

The last year has once again seen many changes in the canteen service. The first major change was motivated by the logistics problem reported by our main caterer in June 2007. A solution was found involving a second caterer for the new kindergarten. Kindermenü König, a catering service specializing in the preparation of meals for children, was selected. This caterer employs nutritionists who assist in planning the menus according to the OptimiX (Optimierte Mischkost) guidelines developed by the Research Institute for Child Nutrition in Dortmund. They are a partner of Bioland and member of Slow Food, and the meals they prepare are composed of around 35% organic ingredients, including all dairy products, pasta, and beef. Once a week a fully organic menu is provided. Though they cannot completely avoid the use of convenience products, they are careful in their choices, avoiding artificial additives and not using products which could contain genetically modified ingredients. They mix their own yogurt and quark, using only fruit and honey to sweeten lightly. Their new kitchen was designed with energy saving in mind, using a block heating station to produce electricity and employing the waste heat to heat water for cooking and washing. They also avoid using unnecessary packaging, use recyclable thermal containers to keep the food warm and take back leftover food which is then used as pig feed, a measure which in addition to being sensible in the sense of sustainability also saves the school money for waste disposal. (www.kindermenue-koenig.de)

The Canteen Team, introduced by Ms. Isabella Calvagna in December 2006, continues to support the PA members involved with the canteen service. The team, made up of parents from different language sections, has made many useful contributions, including translating the monthly newsletters, modifying the menus, and tabulating the results of our December 2007 survey. Since its inception, the team has carried out several projects aimed at improving communication and increasing awareness for the school's food program. In February 2007 our monthly newsletter appeared for the first time on the back of the lunch plan, and the following month we also created a website dealing with school food issues. This website has not been online since November of last year because of an invasion by unwanted advertising. We hope to soon devote some time to getting it running again. The project to have parents try a school meal and give us constructive feedback was carried out by a team member in Spring of 2007, and we would also like to call that project back to life. Since these projects take time and energy, we appreciate the help of any parents who would like to participate in helping us carry them through. If you think you may be interested, please contact us.

Another important ongoing project involves finding ways to introduce more organic components into the school meals. As part of this effort, we have been in contact with the "Referat für Gesundheit und Umwelt" about the possibility of obtaining organic milk through the "Schulversorgung München" and will be contacting milk providers to find who can provide the required quantities. Recent studies make it increasingly evident that organic food in general has more beneficial nutrients than conventional, as well as being free of harmful additives and residues.

In December of last year we conducted a survey to help us find out which aspects of the food service at school parents, pupils, teachers and staff are satisfied with, and which aspects you think should be improved, with the aim of evaluating the new service which we had introduced in the kindergarten and to guide our efforts in planning the new canteen. We received 223 responses, indicating that the nutritive value of the food and the consistency between the food service and the lessons taught in school is important to you, as are issues of sustainability. Most of you would like to see a reduction of sweeteners and artificial flavorings and colorings and the introduction of more organic foods, and many would value the inclusion of more fresh, seasonal, regional foods. 44% of you purchase at least half of the food you buy for home use in organic quality. Many of you do not have a positive impression of the school lunches, but the results for the kindergarten showed greater satisfaction than those for the school. The older pupils were especially critical. The eating environment in the cold mensa received the lowest score and that in the kindergarten the highest.

For more details on the results of this survey please see the PA web page. We hope that the opening of the blue container after the Easter vacations has improved the atmosphere for many of the children, though we all must make the best of the less than ideal situation which will persist until the new canteen opens.

The number of meals served in the canteen continues to rise. An average of over 3400 meals were served per

week in 2007/2008, compared with around 3100 the previous school year. In September 2008 the number has risen once again to over 3900.

Last April we complied with a long-standing request of the PA auditors and purchased a cash register to be used in the canteen. After an initial period of learning to operate the register, our canteen staff has been turning out accurate monthly receipts for all the transactions taking place in the canteen since June 2008.

The handling of cards and invoices was improved by Ms. Gabi Georgiou, who gave the cards a new format and reorganized the pupil lists to handle the increasing complexity due to the separate services being used in the kindergarten and school. There were still a few technical difficulties, and we hope to improve the handling of invoices further in the next year. It helps the work of Ms. Georgiou and her assistant, Ms. Iris Peschel, enormously when parents turn in their applications for lunch cards in time. Many thanks to Ms. Gabi Georgiou and the food service staff for their dedicated support in making the lunch service run smoothly and pleasantly. The work and responsibility involved in running the canteen has increased substantially in the last years. The canteen staff puts a lot of caring into the lunch service, which is felt by our children and appreciated by all who are present during the lunch period. Thanks too to Ms. Jacqueline Lantsheer and Mr. Jens Gernhardt for their support in the office, to the school administration, and the PA. Also, thanks to the teachers who cooperate in caring for the children during the lunch period, which they do on a voluntary basis.

Since we were satisfied with the service provided by the new caterer and saw that it was well received by the teachers and children in the kindergarten, we asked them to provide the meals for the children of the first and second classes of the elementary school as well, starting in September 2008. After the fall vacations we will distribute a survey to parents and teachers to help us evaluate the service. Our plan is to perform an evaluation after a 3 month trial period based on a set of criteria including the nutritional quality of the food, sustainability criteria, logistical criteria, and the feedback of teachers, children and parents. We realize that any change requires a period of adaptation for children, food service staff and teachers, as well as for the provider itself. We try to introduce changes slowly to allow time for adaptation, and to be able to make corrections where needed. We will continue to look for places in which to introduce meaningful changes in the canteen service.

In the following year we consider a priority to be the re-launching of the Canteen Committee, in which representatives from the pupils, food service staff, school administration and parents will come together to develop a shared vision and action plan for the new canteen, as well as seeing how that vision can be applied already in the current canteen.

There are many challenges ahead, and we believe in facing these optimistically, working and cooperating together to find the best way to achieve our vision. We believe in introducing changes slowly where possible, so that we may assess the impact of the changes and make appropriate corrections. We believe that corrections are an inevitable part of the change process. Of fundamental importance is a transparent, consistent, and creative approach, which uses the perspectives of as many people as possible. To this end, we would like to introduce the Open Space method, which enables groups of any size (5 to 2000 people) to address complex issues and achieve meaningful results quickly. This method which follows simple rules, requires little preparation, is not expensive, and synergistically uses the participants' strengths, experience and creativity, lends itself especially well to topics such as the development of new structures or the treatment of themes which are broad in scope, such as "Rethinking School Lunch."

Everyone who is interested in contributing to this process is welcome to take part. We will continue to keep you informed through our monthly newsletters, now sent to members of the PA via email, and we hope to hear from you as well.

Raquel Sommer