

# Initial summary report of the Hakuna Fruitata evaluation



September 2023

This report provides a high-level overview of some of the key findings from the evaluation of Hakuna Fruitata during summer 2023. Information that has contributed to this overview includes a number of observations of holiday clubs as well as interviews/focus group discussions with 10 staff members which were carried out after the summer.

Twenty-nine observations were made in total, this includes six clubs which were observed on the same day by two independent observers, and one club that was observed on two different occasions by the same observer. On each occasion, the observers independently completed an MS Form to log what they saw in the club on that occasion.

Two focus groups were held (in person and online) and two online interviews were conducted to collect the views and feedback from a total of 10 holiday club staff members.

Information from the observations and the discussions with staff have been summarised to focus on some key findings.

## **Part A: Types of food**

The types and providers of food varied between clubs. Table 1 shows that most food was provided on site by the club. Some children brought their own packed lunches in a few clubs.

**Table 1**

*Details of who provides the foods at the clubs*

	Frequency	Percent
The food was provided on site by the club	14	50.0%
Central food service	9	32.1%
The food was provided by a local partner organisation	5	17.9%

Table 2 shows the types of lunches provided in each club. Hot lunches provided to children included brown rice with chickpeas and lettuce, rice with vegetables, pasta, garlic bread, chicken wraps, rice with chicken, rice and curry (e.g., beef), chicken casserole and vegetarian casserole. In one club, children had pizza to celebrate their last holiday club day.

Cold lunches provided to children included a variety of sandwiches such as cheese, chicken, tuna, ham, turkey, and jam. Fruit bags, yogurt, crisps, Soreen bars, and flapjacks were also provided in some clubs during lunch time. In one club, after having their packed lunch, children had mashed potato, baked beans, carrots, and fish fingers as a snack-time meal.

**Table 2**

*Frequency (and percentages) of hot and cold lunches given by the providers in the clubs*

The food was provided on site by the club		Central food service		The food was provided by a local partner organisation	
Hot lunch	Cold lunch	Hot lunch	Cold lunch	Hot lunch	Cold
7 (41.2%)	10 (58.8%)	0 (0%)	6 (100%)	2 (40%)	3 (60%)

### **Part B: Feeding practices**

#### Encouraging balance and variety

This feeding practice captures whether staff are encouraging children to eat a wide range of foods and to try (new) foods. In general, encouraging children to eat a wide range of foods was observed at least sometimes in most clubs (see Table 3). This behaviour was not seen in 17.2% of the clubs (5 clubs), however. Encouraging children to try new foods was commonly seen at least some of the time (see Table 3), but was not seen during the observations in almost a quarter of the clubs (7 clubs). Although it is noteworthy that this behaviour was dependent on there being a novel food present which was not the case for every observation.

**Table 3**

*Club staff encourage children to eat a wide range of foods and to try new foods*

	Encouraged children to eat a wide range of foods		Encouraged children to try new foods	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Never/Not seen in practice	5	17.2%	7	24.1%
Rarely/A few staff did this	4	13.8%	1	3.4%
Sometimes/Some staff did this	9	31.0%	10	34.5%
Often/Most staff did this	3	10.3%	2	6.9%
All staff did this	8	27.6%	9	31.0%
Total	29	100.0%	29	100.0%

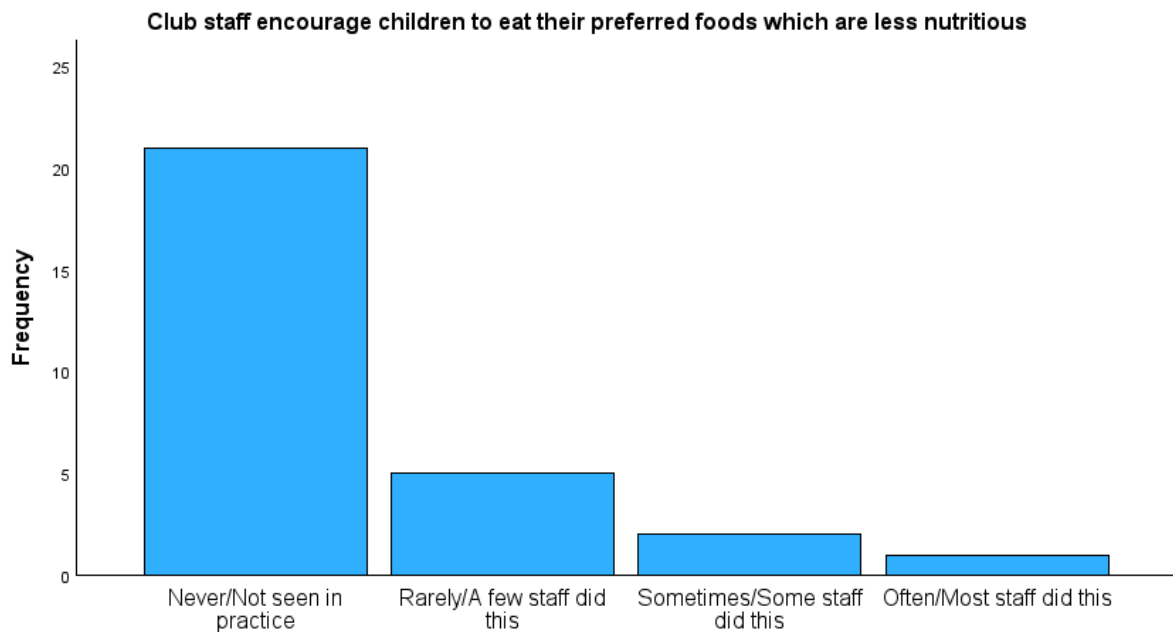
In most clubs, staff were **not** seen to encourage children to eat their preferred foods which are typically less nutritious (see Figure 1 below).

Discussions with holiday club staff members highlighted that the range of fruit and vegetable deliveries, as well as workshops delivered as part of the Hakuna Fruitata project, were important for helping to encourage balance and variety. Children experimented with novel fruits such as passionfruit by putting it in sundaes or fruit skewers which encouraged them to try the novel fruits which they would not otherwise eat. One club staff member said, “... *passionfruit they'd never seen it*

they never and (.) they were sort of waiting for the next passionfruit delivery ... So they were like 'oh we want passionfruit when, when can we get the next passionfruit' and they got really sort of creative with it, some of them put it in sundaes, some of them made smoothies, some of them literally just cut it in half and started just eating it". In another club where children were making fruit skewers, they were encouraged to try new fruits by first smelling and licking the fruits before eating them. Research suggests that these are sensory exploratory behaviours which help children to familiarise themselves with new foods before consuming them.

**Figure 1**

*The number of occasions in which club staff were observed to encourage children to eat their preferred foods which are typically less nutritious*



It is therefore important that the encouragement of balance and variety in children’s diets continue to be highlighted through creative workshops run as part of the clubs. Staff suggested that children would likely be more engaged if these workshops are run by someone different to the club staff. Participant 1 said, *“sometimes the children see you as kind of like you're there everyday when actually when it's somebody else telling them the same thing. But it's just a different person and it's somebody special coming in to talk to them. They see it in a different way.”*

Holiday clubs may have the opportunity to expose children to a wide range of foods but children may be inclined to choose familiar unhealthy foods than try novel healthy foods that are available at the holiday clubs. Thus, social factors such as feeding practices, are important to be implemented alongside physical factors such as the provision of fruits and vegetables, to encourage children to try novel foods.

## Role modelling

This feeding practice involved the club staff eating the same food as the children, eating nutritious foods in front of the children, and talking to the children about how much they enjoy eating nutritious foods. In most of the clubs, club staff members ate the same food as the children (see Table 4), though this was not seen in around a fifth of the clubs. Again, in most of the clubs observed, staff ate nutritious foods in front of the children, though this was not the case in 27.6% of the clubs. Club staff talking to the children about how much they enjoy eating foods was seen the least as a role modelling practice.

**Table 4**

*Club staff practising role modelling behaviours such as eating the same food as the children, eating nutritious foods in front of the children, and talking to the children about how much they enjoy eating nutritious foods*

	Club staff eat the same food as the children		Club staff eat healthy foods in front of the children		Club staff talk to the children about how much they enjoy eating foods	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Never/Not seen in practice	6	20.7%	8	28.6%	12	42.9%
Rarely/A few staff did this	3	10.3%	3	10.7%	5	17.9%
Sometimes/Some staff did this	6	20.7%	5	17.9%	0	0%
Often/Most staff did this	6	20.7%	3	10.7%	4	14.3%
All staff did this	8	27.6%	9	32.1%	7	25.0%
Total	29	100.0%	28*	100%	28*	100%

\* these data were not able to be collected/observed in one of the 29 clubs

Most club staff reported that role modelling was effective at encouraging children to try foods they would not otherwise try. Participant 5 reflected, *“you’re not telling them to eat, you’re having a conversation about something - you might be talking about whether England won last night ... and you pass some strawberry around and before you know it the strawberry’s finished”*.

A key factor which emerged from the discussions was the importance of young leaders acting as role models. Participant 3 shared that children in their club tended to be more keen to listen to young leaders they looked up to since these leaders were similar to them in age and therefore more relatable. Participant 7, who is a young leader, shared that children formed bonds with particular leaders and were more likely to model the behaviours of these leaders who they were attached to, *“cause kids had favourite coaches (.) so their favourite coaches would sit like in a group with them whilst they eat and it also helped them to clean up after because coaches clean up after themselves so some kids learnt to help around.”* The Hakuna Fruitata project may therefore benefit from training young leaders to act as role models for children attending the club. The training could usefully

include how to practise positive feeding practices (e.g., gentle encouragement to try a variety of foods) and avoid negative practices (e.g., pressuring children to eat).

### Teaching about nutrition

The Hakuna Fruitata training materials emphasised the importance of staff discussing with the children **why** it's important to eat certain foods, to discuss the nutritional value of foods and to talk positively about how they feel when eating a healthy balanced diet or when eating a range of foods. However, as Table 5 demonstrates, most of the clubs were not observed to do this often.

**Table 5**

*Club staff teach children about nutrition by discussing with them why it's important to eat foods, the nutritional value of foods and how they feel when eating a healthy balanced diet or when eating a range of foods*

	Club staff discuss with the children why it's important to eat foods		Club staff discuss with the children the nutritional value of foods		Club staff talk positively about how they feel when eating a healthy balanced diet or when eating a range of foods	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Never/Not seen in practice	11	39.3%	10	35.7%	14	50.0%
Rarely/A few staff did this	6	21.4%	8	28.6%	3	10.7%
Sometimes/Some staff did this	5	17.9%	3	10.7%	2	7.1%
Often/Most staff did this	5	17.9%	5	17.9%	6	21.4%
All staff did this	1	3.6%	2	7.1%	3	10.7%
Total	28*	100%	28*	100.0%	28*	100.0%

\* these data were not able to be collected/observed in one of the 29 clubs

Most club staff reported that it was important to engage children in interactive activities to teach them about nutrition, otherwise they would not be interested. For instance, participant 2 explained how she played bingo with children in her club to teach them about the nutritional value of certain foods: *"we just didn't want to stand there and talk to them for ages, cause I just thought I'm gonna lose their attention in like 5 minutes (.) just talking what a carb is ... so we just wanted to try and do it where they were more in control."* A similar discussion emerged amongst other club staff members wherein they reported that younger children could be given a booklet and taught about the nutritional value of foods by means of sit-down activities, however, for older children this was not the case, and they would become disinterested.

Considering that many of the older children at these clubs go to secondary school where they have modules in Biology that teach them about the nutritional value of foods and how they benefit the

body, staff commented that these children often have knowledge of food nutrition even though they may not put this into practice. Teaching materials for clubs to use to teach about nutrition to these older children may need to be more interactive. Given the importance of youth role modelling that have emerged in discussions with the holiday club staff members, the UCB nutrition students who have offered Hakuna Fruitata workshops could offer an age-appropriate workshop to the older children where the nutritional value of foods and how to implement nutritious foods in one's diet can be learnt in an interactive way. These could include referring to the science behind a balanced nutritious diet, but also how to implement these diets in a student's lifestyle.

#### Restriction and controlling portion sizes

Restricting children's intake of certain foods (e.g., sweets/ desserts) or club staff telling children they cannot have any more food and moving food away from children so that they can't have more was not seen in any of the observations of the clubs. Where restriction was observed, it was being used to manage food waste by offering smaller initial portions of food, with children able to have another portion if they wished to.

Likewise, controlled portion sizes was not discussed in most clubs - club staff in 23 clubs were not observed to talk to children about using their palms to estimate their portion sizes nor to teach children to use their hands as a guide for their portion sizes (see Table 6). However, one of the clubs used child sized plates and cups instead.

**Table 6**

*Club staff talk to children about using their palms to estimate their portion sizes and encourage them to use their hands as a guide for their portion sizes*

	Club staff talk to children about using their palms to estimate their portion sizes		Club staff encourage children to use their hands as a guide for their portion sizes	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Never/Not seen in practice	23	79.3%	23	79.3%
Rarely/A few staff did this	1	3.4%	1	3.4%
Sometimes/Some staff did this	2	6.9%	1	3.4%
Often/Most staff did this	1	3.4%	2	6.9%
All staff did this	2	6.9%	2	6.9%
Total	29	100.0%	29	100.0%

During the focus groups, the staff members explained why this was the case. Participant 2 said, "... if they said to me 'oh miss, can I have another one?' I'd be a bit like well yeah, cause I don't know what you're gonna have for your tea...". This belief was echoed by other club staff, for instance participant

1 said, “rather than saying no, you can't have anymore ... Because actually I don't know how hungry these children are.”

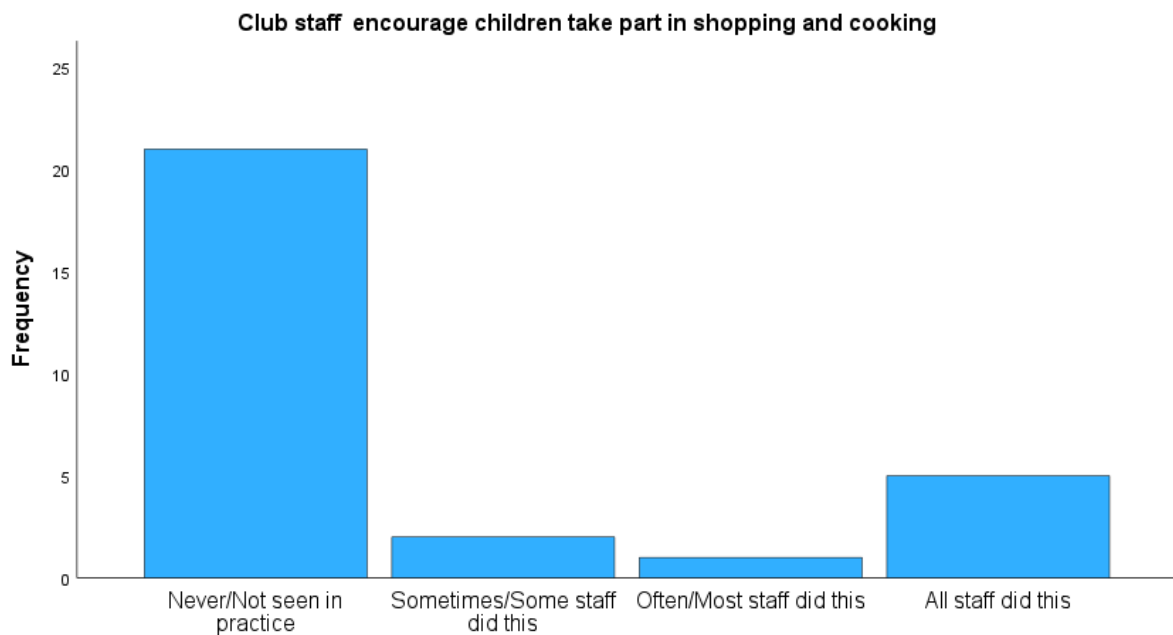
Restriction appears not to be something that club staff feel is an appropriate practice to implement or discuss in these clubs which children facing food insecurity may attend. Likewise, club staff reflected that healthy portion sizes may not be appropriate to be taught to these children who may have limited amounts of food to eat on a daily basis.

### Children’s involvement

Clubs were observed to see whether staff encourage children to help prepare, serve and clear club meals, if children are involved in what food is chosen for the meal, and if staff encourage children take part in shopping and cooking. Across all the clubs observed, the staff were not seen to encourage children to take part in shopping and cooking (see Figure 2), but most clubs did involve children in choosing and preparing their meals (see Figures 3 and 4).

**Figure 2**

*The number of occasions in which club staff encouraged children to shop and cook*

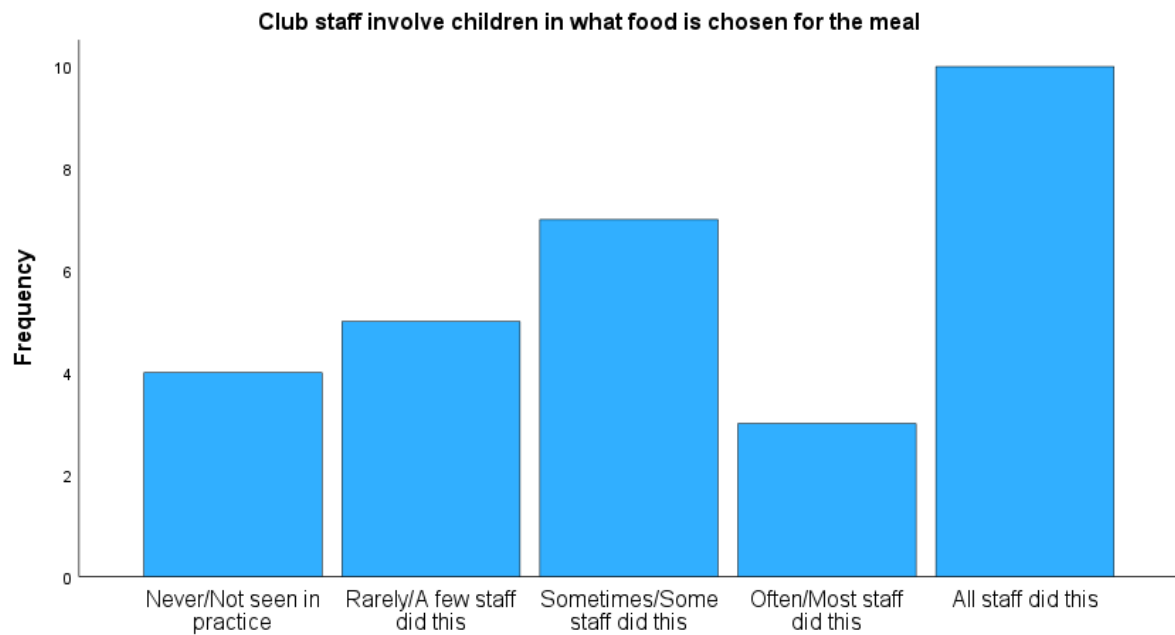


Children’s involvement was often dependent on who provided the food at the clubs. For instance, no involvement was seen in clubs which used Central Food Service that served cold lunches such as pre-prepared sandwiches to children. One club staff reported, “I just tend to order so many of each you know like so many cheese, so many tuna ...” Still, one club tried to give children the option of choosing which food was ordered in, “... once I knew what was on the Central [Food] Service system

... I said to the children, would you like this or would you like that? ... what kind of sandwiches would you like me to ... bring in?" Clubs which prepared food on site sometimes gave children the option to choose their menu, "we do give children the option to help build the menu." This showcases one way in which clubs demonstrated involving children.

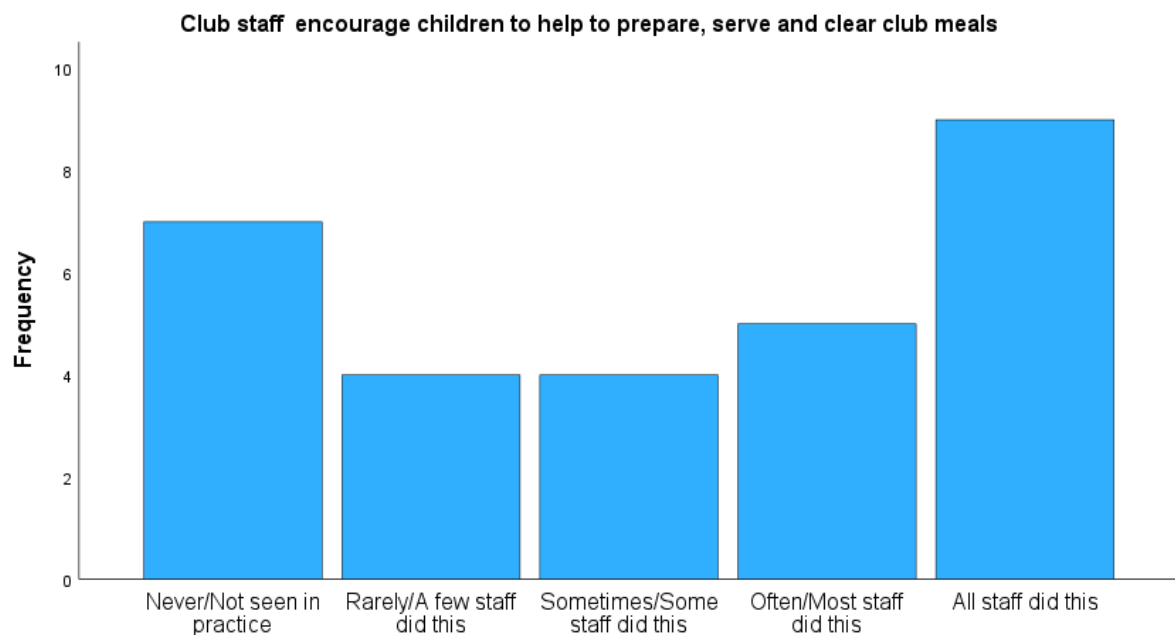
**Figure 3**

*The number of occasions in which club staff involved children to choose their meal*



**Figure 4**

*The number of occasions in which club staff encouraged children to help prepare, serve and clear meals*





Staff distinguished between the serving of snacks to lunches by reporting that children were encouraged to cut and chop fruits and vegetables to taste them (i.e. as a snack), but meals, such as lunches, were prepared in kitchens by kitchen staff solely, *“we didn’t even get involved in that, we paid someone to do that.”* One club ensured that children were invited into the kitchen to help the kitchen staff.

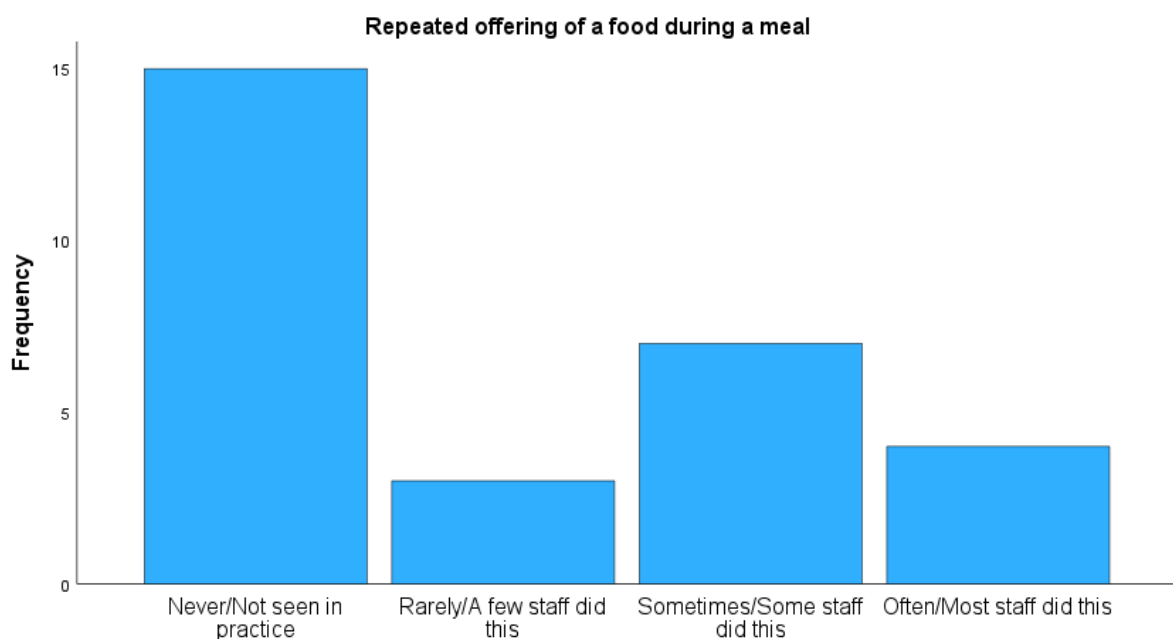
Staff discussions suggested that staff were willing to involve children in meal preparation however, the lack of cooking facilities in venues were an important factor preventing them from doing so, *“If we had kitchen space ... we’d offer more activities for the kids.”* Participant 6 suggested, *“Could you not use a hob ... you know hobs that you can use with camping?”* Portable cookers can therefore be provided so that staff can implement activities where children are given the opportunity to be more involved in the preparation and cooking of the meals they consume. Logistically implementing these activities with a large number of children would mean that a few children are selected each time to help prepare lunch. One concern reported was getting the food prepared in time for lunch. Thus, the preparation of lunch could be an activity children start from the morning, giving them enough time to explore, cut, chop and help cook in time for lunchtime. Involving children in cooking activities would likely provide another opportunity to encourage them to taste new foods, such as new vegetables, which they may not be willing to eat otherwise.

#### Repeated offering of foods and pressuring to eat

There is a fine distinction between repeated exposure of foods to increase children’s liking towards the food and pressuring them to try the foods which can be counterproductive. Repeated exposure such as staff repeatedly putting the same foods in front of children as a form of gentle encouragement to try new foods was not observed in over half of the observations (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5**

*Club staff repeatedly put the same foods in front of children during a meal*



Pressure to eat includes the following behaviours: telling children that they must finish the food on their plate, trying to get children to eat more if they eat only a small helping, or repeatedly pressuring children to touch, sniff or lick the foods, as well as taste and eat them, when children refuse to. These behaviours are classed as negative and were not seen across most of the observations (see Table 7).

**Table 7**

*Club staff telling children they must finish their food, club staff trying to get children to eat more if children eat only a small helping, and club staff repeatedly putting the same foods in front of children, pressuring them to touch, sniff or lick the foods, as well as taste and eat them, when children refuse to*

	Club staff tell children that they must finish their food		Club staff try to get children to eat more if children eat only a small helping		Club staff repeatedly put the same foods in front of children, pressuring them to try them	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Never/Not seen in practice	29	100%	25	89.3%	27	96.4%
Rarely/A few staff did this	0	0%	0	0%	1	3.6%
Sometimes/Some staff did this	0	0%	1	3.6%	0	0%
Often/Most staff did this	0	0%	1	3.6%	0	0%
All staff did this	0	0%	1	3.6%	0	0%
Total	29	0%	28*	100.0%	28*	100.0%

\* these data were not able to be collected/observed in one of the 29 clubs

Discussions with staff also suggested that children were never forced to eat foods they did not wish to. Participant 6 reported, “... one of the people who was preparing the food ... I wouldn’t say forceful but she’s like ‘come on then you will have this’ ... you just don’t argue with her so ... I think it is important as adults to say come on ... try this but you know not be too pushy.” It is worth noting that some clubs had such large numbers of children that it was difficult for staff to focus on specific children and spend time telling them repeatedly to eat foods they did not wish to eat. Nevertheless, seeing that pressure to eat is a negative feeding practice which can make children less likely to want to eat the offered food by associating negative emotions with the pressured food, information to avoid this practice should be highlighted in the Hakuna Fruitata training materials.

### Food to soothe or for emotion regulation

Clubs were observed to see if they offer children something to eat or drink when they get upset (not seen in any of the observations), if children are offered something to eat in response to their boredom (a few staff did this in one observation, but this was not observed in any of the other 28 observations), and if food is used to break up arguments amongst the children (a few staff did this in 2 observations, but it was not seen in any of the other 27 observations). Generally, use of this practice seems to be low and staff discussions suggested that this practice was done in cases where the child may have had special needs, “... *the way to stop his meltdown was to give him an apple.*”

### Using non-food rewards

Club staff were observed to see if they provide non-food rewards such as stickers, high fives, superficial gold stars/points, or praise children when they try a new or disliked food. This was not seen in 72.4% of the observations (n = 29), though in 17.2% of the observations (n = 29), all staff were seen to do this. Staff discussions did not elaborate on the use (or not) of these practices but the low instances when such practices were seen could suggest benefits in focusing more on how these can be valuable in future training sessions.

## **Summary and recommendations**

Overall, from an initial review of the data collected, there was generally good evidence that a range of the feeding practices that staff were taught about during the Hakuna Fruitata training were in use in the clubs. The most frequently observed practices were encouragement of balance and variety in children’s diets, role modelling and child involvement in preparing food. This is encouraging and suggests that the clubs have an opportunity to engage children to learn and practice a balanced and nutritious diet. Chances to cook or prepare food, however, were less commonly observed across the clubs, due to difficulties with access to equipment and space. Moreover, restriction and teaching children about portion sizes were practices not commonly seen in these clubs where children experiencing food insecurity attend. The discussions with staff suggested that this was because children may not have access to regular meals at home, and the clubs were an opportunity for them to have fulfilling meals and try new foods, and these findings suggest less focus could be given to these in future training.

In future, it is suggested that the Hakuna Fruitata project offers more creative workshops to encourage balance and variety in children’s diets. It is also suggested that workshops are run where age-appropriate materials are used to teach older children about nutrition and implementing a nutritious diet. It is also important that children are given the opportunity to practise these behaviours through preparing food and cooking in the clubs. Portable cookers could be provided to make this feasible in clubs which do not have the space and availability of kitchen facilities. Moreover, young leaders are important role models for children attending the clubs and should therefore be trained to implement positive feeding practices and model healthy eating behaviours.