

# Cooking Fun for Families Projects: An Overview of What You Need to Know Before You Begin

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*Province-wide solutions.  
Better health.*

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# Table of Contents

Foreword.....	4
Introduction .....	5
Description of the CFFF program .....	6
Key ingredients for success .....	8
CFFF program checklists .....	10
Challenges and Solutions.....	11
Roles for Key CFFF Partners.....	13
Financial impacts .....	14
Estimated program cost per site .....	15
Project justification and impacts .....	16

## Foreword

This report has been commissioned by the Community Food Action Initiative and managed through the Provincial Health Services Authority.

The Community Food Action Initiative (CFAI) is part of the Healthy Eating component of ActNow BC. ActNow BC is a health promotion program designed to support individuals and communities to protect and improve their health by 2010 focusing on healthy eating, physical activity, tobacco use, overweight and obesity, and fetal alcohol spectrum disorder.

The Regional Health Authorities throughout BC have received funding to address food security issues in their region in a comprehensive and integrated way. The Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA) is providing coordination for implementation and evaluation of the Community Food Action Initiative in collaboration with the Regional Health Authorities.

The Regional Health Authority leads for CFAI emphasized the need for a document that would outline what is required for implementation of the Cooking Fun for Families (CFFF) program, including the advantages, and challenges, that community decisions makers could use to inform their work.

What follows is a description of the CFFF program, how CFFF meets the objectives of the CFAI and how implementing the program could be an option for health authorities and community organizations to offer food skill-building opportunities while supporting families around a variety of issues, including food security, life skills, and socialization, connectivity, and integration within their communities.

## Introduction

Healthy eating is fundamental to physical and emotional well-being, and significantly affects quality of life for children and adults alike. Unfortunately, purchasing and preparing healthy food can be a challenge for some families. Cooking Fun for Families (CFFF) is a school and community-based, 'hands on' program developed to assist school children and their parents with daily issues surrounding food, including diet quality, accessibility and affordability.

CFFF facilitates the active participation of both children and parents in the development of a fun cooking program in a school environment. CFFF focuses on the family dynamics around eating, and identifies specific skills necessary to develop healthy eating habits as well as positive eating relationships.

The goal of CFFF is to provide a supportive environment that is health-promoting for families. The goal of health promotion is to enhance clients' sense of control over their lives, or, put differently, to enhance clients' control over the determinants of health in their lives. The philosophy underlying the CFFF programs is as follows: it is a motivational and skill-building program for healthy eating, network and social support enhancement, relationship building, confidence building, and enjoyment. It draws parents into the schools, or in some cases, other community institutions, and supports learning, literacy, and lifelong education. Both social integration and literacy are connected with improved personal, social and economic opportunities, which are ultimately connected with health.

For further information on Cooking Fun for Families visit <http://www.communitykitchens.ca/index.php?module=htmlpages&func=display&pid=21>

Also available is a Cooking Fun for Families handbook which describes how to develop a Cooking Fun for Families program that is tailored to the needs of the school-community. It is based on the School and Community Action on Nutrition (SCAN) health promotion research project, funded by the BC Health Research Foundation. Information on ordering the handbook can be found at the above web address.

## Description of the CFFF program

**Cooking Fun for Families targets short-term and long-term environmental and lifestyle factors to support disease prevention, health promotion and population health and well-being for low-income families.**

CFFF has been a highly successful program in Vancouver since 1994, and has been piloted in other BC communities. A CFFF Coalition was formed in 2005 to look at continued sustainable funding for CFFF and to explore the potential for expanding the program to more communities in the province.

CFFF is adaptable to a wide variety of settings and can be set up in different ways. Programs can operate at different times and in different ways depending on the needs of the community. It compliments school breakfast and lunch programs with active learning opportunities and offers opportunities to connect families with community resources such as community gardens and community kitchens to promote continued learning and opportunities around nutrition and food security.

Children participate in cooking, games, and nutrition-related activities while parents participate in menu planning, cooking and clean up. The program emphasizes valuable lifelong learning on how to read labels, introduce new foods and food-related terms, and prepare healthy, economical foods that children will enjoy. At the end of each class, participants share a healthy and delicious meal.

CFFF programs usually employ a food service facilitator and an activity worker. The role of the facilitator can include:

- Recruitment of families (parents and children) to participate in the program
- Establishing the program schedule
- Grocery and supply shopping
- Overseeing the planning, cooking and activities of each session
- Co-supervising children's play and participants' kitchen use
- Overseeing set-up and clean up
- Keeping an accurate accounting of monies spent
- Assisting with program assessment and evaluation

The role of the activity worker can include:

- Assisting in recruiting of families to the program
- Assisting in the shopping for and/or picking up of ingredients and other supplies needed for the program
- Assisting with set-up and clean-up
- Planning and implementing cooking and food related games for children and parents

Programs may have parent volunteers who assist with the cooking and the children and assist in set-up and clean-up.

Staff hired requires the following minimum skill set:

- Basic knowledge of nutrition and skill development
- Knowledge of how good nutrition affects learning
- Group facilitation skills

The program:

- Offers a safe place for families to learn and play
- Offers a setting where parents and children can participate together, enhancing the family unit
- Enables skill development in budgeting, meal planning and food preparation
- Increases awareness of healthy foods and good nutrition
- Provides opportunities for parents to network, socialize and contribute to each others' well-being
- Provides cross-cultural exposure
- Enhances parent comfort in accessing the school in a positive way
- Provides parents with increased access to services such as counseling, parenting classes and pre-employment skill development

## Key ingredients for success

Evaluations of programs in Vancouver, New Westminster and the Kamloops area have indicated key ingredients for success of the CFFF programs, keeping in mind that a program must be developed that truly meets individual needs and realities of each community as you cannot always “transplant” one program to a different location. The key ingredients for success are as follows:

### Funding

- Consistent, continuous funding and a commitment to the success and continuity of the program. Programs that are cancelled due to lack of funding are very difficult to get going again.

### People

- An independent coordinator overseeing the project who is located at or near participating schools
- Buy-in of principals at participating schools
- A champion within the school system (i.e., PAC/parent/volunteer) and a formal system for recruiting parent volunteers and advertising the program
- The right people (i.e., facilitators and assistants)
  - Committed to the philosophy of building a sense of community around food and to the development of meals that are both nutritious and budget conscience
  - Friendly, flexible, outgoing, resourceful, creative and strong team players
  - Have experience working with multi-cultural communities and be committed to building bridges between cultures
- Connected with other programs and staff (i.e., Community Gardens/Community Kitchens) as well as other CFFF programs
- Connected to the local health unit (i.e., a visiting community nutritionist)
- Relief staff available to facilitate the program in the event of illness

### Partnerships

- BC Community Nutritionists' Council

- BC Healthy Living Alliance
- Early Childhood Development initiative
- First Call BC
- Make Children First (BC Ministry of Children and Family Development)
- Canadian Diabetes Association (due to the organization's familiarity with developing, offering and evaluating a province wide community cooking program)
- Breakfast for Learning (if hold two sessions per week, can apply for grant monies)

## Location

- Facility needs adequate kitchen space – consider location as well as equipment provided
- Adjacent space(s) for dining and for conducting nutrition activities and physical activities (so children don't run in the kitchen area)

## Advertising

- Advertising the program is essential (i.e., in local newspapers, school newsletters, or posters at schools, parks and community buildings)
- Get parent/PAC volunteers/neighbourhood assistants (paid employees of School Board in Vancouver schools) to determine people at risk in the school/community

## Scheduling

- Need to run programs for the entire school year and work within school calendars (programs should start in September or in January)
- Schedule sessions depending on the availability of participants and volunteers as programs are flexible

## Evaluation

- Need a systematic evaluation process

## CFFF program checklists

The following outlines the goals and values of the CFFF program, a planning checklist and components to consider for staff training:

Goals and Values of the Program at referral (to be ranked/checked by referring person, and revisited at some later date for comments on achievement):

- Connect isolated or alienated families with the school in a positive manner
- Provide a supervised educational and recreational activity, for parents, or for parents and their children to do together
- Provide food/nutritional support for impoverished families
- Enhance self-confidence, social support for parents, children
- Increase self-sufficiency through acquired cooking skills
- Provide an opportunity for family to increase network and gain exposure to more resources
- Education on healthy eating
- Motivation for healthy eating

Planning checklist: evaluation of planning (readiness to start CFFF):

- Staff has been identified/recruited to present and/or oversee the program
- Kitchen facility and equipment are ready
- Funds/partnerships have been secured
- Extra staff have been hired if needed
- Staff training has been completed
- Advertising and recruitment have been conducted
- A monitoring and evaluation system has been set up

Staff training components:

- Program philosophy and rationale, goals, objectives, strategies, and actions
- Outcomes
- Record keeping and reporting
- Resources
- Recipes
- Games, if children attend
- Seeking advice and assistance for issues and problems.

## Challenges and Solutions

Existing programs in Vancouver and pilot programs in New Westminster and the Kamloops area experienced the following challenges in running CFFF programs:

### Program staff

- Maintaining skilled food service facilitators and activity workers

### Setting

- Lack of on site supervision to deal with staff questions/concerns
- Access to adequate kitchen facilities and equipment

### Participants

- Reaching “at risk” families

## Program operations

- Linkages to other services
- Access to healthy low cost foods

These challenges could be supported by linkages and/or partnerships with other healthy eating resources and tools that are now available:

## In school settings

- Guidelines for Food and Beverage Sales in BC Schools
- Making it Happen: Healthy Eating at School resources
- Breakfast for Learning Keys to Success
- School Food and Nutrition Policy Resources

## In health regions

- Good Food and Harvest Boxes
- Food Safe training

## In communities

- Community Kitchens/Community Gardens
- Family Resource Centres
- Community Recreation Activity Workers

## Roles for Key CFFF Partners

All of the partners involved in CFFF projects will be responsible to work collaboratively with stakeholders in their communities and their region. What follows is the identification of key partners and suggestions for their specific roles in supporting a CFFF project.

### Regional Health Authorities

- Determine what community/communities have the most families in need
- Determine where in the community the program should be held (e.g., school, community centre)
- Define the division of responsibility between all stakeholders, including the RHA and the partnering agencies (e.g., the school, the health board, community centre, grocery store)
- Support funding for programs in their region
- Support funding for a program coordinator in their region

### Schools/community centres/grocery stores/community agencies

- Determine space availability and compatibility with other programs using the same space (e.g., daycare space)
- Determine availability of kitchen facilities as many elementary schools that do not have meal programs do not have cooking/kitchen facilities (e.g., may need to arrange for use of a community centre)
- Resolve personnel issues (e.g., custodial staff need to be available to clean up after school hours)
- Support program by active participation in ongoing planning and support
- Support a shared funding model by providing appropriate resources, either human or financial, where available
- Work together to support connections to other healthy food resources

# Financial impacts

Costs for the program include, but are not limited to (depending on the community):

- Personnel costs
  - program facilitator
  - program assistant
  - administrative assistant
  - school costs (i.e., custodian)
- Other costs
  - costs of kitchen facilities to host program
  - food costs
  - supply costs (need to budget for new and replacement costs cooking equipment)
  - administrative costs (advertising, bookkeeping, phone, printing, postage)
  - programming costs (training, activities for children)
  - costs of evaluating the program(s)

## Estimated program cost per site

The following is an estimate of the cost of hosting a 20 week CFFF program (one 4 hour session per week) at one site. This information is an estimated cost based on information received from Vancouver, Kamloops, and New Westminster programs and their programs proposals.

Expense Budget Item	total project budget	Estimated Cost
Food service facilitator (includes 4 hour of preparation/session)	8 hours/session x 20 sessions x \$18/hr	\$ 2,880.00
Activity worker	4 hours/session x 20 sessions x \$18/hr	1,440.00
Travel costs for participants and the coordinator/activity worker	\$20/week x 20 sessions	400.00
Supplies and materials (food, cleaning supplies, equipment)	\$100/week x 20 sessions	2,000.00
Training (FoodSafe course)	FoodSafe instructor fees	1,200.00
Emergency fund	Example: Child care costs	750.00
Administration (bookkeeping, phone calls, postage, photocopying)	5% of overall budget	500.00
Advertising		130.00
Evaluation		1,000.00
Total		\$10,300.00

### Expenditures absorbed by Schools/Community Centers:

- Facility costs
- Custodian costs

### Expenditures absorbed by Health Authorities:

- Community nutritionists

### In Kind Contributions from Stakeholder Partners:

- Programming from community gardens
- Community kitchens
- Community volunteers

## Project justification and impacts

CFFF has been shown to affect participants' food-related knowledge, attitudes and behaviours, leading to enhanced nutritional intakes, the ultimate goal of food security initiatives. It also contributes to building community relationships and personal and community capacity, necessary preconditions for mobilizing communities to political action on food security issues and concerns. A review of key documents and reports<sup>1</sup> indicated the following:

The challenges of poverty and associated food insecurity and hunger exist in BC generally and in all regional health authorities. Some communities have conducted studies to gain a better understanding of the extent of the problem in their communities and to identify target populations and geographic sub regions where the need is greater.

- The BC Nutrition Survey indicated that all British Columbians can benefit from programming and policy efforts to enhance dietary quality. Of primary concern is improving consumption of vegetables and fruit to recommended levels.
- British Columbians who are living in lower income families have greater challenges achieving recommended food intakes.
- Community programs in response to food security issues take place throughout the province.
- Programs that address food security issues also incorporate healthy eating and active living into their messages.
- Although community-based programs do not address insufficient incomes/poverty, they have been shown to contribute to the well-being of families and communities.

CFFF provides the option of how to address multiple community needs related to food insecurity and hunger by enhancing knowledge and skills to enhance food self sufficiency and to improve the dietary quality of individuals and families, and to promote family connectedness with the community.

### Food security

Statistics from multiple sources indicate that from 20-23% of families in BC with children are considered to be living with low incomes. Families with lone mothers experience higher rates of low income (from 47% to 65% of families). Regional reports indicate that low income families experience food insecurity at least some of the time.

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<sup>1</sup> Synthesis Document in Support of Cooking Fun for Families. Directorate Agencies for School Health, April 2006.

CFFF improves nutritional well-being and food security through a food and nutrition skill building program for families. It increases families' access to community resources and provides an environment for the development of employment-related knowledge and skills.

## Population health

Healthy eating and physical activity are key features of food security programs at any level of response. Recommendations from various authors and groups make consistent recommendations. Although documentation is limited, there are many examples of communities where healthy eating/active living programs have been implemented, as well as Action Schools BC, a province wide program, that can serve as examples/models for other groups/RHAs interested in developing healthy living programs.

Participants in CFFF programs learn about and understand the importance of adequate nutrition, healthy living, and the impact good nutrition has on their children. Parents incorporate new and healthy foods into their family meals, while children learn life-long health-enhancing attitudes and behaviours. CFFF increases knowledge, motivations and skills for food self-sufficiency and healthy eating.

## Community capacity

CFFF is a way for families to be involved in their communities and to address the social isolation that is common for families with low incomes. Families learn about other services available in their community and have an increase in feelings of belonging, self-esteem and social support. CFFF has reported participants' success in enhancing cooking skills, learning about food access, building family connections through cooking and sharing meals together, and making connections with others who live in the neighbourhood.