

Executive Summary
Targeted Implementation of NutriSTEP®
(Nutrition Screening Tool for Every Preschooler)
June 2007-June 2009

Grant-in-Aid funding from the Danone Institute of Canada provided the opportunity to conduct a targeted implementation and process evaluation study of NutriSTEP®. Led by the University of Guelph and the Nutrition Resource Centre, different nutrition risk screening and referral models in three select Ontario sites were compared. Targeted implementation of NutriSTEP® was conducted in York Region, Thunder Bay and Sudbury, between September 2007 and June 2008, using one of two models, an *assisted referral model* or a *self-referral model*. The purpose of this study was to develop and implement the two models and evaluate the successes and barriers to screening, referral, and follow-up at each site. The overall goal of this research was to determine the required resources and appropriate processes for implementing NutriSTEP® in an ethical manner.

Models for conducting nutrition risk screening in the sites were developed by Site Coordinators in conjunction with their local partners. In York Region, a *self-referral model* was coordinated through York Region Public Health Services and included the NutriSTEP® screening questionnaire in a school board kindergarten registration package. In Thunder Bay and Sudbury, an *assisted referral model* was developed. In Thunder Bay, the *assisted referral model* was coordinated through the Thunder Bay District Health Unit via their established Fair Start preschool screening program. In Sudbury, NutriSTEP® was implemented as part of a new screening program via the Ontario “Best Start Hubs” and coordinated by the Sudbury & District Health Unit. The goal was to screen 500, 300, and 200 preschoolers in York Region, Thunder Bay and Sudbury respectively.

In York Region, 1400 screening packages were distributed to 137 schools from January to May 2008 and 131 (9.5%) of the surveys were returned to the University of Guelph. In Thunder Bay 153 children were screened while 80 children were screened in Sudbury. Only two parents in Thunder Bay and Sudbury declined the nutrition risk screening. A total of 364 NutriSTEP® and demographic questionnaires were completed in this study. The nutritional risk levels were as follows: 6% high risk, 13% moderate risk, and 81% low risk.

Telephone interviews were conducted with 164 parents who completed the NutriSTEP® questionnaire to determine their perceptions of the screening venue, the screening process, nutritional risk, referrals, and usefulness of resources. Parents perceived screening to be a worthwhile experience to obtain a check on their children’s nutritional health and found the screening locations convenient to obtain educational resources. Relatively few referrals were recommended and even fewer parents followed through with referrals. This was reportedly due to the time commitment involved with seeing a health professional for follow-up or the notion that the education materials provided with screening were sufficient to initiate change.

The *self-referral model* through a school board is a reality for communities that have large numbers of preschoolers without the capacity to reach them via an assisted referral process. A subsequent nutrition risk screening using NutriSTEP[®] in York Region was conducted in area schools in September 2008 and the NutriSTEP[®] screening program will be available to as many parents as possible in York Region for fall 2009. The *assisted referral model* in Thunder Bay worked well as it was easily integrated into an existing preschool screening program; this model is continuing in Thunder Bay along with a self-referral model. In Sudbury, the “Best Start Hub” Implementation Committee, Hub Coordinators and staff were very supportive and interested in continuing to implement NutriSTEP[®].

This implementation project has identified areas of success and areas where modifications can be made to improve the nutrition risk screening process and improve the health of Canadian preschoolers. Nutrition risk screening for preschoolers using NutriSTEP[®] has been demonstrated to be not only feasible, but sustainable, in both *self-referral* and *assisted referral models* in Ontario; however, the low uptake of referrals highlights the need to ensure adequate follow-up of ‘at risk’ families.