

TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

FROM: Christopher Mackie, Medical Officer of Health

DATE: 2013 May 16

CREATING HEALTHIER NUTRITION ENVIRONMENTS IN LOCAL GROUP HOMES

Recommendation

It is recommended that Report No. 071-13 re “Creating Healthier Nutrition Environments in Local Group Homes” be received for information.

Key Points

- The goal of the Group Home project is to improve the nutritional environments in four pilot group home sites.
- Community partners collaborated to develop a comprehensive Nutrition Checklist Manual which encourages group homes to consider a healthy physical environment, education and skill building, and community partnerships.
- As a result of this initiative, Fanshawe College has changed its curriculum to include teaching students about a healthy nutrition environment with six hours of class learning which utilizes the Nutrition Checklist Manual.
- Future plans include offering these tools to other group homes within partnering agencies, and quality assurance monitoring of participating programs.

Background

Creating a supportive nutrition environment for groups of youth living together in a community setting can have a positive impact on their eating habits. The Youth on Track for Health Committee was struck in 2011 to assist in improving the nutrition environment in group homes. Advocating for positive role modeling and the development of a safe and sanitary environment for food production, as well as providing food literacy education for staff and youth, are all important components of the comprehensive approach to improving nutritional habits in our local group homes.

Stakeholders working collaboratively on this project include: Western Area Youth Services, Craigwood and Anago. In addition, the committee includes representation from a registered nurse from the Centre for Children and their Families in the Justice System, an instructor from Fanshawe College and two registered dietitians from the Health Unit. The Health Unit is the project lead and works with partners to plan, implement and evaluate the various strategies.

Project Description

The Committee has developed and implemented several activities in the four pilot group homes. They include:

- The development of a comprehensive [Nutrition Checklist Manual](#) that was based on the evidence-based Nutrition Tools for Schools. This document includes four main areas: Healthy Physical

Environment; Healthy Supportive Environment; Education and Skill Building and Community Partnerships. The goal is for the homes to use the checklist to identify what is working well and to identify priority areas to work on to improve the nutrition environment. The Manual is now used at Fanshawe College in the course curriculum for Child and Youth Workers. The integration of this information into the curriculum allows students to be better prepared in terms of nutrition knowledge and have the necessary food preparation and food safety skills they need to work in group homes. The instructor involved in this project has also partnered with the Health Unit and created opportunities for students to receive their Food Handler Certification prior to graduation.

- The Public Health Registered Dietitians have provided opportunities for at-risk youth living in these homes to practice and enhance their food skills. The youth have engaged in cooking sessions in community-based settings. They have been empowered to learn how to make nutritious, economical, easy meals that require minimal equipment and time. These sessions have also built self-efficacy, self-esteem and confidence in participants' cooking abilities.
- Quarterly newsletters have been developed by the Health Unit and shared with the group homes and partners. Topics have included healthy eating information, role modeling and creating supportive nutrition environments.

Success Stories from Local Pilot Agencies

Success stories from local agencies have been captured:

- Fanshawe College reported that *"the second (2nd) year curriculum now includes 12 hours dedicated to teaching students about a healthy nutrition environment with 6 hours in-class learning including an overview of the Checklist and resources and 6 hours devoted to food skills development"*.
- One student stated *"I have never made a meal from scratch and it really isn't that hard and tastes so much better."*
- Another agency reported that previously *"they used only white flour based grain products and switched to whole grain products [because of this project]. Initially youth were upset but with time and teaching they have accepted the change and disclosed they don't mind whole wheat now or notice a difference."*
- Annotated comments from a third home revealed *"the salt shaker is no longer placed on the table, youth didn't appreciate this but with time and teaching they have come to accept this, we have also changed from serving fruit punch to 100% fruit juice, staff have been purposefully enrolled in food safety certification classes, and the grocery shopping lists have been tweaked to ensure ingredients to support menu items are purchased to decrease menu substitutions."*

Next Steps and Conclusion

Creating healthier nutrition environments through collaboration with local champion agencies using the [Nutrition Checklist Manual](#) and other strategies can have a positive impact on eating habits and the lives of youth living in group settings. Next steps for this project include disseminating these tools to additional homes within our community, monitoring practices using the audit tool, continuing skill building opportunities and sharing these successes with our provincial partners.

This report was prepared by Ms. Christine Callaghan and Dr. Heather Thomas, Registered Dietitians, and Ms. Christine Preece, Manager, Young Adult Team.

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This report addresses the following requirement(s) of the Ontario Public Health Standards: Chronic Diseases and Injuries Program Standards: Child Health Standard 4,5,7 and Chronic Disease 11
