



PRESS RELEASE

Embargoed: 27th March 2006

Ensuring that children experience lunch with their peers in pre-school services and at school would have a significant impact on their attitude to food in later life, according to a new survey in the latest issue of *Children in Europe* magazine.

The survey of food provision in nurseries and schools across Europe suggests that preparing and experiencing food in schools helps shape in children a positive attitude towards eating.

Extending services from part-time to full time in pre-school services would allow children to participate in the process of preparing and eating food at lunch time. Ensuring a mid-day meal is a staple of daily school life with peers would foster better social skills in children, reduce problems associated with food and the rituals of eating, and better inform parents about the importance of healthy eating.

Bronwen Cohen, Chief Executive of Children in Scotland, said: “In the UK, many three and four year olds go to school nurseries part-time and do not stay for lunch. However in other countries in Europe where young children are offered full-time services they have more opportunities to eat with their own age group and learn how to enjoy food. Starting eating meals in a social setting with peers and participating with food from the early years is likely to offset serious problems arising in later life, such as obesity and eating disorders.”

Rising obesity rates in Scottish children have forced the Scottish Executive to make healthy eating in our schools a priority. New nutritional guidelines for school children have been implemented as part of the Scottish Executive’s Hungry for Success initiative and new pre-school guidelines, *Nutritional guidance for early years*, were published in January. As the findings in *Children in Europe* magazine demonstrate, early years services offer valuable opportunities for establishing healthy eating, both in schools and in a family context.

At a European level, the EU is currently consulting on ways of promoting healthy diets and physical activity. Compared to Scotland, eating in many European countries tends to be viewed more as a pleasurable social event, and one that is embedded in the cultural experience, a theme covered in issue 10 of *Children in Europe* magazine.

Peter Moss, editor of *Children in Europe* magazine, said: “At their best in Europe, meal times for children in nurseries and schools are more than just about meeting the right nutritional standards. They are also important social, cultural and aesthetic experiences, at the heart of daily life and children’s upbringing and a means of connecting children to where and how our food is produced – in short, an affirmation of all that is best in life.”

Donatella Giovannini, education coordinator for the Pistoia region of Italy, said the importance of the mid-day meal in developing social and emotional skills and learning must be recognised. “Lunch is an important social and convivial occasion in daily life,” she said. “Attention is given to everything that is considered a necessary accompaniment to the food itself: the eating area, the beauty of the table, good company, pleasant conversation, the rules to be respected, good manners and the rituals involved in the children’s participation in this aspect of community life.”

This supports a pleasant, consistent and secure context for the children to enjoy their food, which in turn encourages a positive attitude towards food that is more likely to remain throughout life.

Children in Europe issue 10 shows many examples of good practice, including children in a German kindergarten helping to bake the bread for the day and pre-school children in Sweden making a cooking hole and eating outdoors. A project in Italy encourages children to create and look after school vegetable gardens. This is shown to be an excellent way of encouraging participation from children’s families and wider communities.

European legislation has introduced a number of regulations concerning food and hygiene. One negative impact of these restrictions, however, is that it is now more difficult to create positive learning opportunities for children.

Discussing the new EU Directive on food and hygiene control (852/2004), guest editor of *Children in Europe* issue 10, Ferruccio Cremaschi, argues: “Staff must use all the spaces left free by the rules and all the instruments that the new system places at their disposal. It will be necessary to assume responsibilities, be imaginative and invest in innovation.”

Children in Europe issue 10 also gives a cross-European overview of food provision in nurseries and schools, with a table of comparative statistics, as well as sample menus from different European countries. Children’s voices are heard through comments on their eating experiences.

Children in Europe issue 10 is launched today, Monday 27 March.

A one-day conference, *An appetite for life: young children, food and eating*, will be held in Edinburgh on 25 August 2006.

Notes for editors

- *Children in Europe* is a magazine for everyone working with and for children from 0-10 and those interested in children's issues. It is published simultaneously in eight languages by a network of national magazines. It aims to provide a forum for ideas, practice and information and contribute to the development of policy and practice and European and national levels. It is published in the UK by Children in Scotland, the national agency for voluntary, statutory, and professional organisations and individuals working with children and their families in Scotland, with the support of the Bernard van Leer Foundation.
- Filming, photo opportunities and press interviews can be arranged. Please contact Chris Small: csmall@childreninscotland.org.uk
- **Contents of Children in Europe issue 10 include:**

Ferruccio Cremaschi, guest editor of issue 10: European legislation relating to the provision of food.

Wendell Berry, poet, essayist, novelist and small farmer: how to eat responsibly.

Donatella Giovannini, education coordinator, Pistoia: the social and cultural importance of lunchtime for nursery school children in Pistoia, Italy.

Karin Eeckhout, freelance journalist: mealtimes in Flemish nurseries are a social activity that brings children, workers and parents closer together.

Françoise Léon, food specialist: the factors influencing children's enjoyment of food.

Roger Prott, freelance consultant: how schools and nurseries in Berlin are tackling rising obesity rates.

Cristine Deliens, coordinator: projects in French-speaking Belgium designed to make mealtimes in schools and nurseries healthier.

Giuseppe Dalmasso, coordinating director of the school catering service, Turin: how Turin meets the challenges of feeding 50,000 children a day.

Annica Grimlund, editor of Tidningen Förskolan: the benefits of cooking and eating outdoors.

Linsey Denholm, communications manager Children in Scotland: the phenomenal success of Jamie Oliver's school meals campaign in Britain, and the Scottish Executive's pioneering campaign, Hungry for Success.

Sara Famiani, Slow Food project: how vegetable gardens can be used as a source of food, education and fun.

Also: food diary of a Scottish primary school pupil, children's comments and pictures on the experience of eating at school, sample menus from across Europe.

- Hungry for Success was a three-year initiative by the Scottish Executive, which ran from 2002 to 2005, aimed at encouraging healthy eating in children, and included the free provision of fruit to primary school children.
- *Nutritional Guidelines for pre-school children* is available from the Scottish Executive.
- For more information: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/education/hfs-00.asp> or contact the Scottish Executive: www.scottishexecutive.org.uk

- For all press enquiries contact Chris Small, communications officer, Children in Scotland on **0131 222 2419** / email **csmall@childreninscotland.org.uk**