

Chef's Adopt a School Programme Final Evaluation NWDA Executive Summary (May 2010)

Programme overview

The Academy of Culinary Arts runs the Chefs Adopt a School Programme (CAAS) across England; NWDA funding is being used to deliver CAAS in the Northwest. The Programme commenced in April 2007 as a three year initiative with a total budget of £243,000. The Programme is focused on *healthy eating* and has recruited a Regional Chef (and supports local 'Ambassador' Chefs) to deliver sessions in primary schools across the Northwest with the aim of promoting healthy choices and good food habits amongst children. The emphasis of CAAS is on 'tasty' as well as healthy food and the Programme is concerned with a holistic approach to food: 'from plant to plate'. The CAAS Programme targets primary schools in deprived areas of the Northwest and is therefore also focused on tackling *health inequalities*.

The 'theory of change'¹ underpinning the CAAS Programme is that:

A Regional Chef delivering interactive classroom based sessions in primary schools for children aged between 5-11 years old which focus on healthy eating, food provenance, food appreciation and cooking will increase those children's knowledge of food, cookery and food provenance and stimulate their interest in food appreciation so they can make life long informed and healthy choices about the food they eat.

It is also believed that:

A programme undertaking the above across primary schools in the Northwest and which is supported by a Regional Co-ordinator who can provide resources and support for teachers and other key organisations and partnerships, will enable healthy eating, food provenance, food appreciation and cooking to be embedded within the school curriculum and the programme to make a wider contribution to regional policy and practice.

Evaluation purpose and approach

In February 2010 the Northwest Regional Development Agency (NWDA) commissioned GENECON to undertake a final evaluation of the CAAS Programme in the Northwest. The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the achievements of the Programme as compared with its original aims and objectives and to summarise the evaluation's findings as to the validity of its theory of change. The approach to the evaluation has comprised both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis and has comprised:

- ❑ A short review of evidence on 'what works' in changing the food habits of children, focusing on interventions designed to promote healthy eating amongst primary school aged children and the effectiveness of school based interventions.
- ❑ A review of the Programme's administrative, appraisal, financial and monitoring and evaluation information in order to assess performance against the forecast outputs and outcomes for the Programme.
- ❑ Primary research which involved: a survey of teachers from primary schools who had received an input from the CAAS Programme (36 surveys were completed out of a total of 184 sent which is a 20% response rate; three focus groups with primary school aged children who had taken part in CAAS and one focus group with their parents; 11 interviews with other key stakeholders from the education, health, hospitality and farming sectors and the CAAS Regional Co-ordinator, Regional Chef and the NWDA Programme Manager.

¹ A 'theory of change' is a 'hypothesis' as to the relationship between interventions and intended outcomes over time (why will doing X create Y?)

Key findings

The nature of the CAAS Programme has resulted in the project generating outcomes and wider benefits, rather than the traditional economic outputs 'typical' of NWDA projects and programmes. The main findings of the evaluation are as follows:

Strategic objective

The Programme's strategic objective is '*to increase children's knowledge of food, cookery and food provenance and so they can make informed and healthy choices for the rest of their lives on what they choose to eat*'. Evidence gathered through the evaluation suggests that the Programme has *increased children's knowledge of food, cookery and food provenance* (see below). It is more difficult to evidence the impact of the Programme on children's ability to *make informed and healthy choices for the rest of their lives on what they choose to eat* through this evaluation, as it would require more longitudinal research which tracked beneficiaries over time. However the evaluation has demonstrated that the Programme has stimulated children's interest in food, cookery and food provenance; promoted healthy eating messages in a positive and practical way; and supported parents and teachers to embed these messages within school and home. All of which have the potential to support children to make informed and healthy choices in the long term.

Theory of change

Through the ACA, the CAAS programme has been operating across the country for 20 years. The Programme rationale has developed over this period and has been informed by policy, research and practice. This evaluation has explored the 'theory of change' behind the Programme and concludes that there are number of key aspects of Programme delivery that have led to the intended outcomes (i.e. what it is about X that achieves Y). These include a focus on stimulating an interest in food (as opposed to simply presenting healthy eating messages); the 'wow' factor of a Chef delivering the sessions; session activities which include the 4 tastes, 5 senses and an offsite farm visit; and the 'demonstration' element of the Programme – showing schools what they can do to promote healthy eating and food even without a school kitchen or cookery facilities and through other areas of the curriculum and school activity.

Secondary evidence

The evaluation drew on existing evidence from research and practice to determine the extent to which the CAAS Programme mirrors recognised good practice in the area of children, food and healthy eating. There are several areas where the Programme clearly reflects 'good practice' as defined by the evidence base: contributing to a 'whole school' approach; promoting freshly cooked food as tasty, rather than healthy and targeting lower socio-economic groups. There were other areas where there was some fit between the Programme and the evidence base but which could be an area for added emphasis or development in the future such as: running more than one sessions with individual schools; enable all children to be actively involved in the preparation and cooking of food; and increase parental involvement in sessions. One area which has not been part of CAAS but was a key message from the evidence was the involvement of children in the planning of sessions. This may be something CAAS wants to consider for the future.

Outputs

The CAAS Programme has made some considerable achievements over the past three years. Its net outputs include 760 sessions with children, parents and families, far exceeding the target of 240 sessions set for the Programme. The recruitment of 33 new Ambassador Chefs, 3 more than the Programme target. Other net outputs include reaching 10,950 primary school aged children and adopting 283 schools across the Northwest.

Outcomes for beneficiaries

Evidence collected through the Programme evaluation indicates that the CAAS sessions have been enjoyable and engaging for the children involved – both key aids to learning. It is clear that many children have an increased knowledge of food, food appreciation and food provenance as a result of the Programme and have learnt new skills such as how to cook particular dishes which were demonstrated in the session and how to use a knife safely. The findings of a baseline and follow up questionnaire used with a sample of children from 18 schools involved with the CAAS Programme, which measured the impact on children's knowledge of food provenance, food appreciation and

healthy eating messages, reported that 85.8% of children answered more questions correctly on the follow up questionnaire than on the baseline questionnaire.

The evidence around impact on attitudes and behaviours is less clear, with only a small number of children suggesting that they had changed their attitude to food, food habits or made healthier choices as a result of the Programme. This could reflect the level of intervention of the Programme – some children only receiving one session or the range of socio-economic factors which influence what children eat.

Impact on schools

The CAAS Programme is clearly valued by schools. Through the survey, teachers stated that the CAAS sessions were of high quality and were highly appropriate and engaging for the children involved. There is evidence of teachers embedding the Programme messages on food and healthy eating within other areas of the curriculum and school activity. In terms of education policy, the area in which the CAAS Programme has made the most significant contribution is the Healthy School Standards. CAAS has worked in partnership with Healthy School Co-ordinators across the region to promote the Programme to primary schools. The Programme has demonstrated to schools how it aligns with other healthy eating initiatives in schools and how it can help schools meet the Healthy School criteria. As a result the CAAS Programme is helping 'adopted' primary schools in the region achieve Healthy School Status.

Contribution to partnership working and regional policy

Key objectives of the Programme are to work in collaboration with other key regional players in the fields of school, food and health and to create a regional presence for the ACA. The Programme has exceeded expectations in relation to these objectives. In order to maximise the impact and reach of the Programme, CAAS has linked with a number of businesses and initiatives in the region. CAAS is a key partner on the *Northwest School Food Cluster* a regional partnership which brings together organisations working on the issue of school food and food education. The Programme has also created strong, reciprocal partnerships with Heathcotes (a renowned high quality restaurant chain in the region); a number of local farms and primary food producers; and the Playing for Success initiative in the Northwest which provides out of school hours study support within sports centres, for underachieving children.

The CAAS Programme has contributed to regional policy objectives through its links with the regional Healthy Schools agenda. It is referenced within the Northwest Framework to Achieve Healthy Weight in Children & Families, the regional mechanism for delivery of the Government's Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives Strategy (January 2008) and is supporting the delivery of key actions within the Regional Economic Strategy: RES Action 112 to deliver the Investment for Health strategic plan and RES Action 58, encouraging organisations to develop healthy workplaces and promote healthy attitudes.

Strategic Added Value

NWDA's investment in the CAAS Programme has demonstrated strategic added value.² The recruitment of a dedicated Regional Co-ordinator and Regional Chef appears to be the key factor in transforming the CAAS Programme from a delivery focused initiative, to one which has the potential for regional influence as described in the theory of change. The Programme's innovative approach has acted as a catalyst for activity in relation to food and healthy eating in schools and enabled leverage of a small amount of additional funding to support this task. The Regional Co-ordinator has worked with a range of partners from health, education and industry in addition to performing a key role within the Northwest School Food Cluster group. All these activities have enabled the Programme to extend its reach across the region.

² RDAs are increasingly active in non project activities that do not produce traditional outputs and so capturing this 'catalytic' and 'influencing' role is essential to full monitoring of RDA performance DTA Tasking Framework for RDA Corporate Plans 2005-8, Annex C

Lessons learnt

What has worked well

- ❑ **Parent and pupil sessions** – whilst the children only sessions in schools have been successful in engaging pupils and increasing their knowledge of food, it appears that where the Programme has also offered sessions to parents, this has had the most impact on children's healthy eating habits. This is primarily because parents have the biggest influence over what their children eat.
- ❑ **Extended schools/cluster schools delivery model** – this is a relatively new approach for the CAAS Programme and has enabled the Programme to work with a group of schools and to deliver a number of sessions within each school to pupils in different year groups and their parents. This model has provided greater opportunity to embed the CAAS messages within the school curriculum and to establish strong links between the project and school. The result has been a greater impact on the pupils, parents and teachers.
- ❑ **Farm visits** – where these have taken place, schools have been wholeheartedly positive about the experience of farm visits. Furthermore, it appears that providing children with an opportunity to see where food comes from and then to see how food grown on a farm can be turned into a healthy meal has reinforced the CAAS Programme messages. The relationship has been reciprocal, with the farm owner citing a range of benefits from being involved with the Programme.
- ❑ **Partnership working** – it is clear that partnership working has been integral to the success of the Programme, more particularly its involvement with the Northwest Food School Cluster Group. This has enabled the CAAS Programme to promote its work; learn from other projects; and share and receive information about policy and practice. Furthermore, this partnership has enabled schools to receive a more co-ordinated 'offer' from the range of initiatives which focus on the school food and healthy eating agenda in the North West.

Key challenges

- ❑ **Demand exceeding supply** – the CAAS Programme has proved very popular with primary schools across the Northwest region and has exceeded its target on the number of sessions delivered. Whilst this is evidence of the success of the Programme and its relevance to current school and health agendas, the Programme has not always been able to meet the demand from schools in the short term, particularly those requesting additional sessions and return visits.
- ❑ **One off sessions with schools** - given that the Programme has been aiming to reach as many primary schools as possible, this has meant that some schools have received just one CAAS session for one year group over the past three years. In these cases, it could be argued that such limited involvement with children and schools has the potential to dilute the impact of the Programme and the original approach of CAAS (i.e. as one stakeholder put it, chef's *visit* a school rather than chef's *adopt* a school). Achieving the balance between reaching large numbers of children and schools and providing sufficient input into each school to make a difference has been a key challenge for the Programme.

Summary

The findings from this evaluation all point to the continued need for the CAAS Programme. There is evidence to suggest that the Programme is having an impact on children, families and schools and that it is valued by teachers and partner organisations alike. Furthermore, there appears to be no other organisation in the Northwest addressing the issue of food, cookery and healthy eating in such a creative way on a regional scale.

The Programme has a good strategic fit with the Healthy Schools and Food in Schools agendas; healthy policy targeting childhood obesity and specific actions within the Northwest's Regional Economic Strategy. Furthermore, it is a good example of innovative practice from a Regional Development Agency and of a project which helps to deliver a number of policy objectives across health, education and skills, food and farming.

For further details of the CAAS Programme in the Northwest contact Alison Hill, NWDA Programme Manager Skills and Employment at Alison.Hill@nwda.co.uk. For more information about the CAAS Programme Evaluation contact Claire Turner at claire@claireturnerassociates.co.uk