

Implementing a group snack instead of a rolling snack bar to promote healthy choices, independence and social food times.

	<p>Enjoying a wonderful rainbow of vegetables in the garden after the Riverford vegetable workshop the day before at Pre school. The promotion of independence was nurtured, with helping of the chopping of the vegetables with Mummy at home as well!</p>
	<p>In the mornings, the children can now choose to help prepare snack for the day. They are supervised, washing their hands before handling the food, and talked through how to use the tools safely, risk assessing independently after (with a grown up close by). Here spreading and chopping is being done, with the 'claw' technique being demonstrated beautifully, which we were taught at the Riverford vegetable workshop.</p>
	<p>High levels of interest and perseverance was shown today with the peeling of oranges ready for group snack time. Fine motor skills were practised, with the pincer grip being used well to take the peel off.</p>
	<p>Whilst chopping, we were told how "Mummy cut her finger and there was lots of blood". Instructions were listened to well, and no fingers were hurt in the chopping of the cucumber. With standing up instead of being sat down on a chair, a greater range of movement in the arm can be done, strengthening the muscles and promoting being active, as the children are more likely to prepare snack and then go off and explore a different area of the setting.</p>
	<p>Here, the 'claw' technique to use a knife is shown, with great control and precision being shown with slicing the banana.</p>
	<p>During group snack, one child really enjoyed creating a 'snack man', showing her friends who then liked making their own snack pictures! This lovely social interaction may not have happened, and definitely not on a whole group basis, had the rolling snack bar still been in use. This whole group time has enabled spontaneous conversations and discoveries to be made, in a relaxed and calm environment.</p>

	<p>As well as chopping and peeling, spreading is enjoyed, with the carbohydrate element of snack also being prepared. The children are aware of how not all children at the setting have butter, and so these are kept separate once prepared.</p>
	<p>Here, the other technique to use a knife safely is shown, called the 'bridge'. It is great to see children being positive role models to their peers, who observe their technique and will be able to use it themselves.</p>
	<p>As well as the techniques using the tools being practised, children are discovering different textures, and commenting on similarities and differences.</p>

WHAT WE DID

During a planning meeting staff discussed snack options, and how to promote further independence for all children. Snack was prepared for the children before, and therefore limited the amount of independence they could show. Staff had noticed many children were not keen to come to snack bar, as they were enjoying their play. This then resulted in a lack of energy and routines being hindered.

We decided to set up a table, for children to help prepare the snack. A member of staff is allocated to this activity, encouraging and supporting hand washing, and the use of tools to chop, juice, peel and spread items for snack. Children are talked through the safety aspects, and then they help to risk assess situations – how close they are to others, how to hold a knife, peel away from body... A workshop was arranged with Riverford veg, to allow hands on explorations of a wide range of fruits and vegetables, with discussions around what these foods give to our bodies. The staff team introduced whole group snack to the children, asking for their opinions, and they regularly choose the snack items. Staff eat snack with the children, modelling the eating of a range of foods, monitoring closely children's portion sizes, dietary requirements and enjoying social interactions with the whole group.

Through conversations with families, the feedback was that the children became much more interested in the process of food; wanting to be a part of the preparation and eating! One parent sent a photo of her son enjoying a rainbow of veg, saying "Rowan really enjoyed the visit from Riverford Organics. When our veg box arrived the next day he was excited to unpack it and wanted to try everything. He helped to chop the vegetables and asked to eat them in the garden. It is so lovely to see him so interested in vegetables". Another parent commented how "Gilb loves using tools and being given responsibility so I imagine he loved doing this. Those knives look great - I want some!" after seeing the observation of him helping to prepare snack. This awareness of healthy foods, in line with the Eat better, start better initiative will help in the children's understanding of what a balanced snack would incorporate. Referring to the food for thought guidelines, when children have taken ownership of the snack, they have an invested interest in it, and so are more likely to taste a range of food on offer. When the staff asked the children, their responses included "I can cut cucumber all by myself" (Wilf, age 3), "When you use a knife, be safe and don't cut your fingers" (Dan, age 2), "I eat snack with my friends" (Bella age 3), and "I wash my hands on my own and the drier is fun!" (Cerys, age 4)

We have found since implementing group snack, that the quality of free flow play has improved greatly, with children's attention during activities increasing, and we have observed wonderful social communications between children. Children are also eating their lunch better, as we are now following the food for thought guidance of between 2 and 2 and a half hours between snacks and meal times. Children's levels of independence have heightened, with children washing their own hands, and enjoying to pour their drinks for snack. A wider range of snack foods are being eaten, with the activities planned in session complimenting this – including a farm shop role play using real food and the Riverford veg workshop.

With the setting communicating through newsletters, and notices that snack has changed to a whole group time, and children are helping in the whole process, this has empowered parents to rethink food options, giving them a greater understanding of what they can do to at home too.