



Goodie bags

In Glasgow, one nursery school is encouraging families to eat healthily by distributing 'Easypack Meals' – bags containing the ingredients for a tasty, nutritious meal for four, reports *Karen Faux*

Take one brown paper bag, place inside a recipe and all the ingredients to make a family meal, and you have a winning idea. Flatpack meals, as the bags were initially called, have proved a hit with children and families attending Chesters Nursery School, in Drumchapel, Glasgow, where they were introduced two years ago as a way of helping families improve their diet.

Bags arrive at the nursery at the end of each week, and include one which makes a soup, usually priced at around £1.50, and a main meal bag, priced between £1.80 and £2. The ingredients for each can feed a family of four but could easily stretch to six. All the recipes are vegetarian, extremely tasty and very straightforward to make.

Head teacher Anne O'Grady says, 'The meals were originally launched as a healthy alternative to families' existing diets, and were designed to be a resource for families, many of whom experience ill-health due to poor diet. The packs have helped them to understand the importance of healthy eating and how this can be affordable, even in deprived circumstances. It is important that each pack contains all the ingredients for the meal, such as olive oil and garlic bulbs. These are all nicely packaged in small tubs, so whoever buys the

pack needs nothing else to produce the meal.'

The week's menus are posted on the nursery's Facebook 'coffee morning' page, and families place their orders to be collected at the end of the week. 'They are given out on a first come, first served basis, but we try to make them available to anyone who wants them. Because the ingredients are all vegetables, and leftovers can be used in the nursery, there is never any waste,' says Ms O'Grady.

She reports that sometimes there have been concerns voiced that the meals are all vegetarian, with parents and children saying they don't eat them. 'The answer to that is they can always add chicken or lean mince, or another alternative,' says Ms O'Grady.

FUELLING HEALTHY WALKS

Flatpack meals were the brainchild of Kenny McDonald, former manager of L.I.F.E. (Living Is For Everyone), a healthy living centre based in Drumchapel. Located in the north-west area of Glasgow, the charity aims to help improve the health and well-being of local families and ensure its communities are healthy, happy, safe and working together.

After being trialled by Drumchapel Housing Services in 2014, Chesters Nursery School spotted the do-it-yourself meals' huge potential. 'We visited parents and told them about

Above: parents sample a meal at Chesters Nursery School, and the children take part in a healthy Friday walk

the idea, and nurseries in the East End of the city subsequently became involved in distributing the meal packs,' says Ms O'Grady. 'L.I.F.E. developed a pilot around healthy eating which involved parents, nurseries, and health and housing professionals. While Drumchapel L.I.F.E. later lost the funding, a volunteer mum, Kirsty Murphy, recently took up the scheme and christened the packs "Easypack Meals". She now provides the same service and meals are delivered more widely than ever, including to four nurseries in Easterhouse, in the East End.'

Since the project began, parents and children have had the opportunity to sample the meals in the nursery before purchasing the ingredients and recipes. Ms O'Grady says, 'Some of the parents were unsure of the ingredients so this has been a good way to introduce them to new foods and flavours, and children have discovered they like them as well.'

Members of the Chesters team have led initiatives to encourage a more active lifestyle, along with improving diet. 'One of our team members has recently taken this forward with a healthy walk on Fridays, when the meal packs are delivered to the nursery for parents to take,' says Ms O'Grady. 'The two go very well together – families are exercising and they are being fuelled to do it.' ■



FURTHER INFORMATION

● www.drumchapel.life.co.uk