

Arndala Wynd

St James CE Primary School

Once my three children were all at school, I thought it was time for me to get a job (in a school would be superb, but how often do they come along?!) Looking through the weekly newspaper I noticed a job in the kitchen of my local junior school, I applied and, much to my surprise I got the job.

When I first started it was just counting out fish fingers, chicken nuggets etc and yes, even the dreaded Turkey Twizzlers! When Jamie' School Dinners came along I panicked, having no cooking qualifications, I really didn't know what to do - counting out is easy, but making things on a large scale was going to be a real challenge.

Whilst attending a course in my local area, I heard a lady giving a speech about the Food for Life Partnership program (To be honest it had been a long day and I wasn't really listening!). At the end of her speech she handed out forms for us to fill in and sign if we were interested in learning more about the program. I signed the form, putting the school name and address on and thought nothing more of it.

Soon all the information started to filter through and meetings were set up with the team. Before long all the menus at school had changed, everything had to be made from scratch, so this was another learning curve for me, but there was always a member of the team on hand to offer help or advice.

Since joining the Partnership I have attended numerous courses and have always come away from them with loads of new ideas for my kitchen. It is great to meet with other cooks from different areas and share experiences, recipes and to just generally talk. I have made a lot of new friends through the programme.

The food in my school has changed immensely, we now make everything

from fresh, locally sourced products and there are no undesirable additives. Through the programme the children have been on local farm visits where they have learned all about food from "field to plate". We have had a visit from the cooking bus for a week, all the children and staff were able to take part in some practical cooking with the teams support. From this we have developed practical cooking lessons in school and all the children have had the opportunity to take part. We have parents who come in on a regular basis to help out with these classes.

Also through the Food for Life Partnership we as a school have developed the school grounds. Each class has a vegetable plot and a flower bed where they learn to grow and nurture their produce. All of our food waste goes into compost bins which have been placed all around the school, so we hope to have a supply of compost in the future.

In my opinion since starting my job as school cook the food has developed in three stages:

1. Using frozen products ie: chicken nuggets, fish fingers, pies even casseroles were frozen.
2. Using fresh meat but then adding a jar of sauce to it, bolognaise, curry etc.
3. Since joining the Food for Life Partnership now everything is made from scratch using fresh local good quality ingredients.

I really enjoy my work in the school, kitchen and I am becoming more a part of the school team than I ever was when I first started, it is hard work and you are always busy (it means the day goes quicker for me) but when a child comes and tells you they have really enjoyed their meal or they draw you a picture it makes it all worth while.

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If you are thinking of joining the programme, my advice to you would be "go for it", the benefits are exceptional! It is a long hard process but well worth it in the end. The help and support we have had from the team has been amazing, they have given us the confidence to go from strength to strength and we know the children are eating good wholesome food.

My greatest moment since joining the Food for Life Partnership (apart from meeting Jeanette) was when we were told we had achieved the Bronze award. It had taken us a while to reach all the requirements but it has been worth all the hard work... We are now well on our way to Silver!