

snacks and lunch, David and Lulu are confident that the benefits to children's health, not to mention the lifelong value of teaching kids to appreciate quality food, outweigh those extra few dollars for parents.

"You feed a child a chicken nugget, fine, but what is that?" David said. "It's a processed 'thing' and kids won't have a concept of what it is or where it really comes from."

From grinding their own spices to rising at 3 a.m. for the daily routine of sautéing onions and preparing fresh sauces in the 9,000-square-foot RFRK kitchen, David and Lulu readily devote twenty hours a day to keeping the program up and running, and things don't seem to be slowing down.

"The program has been blowing up for about the past year," said David. "We don't advertise and we don't have a website, but word-of-mouth means we've got parents calling up from daycares across the city."

One of those parents is Susan McKeen, co-chair of Earl Haig Daycare. After she got wind that the daycare served boxed potatoes and other processed, high-fat foods, McKeen took action. "I was stunned when I found out what my son was being fed," she said. "I called Real Food for Real Kids and immediately things started moving forward to get their food into the centre."

Despite the higher cost of the program, response from parents has been positive, and McKeen said she knows David and Lulu have their hearts in the right place. "It's about our children, and these people are so passionate, and so personally interested in the kids and their wellbeing," she said. "The government might get to making changes eventually, but by doing this, we're already a step ahead."

While most parents and daycare caregivers support their initiatives, the Farnells do encounter values that clash with their own. "We've only lost one client, and it was over ideas, not money," David said. "The caregivers were eating MacDonald's three days a week, and they didn't see why serving kids that food was a problem, if they ate it themselves."

Though the daycare in question has reverted to canned pasta and packaged cookies, the Farnells know that the hard facts about children's nutrition are on their side.

With Statistics Canada reporting that over 25 percent of Canadian kids are overweight and that most daycare-aged children consume 77 percent more than their recommended limit of sodium each day, David and Lulu are adamant about the importance of widespread change – and they say it needs to start at home.

Both agree that parents play the most important role in how children approach food. The Farnells say they've seen firsthand how the attitude of adults can make or break the success of the program. "Kids are very curious, they love to try new things," Lulu said. "But are parents supporting that thirst, and are they encouraging the kids to try new foods?"

"In many cases, you see overworked parents who let their kids do the driving and avoid conflict," David added. "But don't make it about conflict – just serve dinner, and kids can eat it, and if they don't you'll

have one hungry child on your hands the next morning!"

Though they still serve Max the same nutritious foods, the Farnells admit they've had to find a new balance as their son gets older. "He does go to [elementary] school now and sees kids with Jell-O and sweet, packaged foods, and of course he takes some of this or wants a bite of that," Lulu said.

Here is a favourite recipe from the Real Food for Real Kids kitchen.

CHUNKY CHICKPEA CHOWDER

Serves 4

- 1/4 cup white miso
- 1/2 cup water (preferably filtered)
- 2 tbsp grapeseed oil or extra virgin olive oil
- 2 medium onions, halved and thinly sliced
- 2 tsp ground coriander
- 1/2 tsp turmeric
- 1/4 tsp ground cinnamon
- 3 cups thinly sliced green cabbage
- 1 large green pepper, diced
- 1 large red pepper, diced
- 3 ripe tomatoes, chopped
- 1 can (15 to 19 oz) chickpeas, drained and rinsed, or 2 cups cooked chick peas
- 1/4 cup raisins or currants
- 1 tbsp lemon juice
- Sea salt or kosher salt, to taste

In small bowl, whisk together the miso and water; set aside. In large, deep sauté pan or skillet, heat oil over medium heat. Add onions and cook, stirring occasionally, until softened, about 5 minutes. Stir in coriander, turmeric and cinnamon. Cook for 1 minute. Add cabbage and cook, stirring occasionally, until cabbage begins to soften, about 5 minutes.

Stir in miso and water mixture, green pepper, red pepper, tomatoes, chickpeas and raisins. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium-low, cover and simmer until vegetables are tender, about 15 minutes. Stir in lemon juice, and salt (if required) to taste. Serve over whole wheat couscous, brown rice or quinoa with a side of broccoli.