption of fruit and vegetables. It incorporates three key behaviour change principles – repeated tasting, peer-modelling, and rewards.

The Programme consists of an initial 16-day Intervention phase (Phase 1) during which children are introduced to the “Food Dudes” who, via video adventures, letters and rewards, encourage them to taste and eat fruit and vegetables. This introduction provides sufficient opportunities for children to repeatedly sample fruit and vegetables, and, in the process, develop a liking for them.

Following this, the Maintenance phase (Phase 2) of the Programme begins and the school supports the children's increased consumption of fruit and vegetables, for example, through the use of class wall charts and certificates. This phase lasts for up to a year and the aim is for the school to move towards a self-sustaining system of rewarding fruit and vegetable consumption to ensure that a “culture” of healthy eating is maintained over time.

Research by the BFARU has shown that by far the greatest increases in fruit and vegetable consumption are achieved when the peer-modelling element (i.e., videos, letters) and the rewards are used in combination. For this reason, the Programme must be used in its complete form.

Implementation

In order for the Programme to be implemented in schools in a particular area, it needs to be co-ordinated and managed by personnel based in a local organisation (e.g., commercial organisation, local education authority, local health board, city council, primary care trust,). These local Food Dude Project Managers (FDPMs) will be responsible for the following key tasks:

1. Recruit schools and identify a co-ordinator in each school;
2. Ensure that school co-ordinators attend a training workshop;
3. Ensure an adequate supply of foods in each school;
4. Re-produce materials and provide to schools;
5. Monitor the programme's progress over time in each school and provide a continual source of support;
6. Organise distribution and collection of teacher and parent feedback questionnaires.

It is essential that the FDPMs receive adequate training in the procedures and underlying principles of the Programme. The BFARU provide training and also advise on the implementation of the project in various settings.

Contact with Schools

For each school, the FDPM will first need to meet with the Principal to provide an overview of the programme and its benefits. Once Principal approval has been obtained, the FDPM will need to identify an in-school co-ordinator who will be responsible for the Programme. This person will be key to ensuring that all procedures are strictly adhered to and will be responsible for ensuring that materials are distributed around the school. Given the responsibilities involved it is best if the co-ordinator is not the school principal.

The in-school co-ordinator at least (if not other members of teaching staff) must be fully trained by the FDPMs in the procedures and underlying principles of the programme. Where possible, this should be provided as in-service training for the relevant members of school staff. Each school will need to decide how it will run the reward procedures integral to the intervention and maintenance phases.

Communication with parents throughout the project is essential in order to encourage their involvement. In the first instance, parents need to be informed of the intention to implement the Programme, and should receive an outline of its aims. Food Dude Homepacks are provided as part of the Programme and these include information designed to help parents encourage their children to eat fruit and vegetables at home. It is useful if parents can be given general feedback on the children's performance in the programme.

The FDPMs will need to maintain regular contact with the schools during Phases 1 and 2 through a schedule of visits and phone calls.

Food Supply

To implement the programme on a large scale it will be necessary to initially create links with the area's catering supplier. The school meals service will need to

provide at least one vegetable and one fruit every day – enough to meet demand – perhaps enough for every child.

In schools where meals are not provided, children will need to be provided with a portion of raw vegetables and a piece of fruit for the 16 days of Phase 1. This is to give every child the opportunity to taste fruit and vegetables and take part in the programme. The foods will need to be provided at no cost to the schools or parents; the FDPs should liaise with local suppliers to ensure provision and delivery of the foods. After the initial 16 days, parents are requested to provide children with fruit and vegetables in their packed lunches; Food Dude fruit and vegetables containers are provided to each child for this purpose at the start of Phase 2. In this way, parents, as well as children, are encouraged to change their behaviour.

Materials

Once the above are in place, the FDPs may organise the materials to be used in the Programme. The total number of children and teaching staff per school will first need to be calculated. The following materials are essential for the running of the Programme;

Items per child

- Parent letters
- Rewards
- Homepacks
- Certificates
- Fruit and vegetable containers

Items for whole school

- Teacher and co-ordinator instructions and monitoring sheets
- Video episodes (infant and junior versions)
- Food Dude Letters
- Wall Chart

All of the print/photocopy items and the relevant artwork are available from the BFARU. It will be the FDPs' responsibility to identify and purchase rewards directly from their own suppliers. Printed items will need to be reproduced and distributed to schools.

The FDPs will need to monitor the progress of the programme in each school to ensure that class teachers are adhering to the procedures. This may be achieved by requesting teachers to record the number of children who are eating fruit and vegetables in their classes before the programme, and during phases 1 and 2. A Class Record Card is provided for each class in every school for this purpose. The school co-ordinator will be asked to collate the results from all classes onto the Whole School Record Card; this should be returned to the FDPs when completed. This monitoring is also a useful exercise for the school staff as it provides immediate feedback on the effectiveness of the programme.

Evaluation

The research carried out by the BFARU employed careful measures of each child's individual consumption of fruit and vegetables before, during and after the programme has been introduced. Whilst this is a time-consuming and costly exercise, it does yield a quantitative measure of the effectiveness of the programme. Simpler measures suitable for a large number of schools are provided by questionnaires. The BFARU have developed short questionnaires for parents, teachers and school co-ordinators to assess the perceived impact of the programme.

Costs

Currently, the estimated cost of the project management and materials is £18.00 per child. Please note, these costs are for the rewards and staffing; they are not paid to the BFARU. This does not include the cost of providing additional fruit and vegetables or VAT. This figure is based on approximately 30,000 children participating from 150 schools. The costs for a larger-scale roll-out would be further reduced.

Contacts and Further Information

If you would like further information about implementing the Food Dude Programme on a large scale please contact:

The Bangor Food and Activity Research Unit
School of Psychology
University of Wales, Bangor
Adeilad Brigantia
Penrallt Road
Bangor, Gwynedd
LL57 2AS
Phone: 01248 388201
Email: fooddudes@bangor.ac.uk
Website: <http://www.fooddudes.co.uk>

The Food Dude Programme is currently being implemented on a large scale in the Republic of Ireland. For further information see the Food Dudes in Ireland project website <http://www.fooddudes.ie/> or contact Michael Maloney Michael.Maloney@BordBia.IE