

Theresa Radwanski
Supervisor, Children's Circle Daycare
St. Barnabus Church
175 Hampton Avenue
Toronto, ON M4K 2Z3

October 29, 2015

Dear Theresa,

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the 4-week menu at Children's Circle Daycare. I am very pleased to inform you that once again the meals and snacks offered at the child care centre reflect the Day Nurseries Act (DNA) standards and the menu and variety of food offered does a very good job of satisfying criteria that "meets expectations" and often "exceeds" these expectations according to Toronto Children Services 2014 Nutrition Guidelines. The concerted effort you and your staff make to provide nutritious food to the infants, toddlers and school-age children at the centre is of utmost importance as these age groups grow and develop positive eating habits that serve them well now and later in life.

Overall Comments:

- In general, the menu meets requirements for meals and snacks. Children are offered food in proportion to their time in care (one meal and two snacks if in care for six hours or longer), and the menu plan includes substitutions and adaptations for children with special dietary needs/restrictions.
- The weekly menus are well-planned and offer balance and variety, which improves the nutritional value of both meals and snacks. Please find below some additional suggestions that may help to increase the variety of the foods served at the day care even more.
- The menu plan provides a great description of the foods served, listing many specific foods and ingredients used and in some places preparation methods. I have noted in the sections below (when appropriate) where further details could be provided.
- Through this menu analysis, it was not feasible to assess whether food is served in appropriate portions since these are not typically listed on a menu (with the exception of 1 cup noted for a serving of milk, which is accurate). Therefore, assumptions were made regarding the contribution of some foods and food groups to the menu and food offerings at the centre.

- *Canada's Food Guide* recommends that thirst be satisfied with water and that we should encourage children to drink water more often. I was pleased to see that water is listed as an option at A.M. snack, lunch, P.M. snack and late P.M. snack. This is an improvement from when I reviewed the menus in 2014. Instead of listing water at each meal and snack time, it could be removed as a menu item, and added as a footnote (e.g., water is available at all eating occasions) at the bottom of the menu, where the substitutions are noted.
- Homemade items appeared to be noted on the menu, which is great as this allows you to control how the food is prepared and how much fat, salt and sugar are added. If processed food products are used, ensure that they are free of artificial Trans fat, as they should not be served to children. If food is prepared with vegetable oil or non-hydrogenated (soft) margarine, they can be healthy.

Lunch:

- With the exception of two (details provided below) of the 25 lunches listed on the menu, the lunch offerings meet the DNA standards: one serving of Grain products, two servings from the Vegetables and Fruit food group, one serving of Milk and Alternatives, and one serving of Meat or Alternatives.
- **On both Tuesday of Week 3 and Thursday of Week 4, there is an additional serving of grain products provided.** Both steamed couscous and whole wheat sliced bread are provided at these two lunches. While offering a variety of different grains is ideal, this could be done on different days of the week so as to only offer one of these two servings of grains at lunch.
- I was happy to see that mixed dishes (e.g., curry, soups, stews, salad, tacos) have ingredients from at least two of the four food groups, and often three of the food groups are represented. Do be mindful that mixed dishes should aim to contain enough of each food group to count as a serving for each child.
- It is great that the menu listed the main ingredients for lunch items (e.g., homemade chicken noodle soup: corn, onions, celery, garlic, egg and rice noodles, olive oil, sea salt), as it provides nutritional information to parents and also allows for a better assessment of what food groups are provided and gives a sense of the amounts). If there is interest from parents and capacity at the day care, approximate serving sizes could be added to the menu in order to provide additional information.
- The Children's Circle menu provides great variety, offering children different types of meals weekly. This variety of mixed dishes, pizza, sandwiches, burgers, fish, quinoa salad and more exposes children to different tastes, textures and smells.

Snacks:

- To meet DNA requirements and to offer balance and variety to children, a snack should contain a minimum of two good groups from *Canada's Food Guide*, with at least one of these being a full serving of Vegetables and Fruit. On all occasions the snacks served at the centre meet and in some cases exceed the DNA standards by offering food from three of the four food groups. This improves the nutritional value of the snack, increasing the variety of nutrients that a child is offered and will eventually consume.
- On one morning of all five weeks, cold or hot cereal is offered with milk, fruit and water. The variety of grains and cereals (oatmeal, Shreddies, Cheerios, quinoa flakes, All-Bran) is to be commended.

Food Groups:

Vegetables and Fruit

- Vegetables (fresh and frozen) and fruit have important nutrients such as vitamins, minerals and fibre, and play an important role in healthy eating. It is truly wonderful to see that vegetables are incorporated into all of your lunch offerings, often with an additional serving provided (e.g., Wednesday of Week 1, mashed sweet and white potatoes, steamed carrots, fresh garden salad and apple slices are all offered). In the case of vegetables, more is always better so I am pleased to see you maximizing the vegetables provided at lunch whenever possible.
- *Canada's Food Guide* encourages dark green and orange vegetables often, due to the important nutrients that they contain (folate and Vitamin A). The menu does an excellent job of offering these foods on all days of the week.
- It is great to see that fruit is offered at lunch as well as A.M. and P.M. snacks. It is also wonderful to see that you have specified the type of fruit being served and that you rotate through a variety of fruit each day and week.
- The use of fresh and frozen fruit is encouraged as they are equally nutritious. Unsweetened applesauce is recommended so I was pleased to see this identified on the menu. You could also consider draining and/or rinsing fruit that is canned in syrup to reduce the sugar content.

Grain Products

- *Canada's Food Guide* encourages us to get at least half of our daily servings of grain products from whole grains and your menu does a good job of meeting this. Whole grains provide fibre and other nutrients that children need for healthy growth and development. Grain products are considered whole if the ingredient list includes whole grain as the first ingredient OR your recipe

includes whole grains (e.g., whole grain flour, oats, cornmeal, etc.). I noted that almost all of the grain products listed on the menu are whole grains, which is excellent. You may also want to consider whole wheat pasta, pancakes and including brown rice in place of the basmati rice to maintain this high standard.

Milk and Alternatives

→ *Canada's Food Guide* states that children aged 2 to 8 years should consume two servings of Milk and Alternatives each day and the DNA requires that for children under the age of 6, that 1 – 1 ½ cups be offered per day. It is great to see that milk is offered at lunch every day and all A.M. snacks, which helps to ensure that one cup fluid milk is offered to each child daily. Homogenized milk should be served to toddlers (under the age of 2) and 2% or 1% to preschool children or skim to children over the age of 2. It is also good to see that alternatives to milk are offered frequently (cheese, yogurt). You could also consider offering plain cottage or ricotta cheese as a snack option to increase variety. Fortified soy beverage can be used as an alternative to milk for children with dairy allergies.

Meat and Alternatives

- Lunch rotates through a nice variety dishes, such that a different type of meat or alternative is offered each day, and substitutes are provided. While chicken is a lower fat option and has been utilized well, it is acceptable to provide turkey or pork (e.g., Chilli, meat balls, lasagna) to improve variety.
- As I noted in the menu review completed in 2014, an additional ideal to strive for is the *Canada's Food Guide* recommendation to have meat alternatives such as tofu and legumes (chickpeas, beans, lentils) often. I am pleased to see you offering more vegetarian meals as they are highly nutritious (e.g., curry with chickpeas, meatless ground beef, navy bean and lentil stew, firm tofu on pizza).
- *Canada's Food Guide* recommends that Canadians consume at least two servings of fish each week. Specifically, salmon, rainbow trout and mackerel are recommended as they contain healthy fat (called omega-3). While it is reasonable to assume that parents offer their children at home fish at least once a week, it would be great to include fish on the day care's menu at least once per week (it is currently absent from Weeks 1, 2 and 3. To get the greatest health benefits, fish should be cooked using lower fat preparation methods (e.g., boiling, baking).

While I have made some recommendations above for a few changes to the five weeks of menus most of these recommendations are based on ideals that exceed the standards of the DNA. I certainly do not intend to diminish the incredible job that you are already doing to provide healthy, nutritious food to

the children that attend the daycare centre. Thank you for carefully considering the food that is offered to the children each and every day.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rebecca Truscott". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rebecca Truscott, Registered Dietitian and Nutrition Consultant
College of Dietitians of Ontario Registration No. 4500