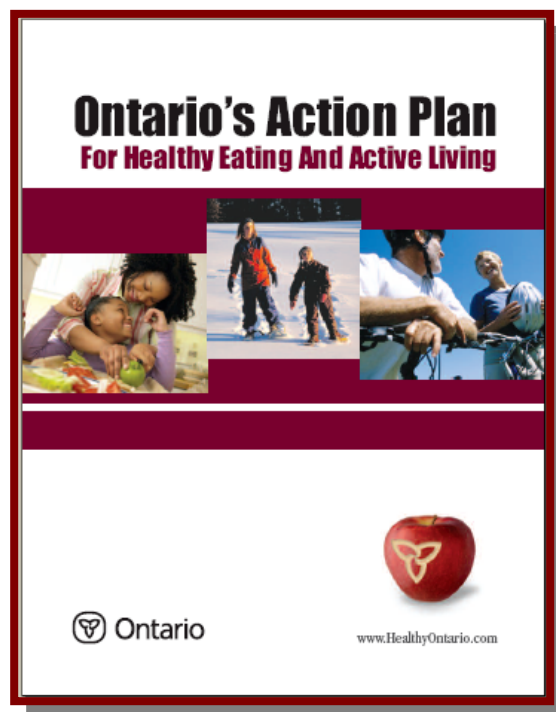


EVALUATION OF THE NORTHERN FRUIT AND VEGETABLE PROGRAM PHASE II: CHILDREN'S PERCEPTIONS PORCUPINE FINAL REPORT



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SUBMITTED TO THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH PROMOTION
BY
PUBLIC HEALTH RESEARCH, EDUCATION & DEVELOPMENT (PHRED) PROGRAM

JANUARY 28, 2009



Public Health
Services
City of Hamilton

Kingston, Frontenac and
Lennox & Addington
Public Health

Middlesex-London
Health Unit

Ottawa Public Health

Sudbury and District
Health Unit

Public Health Division,
Ontario Ministry of Health
And Long-Term Care

PHRED* INVESTIGATORS

- Ms. Charlene Beynon, MScN, Director, Public Health Research, Education & Development (PHRED) Program, Middlesex-London Health Unit (MLHU) and Casual Associate Professor, The University of Western Ontario
- Dr. Meizi He, PhD. Public Health Scientist, PHRED Program, MLHU & Associate Professor, University of Texas at San Antonio
- Ms. Jennifer Gritke, MA, Research Associate, PHRED Program, MLHU
- Ms. Michelle Henderson, MScFN Graduate Student, Dietetic Intern, Brescia University College
- Ms. Joanne Kurtz, Research Assistant, PHRED Program, MLHU
- Ms. Elaine Murkin, RD, MSc, Supervisor, Public Health Nutritionist, Ottawa Public Health
- Ms. Michelle Sangster Bouck, MA, Research Associate, PHRED Program, MLHU
- Ms. Renée St Onge, MA, Research and Development Specialist, PHRED Program, Sudbury & District Health Unit

* *Public Health Research, Education and Development*

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Charlene Beynon, Project Co-Lead
PHRED Director
Public Health Research, Education and Development (PHRED) Program
Middlesex-London Health Unit
50 King Street
London, ON N6A 5L7
519-663-5317 ext. 2484
cbeynon@uwo.ca

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We are most appreciative of the funding provided by the Ministry of Health Promotion and to Roselle Martino, Nutrition Consultant, Nadia Stokvis, Program Coordinator, Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion Branch and their ministry colleagues for their support of the PHRED Program.

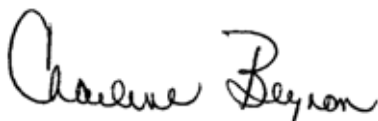
Betty Ann Horbul, Public Health Nutritionist/Manager, Nutrition Services/Population Health and Bill Chicoski, Health Promoter, Northern Fruit and Vegetable Project (local site coordinator) both from the Porcupine Health Unit provided assistance to the evaluation team in gaining access to the schools. We also would like to thank Dr. Dennis Hong, Porcupine's Acting Medical Officer of Health for his ongoing support.

Thanks is expressed to the four school boards that participated in our evaluation: the Northeastern Catholic District School Board, the District School Board Ontario North East, the Conseil scolaire catholique de district des Grandes Rivières, and the Conseil scolaire public de district du Nord-Est de l'Ontario and to the staff in each of the participating schools. We would also like to thank the elementary schools where the focus groups were conducted for the time, space, and assistance in distributing and collecting consent forms.

We would specifically like to acknowledge Roland Perron, who moderated the focus groups, and Joanne Kurtz, who served as the Assistant Moderator and the Research Assistant for the project. They are to be commended for facilitating the sessions which generated such rich data. Joanne was instrumental in setting up the focus groups and liaising with the school boards and schools. Joanne also provided invaluable assistance during the analysis by offering her "on the ground" perspective and French language skills. We also wish to express our deep thanks to the PHRED Investigator Team for the extraordinary role they played, to Susan Stewart (Kingston PHRED), a former team member, for her significant role in developing the proposal, to Colleen van Berkel (Hamilton PHRED) for reviewing the summary and to Ms. Nancy Forbes, Administrative Assistant to the Director, REED Services, MLHU for ensuring that administrative supports were in place and for her attention to detail.

And finally we wish to thank the parents who allowed their children to participate and to the students who made this evaluation possible.

With appreciation and thanks,



Charlene Beynon, MScN
Evaluation Co-Lead



Meizi He, PhD
Evaluation Co-Lead

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Key Findings at a Glance

- Focus groups were conducted in the Porcupine region with students in grades 5–8 in order to solicit their views on the Northern Fruit and Vegetable Program (NFVP).
- The NFVP was viewed as a valuable program, which had a positive impact on the students' fruit and vegetable consumption behaviours, particularly increased willingness to try new fruit and vegetables and increased consumption either at home or at school.
- Student participants enjoyed the program, largely thought the food was good, and appreciated the chance to snack on healthy foods and to try new fruit and vegetables.
- Students identified some areas for improvement, including produce quality, quantity, and variety and offering the produce as an afternoon snack.

BACKGROUND

The Northern Fruit and Vegetable Program (NFVP) was implemented as a pilot in 24 elementary schools in the Porcupine area beginning in December 2006 and was further expanded to schools in the Algoma region in September 2007. The project supports Ontario's Action Plan for Healthy Eating and Active Living and aims to raise awareness and increase the consumption of fruit and vegetables among children. A quantitative outcome evaluation has demonstrated a statistically significant increase in the children's daily fruit and vegetable consumption by 0.5 servings at school as a result of the program¹. However, little is known about the children's perceptions of the program. This evaluation which used a qualitative approach further detailed what children like and dislike about the program.

Objectives:

The objectives of the evaluation were to:

- 1) solicit students' (grades 5-8) views of the NFVP.
- 2) qualitatively explore impacts of the NFVP on students' (grades 5-8) fruit and vegetable consumption behaviours.

¹ He, M, Beynon, C, Sangster Bouck, M, St Onge, R, Stewart, S, Khoshaba, L, and Lemieux, S. (2007). Evaluation of the Northern Fruit and Vegetable Pilot Program (NFVPP) - final report. London, Ontario, Middlesex-London Health Unit.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The NFVP was qualitatively evaluated using focus groups, which was determined to be an appropriate means to solicit children's viewpoints. The interview guide is included as Appendix A. The evaluation protocol was approved by the Research Ethics Boards at both Brescia University College and The University of Western Ontario. Parental informed consent was obtained prior to the focus groups (Appendix B & C). Focus groups were conducted with 82 students in 11 elementary schools in the Porcupine region, including four French schools. The focus group transcripts were coded and qualitatively analyzed using inductive content analysis.

FINDINGS

This evaluation sought to explore several topics during the focus groups, including perceptions of the program, perceived impacts of the program, the educational component and suggestions for future program improvement.

Perceptions of Program

- The overall perception of the program was positive. Student participants stated that they enjoyed the program, largely thought the food received was good, and appreciated the chance to snack on healthy foods and to try new fruit

and vegetables. When asked what they would tell a friend about the program, the students responded positively.

... on ferait toute pour le supporter, mais c'est comme toute plein de choses qui peuvent te mettre en santé, t'habituer à manger des bonnes choses, qui t'habitue à manger différentes choses comme des asperges pas cuits qui a plein de vitamines, mais 'y a pas beaucoup de monde qui aime ça, mais c'est bon pour la santé.

(We would do anything to support it, but it's like full of things that can make you healthy, getting used to eating good things, getting you in the habit of eating different things like uncooked asparagus that is full of vitamins, there aren't a lot of people that like that but it's good for your health. – English translation)

Perceived Program Impacts

- One of the most significant perceived impacts is that students largely believed that they had changed their eating habits by eating more fruit and vegetables as a result of the program. Some of the perceived impacts of the program also included: an increased willingness to try new fruit and vegetables, changes in previously-held negative conceptions of certain fruit and vegetables, and the belief that eating more fruit and vegetables through the NFVP has made them feel healthier and/or have more energy.

"I like to try more of the vegetables because now I have a more open mind of what they taste like."

...avant j'mangeais pas mes fruits et légumes parce que j'trouvais que c'était pas bon, pis après ça quand 'y ont commencé le programme, j'en en mangé du programme, pis après ça, j'les aimais plus et plus. Pis, j'ai commencé à les manger plus.

(Before I didn't eat my fruits and vegetables because I found that they weren't good, but after they started the program, I ate some there, then after that, I liked them more and more. And then I started eating them more. – English translation)

Educational Component

- Although the educational component was not consistently implemented and was not universally recalled by the students, the "Snack Fact Sheets" were given positive feedback by many of the participants. Students offered many suggestions for improving the educational component, including suggestions that focused on having fun, being creative, and engaging students in interactive lessons about fruit and vegetables.

"I liked them because the paper it was cool because it told you more that you didn't know about the fruit or vegetable and it told you a recipe to make. That was cool."

"Maybe someone could make up a fun game of it and, of course, you are going to remember the game and with the game you are going to remember the facts."

Suggestions to Improve Program

- Suggestions to improve the program included: ensuring quality, having the appropriate quantity for each classroom, offering a wider variety of fruit and vegetables, having fruit and vegetables offered as an afternoon snack, and having a supportive home environment.

And they [carrots and peppers] were kind of slimy and kind of seemed like old, a bit. They weren't fresh and crispy so I think maybe the condition that the fruits and vegetables were in could affect the opinion of the student and they say 'well, it's like soft and mushy and I don't really like it because it's not crunchy'.

"Si tu manges toujours le même légume, bien tu vas être tanné, pis probablement un jour tu vas pu vouloir en manger si tu l'as mangé trop souvent. T'étais tanné du goût, fait que t'as juste laissé tomber le légume."

(If you always eat the same vegetable, well you will get bored of it, then probably one day, you will no longer want to eat any if you ate it too often. You're bored of the taste, and you just drop that vegetable. – English translation)

- Students were also vocal about having their opinions and preferences taken into consideration when determining what to serve, and believed that doing so would increase their fruit and vegetable consumption. They mentioned using surveys and votes as a way of gauging their preferences.

"You could do a survey of the whole school and see the average of what's the most common fruits and vegetables that everyone likes and then you could take those."

- The students' remarks suggested that the home environment can play a large role in helping children increase fruit and vegetable consumption.

Peut-être si comme quand tu arrives à la maison pis les parents aient un assiette de fruits ou légumes pour toi, comme un goûter pendant qu'y fait le souper ou comme juste pour faire que t'es pas faim pour un peu, comme 'y pourraient te donner des fruits et des légumes pour manger en attendant.

(Maybe, if like, when you get home, then the parents had a plate of fruits or vegetables for you, like a snack while they make dinner or like just so you aren't hungry for a bit, like they could give you fruits and vegetables to eat while you wait. – English translation)

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

1. A free fruit and vegetable snack program, in conjunction with nutrition education, offers a promising opportunity to promote fruit and vegetable consumption in elementary school children.
2. A quality control system must be in place to ensure that quality fruit and vegetables are provided with sufficient variety, and quantity based on need.
3. Serving more fresh fruit and vegetables, along with tasty / nutritious dips, making fruit and vegetables into salads, and presenting eye-catching arrangements may enhance the likelihood of children liking fruit and vegetables.

4. Surveying children's preferences and intake could serve as a means to enhance the effectiveness of fruit and vegetable programs.
5. Nutrition education should be delivered consistently across all participating schools in a manner which is informative and engages students.
6. Planning early and ensuring the necessary resources and systems are in place to support teachers are important to ensure the educational component is effective.
7. To maximize the impact of fruit and vegetable programs on children, it is important to involve parents.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH PROMOTION

Based on the findings of this evaluation, it is recommended that the Ministry of Health Promotion:

1. Continue the Northern Fruit and Vegetable Program, having addressed issues related to variety and quantity, and although produce quality has improved, continue to ensure that a high level of produce quality is provided.
2. Ensure the necessary systems are in place to support teachers in consistent delivery of the "Paint Your Plate" nutrition education component.
3. Consider serving more fresh fruit and vegetables with tasty / nutritious dips and presenting eye-catching arrangements.
4. Consider conducting a brief survey of program participants' fruit and vegetable preferences and intake at the end of each school year. Survey results may provide valuable data for future program improvement and could serve as a program impact evaluation indicator.
5. Consider conducting a qualitative exploration of parental perspectives on the NFVP that may lead to a better understanding of how to engage parents and families in promoting fruit and vegetable consumption among children.

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APPENDIX A:

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Children's Focus Group Interview Guide

Introduction and ice-breaker question:

Thank you for coming today to help us understand your thoughts and feelings about fruits and vegetables and the Northern Fruit and Vegetable Program.

Now tell us your name and your favourite fruit or vegetable.

1. The Fruit and Vegetable Program has recently finished. Please tell us how you feel about the program ending.

Probes

- Do you miss it? Why?
- Are you happy that it is done? Why?

2. Imagine that you were going to tell a friend that doesn't go to your school about the fruit and vegetable snacks in your school. What would you tell them?

Probes

- How did you like the snacks?
- Were there any snacks that were new to you? How did you feel about trying new snacks?

3. What do you think of the lessons you had about fruit and vegetables?

Probes

- What did you learn that was new?
- Did these lessons change what you think about fruit and vegetables?

4. Do you think you have made any changes to the amount of fruit and vegetables you eat as a result of participating in this program?

Probes

- What changes?
- Are you eating more or less? What kinds?
- Have you made changes at home or at school?
- Why you are making these changes?

5. You have all been in the Fruit and Vegetable Program for one (or two years), and you have all become experts. We want to bring this program to other schools. How can we make it better?

Probes

- What should we do with the snacks?
- What should we do with the lessons?

6. What do you think can be done to make it easier for you to eat more fruits and vegetables?

Probes

- Would you like fruits and vegetables offered at school more often?
- Would you like different kinds of fruits and vegetables?
- Would you like more fruits and vegetables at home?

To Member-Check:

Provide an oral summary of the focus group discussion, then ask: Is this an adequate summary?

APPENDIX B: LETTER OF INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM (ENGLISH)

LETTER OF INFORMATION - PARENTS

Evaluation of the Northern Fruit and Vegetable Program (NFVP) Phase 2 - Children's Perceptions

Sponsor: Ontario Ministry of Health Promotion

The pronouns 'you' and 'your' should be read as referring to the participant rather than the parent/guardian/next of kin who is signing the consent form for the participant

Background:

The Northern Fruit and Vegetable Program (NFVP) has been implemented in elementary schools in the Porcupine and Algoma areas. The NFVP involved students receiving 3 servings of fruits or vegetables at school each week for the course of the study. The project is funded by the Ministry of Health Promotion and supports *Ontario's Action Plan for Healthy Eating and Active Living*. The objectives of this initiative are to raise awareness and increase the consumption of fruit and vegetables among children.

You are being invited to participate in our evaluation project of the NFVP. The objectives of the evaluation are to solicit children's viewpoints of the NFVP and to explore impacts of the NFVP on children's fruits and vegetables consumption behaviours. Your opinion and feedback would help us improve and further expand this project to children across Ontario.

We are holding approximately 10 separate discussion groups with children in grades five to eight in the Porcupine and Algoma regions.

What will happen in this study:

We will conduct focus groups with children with Graders 5-6 and Graders 7-8 separately. The purpose of these focus groups is to discuss how the children view the NFVP and how the program impacts their behaviours. The focus groups will take place at your school during school time. An experienced moderator will lead each focus group, which is expected to last for approximately one hour. To help us remember the information discussed in the focus group, the discussion session will be audio-taped. Audiotapes will be transcribed by a professional transcriber in London, ON. Transcriptions will be used for analysis. Under no circumstances will this information be made public. No information identifying individuals or your school will be reported. Following completion of the analysis, all tape recordings will be destroyed. If you do not wish to be audio-taped then you should not participate in this study.

There will be one focus group involving 10 to 12 students in each participating school. Should you decide to participate, please return the completed consent form using the prepaid envelope to the research team. If you are chosen for participation, you will be notified by the research team through your classroom teachers.

Possible benefits and risks associated with participating in the study:

Participation in this project may increase individual awareness of attitudes related to vegetable and fruit intake. There is no known risk related to participation in the study.

Alternatives and right to withdraw from the study:

Your participation in this project is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions, or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on your status at school.

Confidentiality:

We will keep your identity, comments, as well as all audiotapes and written records confidential and secure. All data will have names removed upon collection, such that your name will not be used at any time during the research process, or the publication of findings. All data will be kept on password protected computers, and in locked file cabinets in the office of the first co-researcher. Representatives of The University of Western Ontario Health Sciences Research Ethics Board may require access to your study-related records or may follow up with you to monitor the conduct of the research. Focus group members are asked to keep everything they hear confidential and not to discuss it outside of the meeting. However, we cannot guarantee that confidentiality will be maintained by group members.

Costs and compensation:

There is no cost to you for participating in the study. Students who agree to participate in a focus group will receive \$5.00 as well as refreshments during the focus group as a token of appreciation.

Publication of the results:

When the results of the study are published, your name will not be used. If you would like to receive a copy of the overall results of the study, please fill out your name and address on a separate page.

Contact Persons:

If you have any questions about the content of this study, please contact Dr. Meizi He, Nutrition Researcher/Educator, Public Health Research Education & Development (PHRED) Program, Middlesex London Health Unit (519) 663-5317, ext. 2483.

If you have any questions concerning your rights or your child's rights as a study participant, please contact the Office of Research Ethics, The University of Western Ontario (519) 661-3036, email ethics@uwo.ca.

Investigators:

Dr. Meizi He, PhD, Associate Professor, Department of Human Ecology, Brescia University College and Nutrition Researcher / Educator, The Public Health Research, Education and Development Program, Middlesex-London Health Unit

Michelle Henderson, BAsC, MScFN (candidate), RD (candidate), Brescia University College

This letter is for you to keep.

Thank you for considering participation in this study.

FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM
Evaluation of the Northern Fruit and Vegetable Program (NFVP) Phase 2 - Children's perceptions

School: _____ Classroom: _____

I have read the Letter of Information (or Information/Consent document), have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to let my child participate in the evaluation process.

Date Parent's / Guardian's printed name Parent's / Guardian's signature

Date Child's printed name Child's signature (optional)

Date Person Obtaining Informed Consent Signature

(Please sign and return **one copy** in the enclosed prepaid envelope to the research team by **May 28th, 2008.**)

Yes, I would like to receive a copy of the results of the study.

Please send the results to

Name: _____

Address: _____

No, I would not like to receive a copy of the results of the study.

(Please return **one copy** of this page in the enclosed envelope to the classroom teacher of the child who brought this letter home).

APPENDIX C:

LETTER OF INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM (FRENCH)

LETTRE D'INFORMATION - PARENTS

Phase 2 de l'évaluation du Programme de fruits et de légumes dans le Nord de l'Ontario – Perceptions des enfants

Commanditaire : ministère de la Promotion de la santé de l'Ontario

Il y a lieu de lire les mots « tu », « ton » ou « tes » comme s'ils renvoient au participant, et non au parent, au tuteur ou au plus proche parent qui signe le formulaire de consentement en son nom.

Contexte :

Le Programme de fruits et de légumes dans le Nord de l'Ontario a été mis en œuvre dans les écoles élémentaires des secteurs de Porcupine et d'Algoma. Ce programme a fait intervenir des élèves qui recevaient trois portions de fruits ou de légumes à l'école, chaque semaine, pendant la durée de l'étude. Le projet est financé par le ministère de la Promotion de la santé et vient à l'appui du *Plan d'action de l'Ontario pour la promotion de la saine alimentation et de la vie active*. L'initiative a pour objectifs de sensibiliser les enfants aux fruits et légumes et d'en augmenter la consommation chez eux.

Nous t'invitons à participer à notre projet d'évaluation du programme. Cette évaluation a pour objectifs de demander le point de vue des enfants sur le programme et d'étudier les effets de ce dernier sur la consommation de fruits et légumes chez eux. Ton avis et ta réaction nous permettraient d'améliorer le projet et de l'étendre aux enfants de tout l'Ontario.

Nous tenons environ 10 discussions en groupe distinctes avec des enfants de la 5^e à la 8^e année des régions de Porcupine et d'Algoma.

Ce qui va arriver dans le cadre de l'étude :

Nous allons tenir des groupes de discussion avec des enfants de 5^e et 6^e années et de 7^e et 8^e années, séparément. Ces discussions ont pour objet d'établir ce que les enfants pensent du programme et en quoi celui-ci influe sur leur comportement. Elles auront lieu à ton école pendant les heures de classe. Une animatrice d'expérience dirigera chacune discussion, laquelle devrait durer environ heure. Pour que nous nous souvenions mieux des sujets abordés, la séance de discussion sera enregistrée sur bande sonore. Les bandes seront transcrites par un professionnel de London (Ontario). Les transcriptions seront utilisées aux fins d'analyse. L'information ne sera jamais rendue publique. Aucun renseignement permettant d'identifier des personnes ou ton école ne sera rapporté. Après l'analyse, toutes les bandes seront détruites. Si tu ne souhaites pas te faire enregistrer, tu ne devrais pas participer à l'étude.

Une discussion regroupant de 10 à 12 élèves se tiendra à chaque école participante. Si tu décides de participer, retourne à l'équipe de recherche le formulaire de consentement rempli dans l'enveloppe affranchie. Si l'on te choisit, l'équipe de recherche t'en avisera par l'entremise de ton titulaire de classe.

Avantages et risques pouvant découler de la participation à l'étude :

Participer au projet pourra sensibiliser davantage aux attitudes relatives à la consommation de légumes et de fruits. Participer à l'étude ne présente aucun risque connu.

Solutions de rechange et droit de se retirer de l'étude :

Ta participation au projet est volontaire. Tu peux refuser de participer ou de répondre à des questions, ou encore, tu peux te retirer de l'étude en tout temps sans que ton statut à l'école n'en soit affecté.

Confidentialité :

Nous allons tenir ton identité, tes commentaires et tous les enregistrements sonores et les dossiers confidentiels et en sécurité. Les noms seront éliminés de toutes les données une fois celles-ci recueillies, de telle sorte que ton nom ne sera

utilisé en aucun temps pendant le processus de recherche, ou encore la publication des constatations. Toutes les données seront protégées par un mot de passe et placées dans des classeurs verrouillés au bureau de la première cochercheuse. Il se peut que des représentants du comité d'éthique de la recherche en sciences de la santé de l'Université Western Ontario doivent avoir accès à tes dossiers concernant l'étude ou assurer un suivi auprès de toi pour surveiller la conduite des travaux. Les membres des groupes de discussion doivent garder tout ce qu'ils entendent confidentiel, en évitant d'en parler en dehors de la réunion. Cependant, nous ne pouvons garantir qu'ils respecteront cette confidentialité.

Coûts et rémunération :

Participer à l'étude ne te coûtera rien. Les élèves qui accepteront de participer à une discussion en groupe recevront 5 dollars et se verront servir des rafraîchissements en signe de gratitude.

Publication des résultats :

Lorsque les résultats de l'étude seront publiés, ton nom n'y figurera pas. Si tu souhaites recevoir une copie des résultats globaux, inscrit ton nom et ton adresse sur une page distincte.

Personnes-ressources :

Si vous avez des questions sur le contenu de l'étude, communique avec la D^{re} Meizi He, chercheuse-éducatrice en nutrition du Programme de recherche, d'éducation et de développement en santé publique (REDSP), au Bureau de santé de Middlesex-London, en composant le (519) 663-5317, poste 2483.

Si vous avez des questions sur vos droits ou ceux de votre enfant en tant que participant à l'étude, veuillez communiquer avec le Bureau d'Éthique de la Recherche de l'Université Western Ontario en composant le (519) 661-3036 ou envoyant un courriel à l'adresse ethics@uwo.ca.

Enquêtrices :

D^{re} Meizi He, Ph. D., professeure agrégée, Department of Human Ecology, Brescia University College, et chercheuse-éducatrice en nutrition du Programme de recherche, d'éducation et de développement en santé publique, au Bureau de santé de Middlesex-London

Michelle Henderson, B. Sc. A., M. Sc. Inf. (candidate), diététiste (candidate), Brescia University College.

La présente lettre est à conserver.

Merci de songer à participer à l'étude.

FORMULAIRE DE CONSENTEMENT POUR LES DISCUSSIONS EN GROUPE

Phase 2 de l'évaluation du Programme de fruits et de légumes dans le Nord de l'Ontario – perceptions des enfants

École : _____ Groupe : _____

J'ai lu la lettre d'information (ou le document d'information ou de consentement), la nature de l'étude m'a été expliquée et j'accepte de participer. J'ai reçu des réponses satisfaisantes à mes questions. J'accepte que mon enfant participe au processus d'évaluation.

Date Nom du parent ou tuteur en caractères d'imprimerie Signature du parent ou tuteur

Date Nom de l'enfant en caractères d'imprimerie Signature de l'enfant (facultatif)

Date Personne obtenant le consentement éclairé Signature

(Veuillez signer **une copie** et la retourner à l'équipe de recherche dans l'enveloppe affranchie ci-jointe.)

Oui, j'aimerais recevoir une copie des résultats de l'étude.

Veuillez envoyer les résultats à :

Nom : _____

Adresse :

Non, je ne souhaite pas recevoir de copie des résultats de l'étude.

(Veuillez retourner **une copie** de la présente page dans l'enveloppe ci-jointe au titulaire de classe de l'enfant ayant apporté la présente lettre chez lui).