

The Project Approach to Learning at  
**RisingOaks**  
Early Learning | St. Patrick

**Project Name: Little Chefs in the Kitchen**

**Age Group: Toddler 2 Program**  
(1 year 7 months-2 years 6 months)

**Project Start Date: January 9th 2026**

**Project End Date: April 30th 2026**



## Background

This project was developed with the Toddler 2 children at RisingOaks Early Learning | St. Patrick. Up to 15 toddlers participated, guided by educators Nancy, Cileena, and Deborah.

The project emerged from the children's consistent interest in the dramatic play kitchen. Toddlers engaged daily in cooking routines such as stirring, serving, washing dishes, and eating together. These experiences reflected familiar home routines and provided rich opportunities for learning through play, relationships, and exploration.

## Phase 1: Beginning the Project

Educators began by closely observing children's natural interest in cooking and food during dramatic play. Toddlers often talked about foods they eat at home, pretended to prepare meals, and invited peers into their play. Educators documented children's ideas and created a web of learning to guide the direction of the project. What we know and what we want to know will guide the activities of this project and our learning.

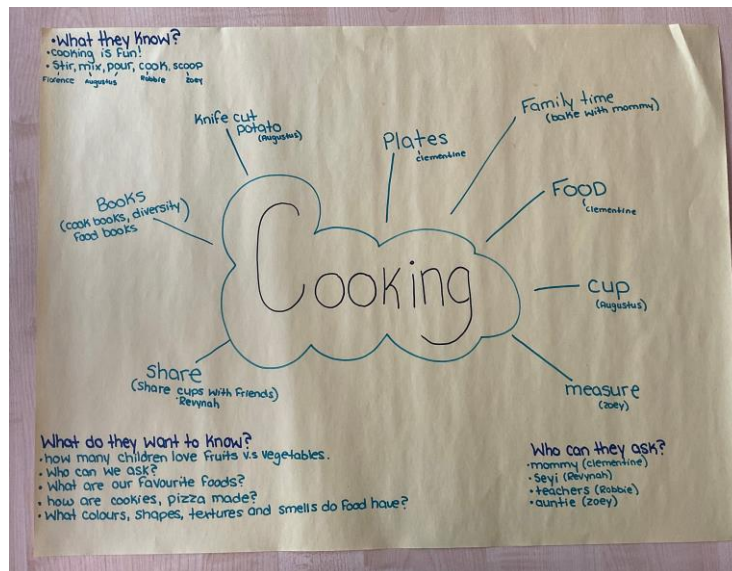


Figure 1: Children's Web (January 2026)

<u>What We Know?</u>	<u>What We Want To Know?</u>	<u>Who Can We Ask?</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Cooking is fun</li> <li>-Stir, mix, pour, cook, scoop</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-How many children who love fruits versus vegetables?</li> <li>-What is our favourite food?</li> <li>-How are cookies and pizza made?</li> <li>-What colours, shapes, textures, and smells does food have?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Mommy (Clementine)</li> <li>-Seyi (Reynah)</li> <li>-Teachers (Robbie)</li> <li>-Auntie (Zoey)</li> </ul>

## Phase 2: Developing the Project

January 9th 2026

### Kitchen Chef Adventures: Cooking Together

Today in the kitchen area, the children engaged in imaginative cooking using spatulas, forks, bowls, and play food. The space was filled with movement, conversation, and pretend tasting as they explored together. Zoey stirred watermelon in a bowl, saying, "Mix, mix," then pretended to taste it: "Mmm! Yummy!" She later said, "Need more food at grocery," and went to collect grapes and juice. Augustus carefully worked with a potato, saying, "Peel potato... Soup... Hot soup," as he stirred and cooked. Florence scooped and poured, saying, "Eggs... More eggs... Cook, cook," as she focused on her pretend meal. Clementine joined in, stirring the watermelon and saying, "Stir watermelon... help Zoey... Cooking watermelon." When Zoey returned, she said, "You help!" Clementine smiled and handed back the spatula. Zoey added grapes and pretended to pour juice, saying, "Yummy juice." The children shared tools, took turns, and built on each other's ideas through rich imaginative play, language use, and cooperation in the kitchen area.



Figure 2, 3, and 4 Clementine (2 years, 4 months) , Augustus (1 Year, 11 months) and Zoey (2 years, 1 month) working together in the kitchen area by stirring pretend food, helping each other cook, and sharing tools while talking about their meals.

January 14th 2026

**Paw Patrol Lunchtime with Friends.**

Nancy set up a small table with chairs for the Paw Patrol toys—Chase, Skye, Rocky, and Marshall—to enjoy lunchtime together. Zoey giggled as she poured milk, saying, “Skye, milk?” Florence brought waffles and apples, saying, “Lunch Chase!”

Robbie stirred food on the stove and served it, saying, “Here you go!” while Clementine helped arrange the plates, saying, “Thank you!” Zoey checked on each toy, asking, “Rocky okay? Milk?” and carefully helped them sit and eat. More children joined in, excited to help. “Hi doggies!” one said. “Pour milk?” another asked. The children took turns pouring, serving, and sharing. “Your turn!” Zoey said. “My turn, pour milk!” a friend replied. Florence offered waffles, saying, “Waff-waff?” The play encouraged kindness, cooperation, turn-taking, and imaginative caregiving.

“Children are competent, capable of complex thinking, curious, and rich in potential.”  
— *How Does Learning Happen?* (p. 7)



Figure 5, 6, 7 Robbie (1 year, 11 months), Augustus (1 year, 11 months), Benjamin (1 year, 8 months), and Clementine (2 years, 4 months) are having fun pretending to feed and take care of their Paw Patrol toys while sharing, taking turns, and helping each other.

January 14th 2026

### Sticky, Soft, and Sparkly: Learning Through Playdough

Nancy invited the toddlers to help make playdough, using measuring cups and spoons to scoop and pour ingredients together. The children took turns adding flour, with Nancy saying, "Scoop the flour... pour it in the bowl." They then added salt, watched lemon juice and oil being mixed in, and observed as yellow colouring changed the dough. Nancy explained that the boiling water was very hot and poured it herself for safety. Once the dough formed, glitter was added and the children helped mix. They explored the texture with their hands, describing it as "soft," "sticky," and "squishy." This hands-on experience supported communication, sensory exploration, and problem-solving in a safe, engaging environment. As stated in *How Does Learning Happen?*, "Children are competent, capable of complex thinking, curious, and rich in potential." (p. 7)



Figure 8, 9, 10 Dante (1 year, 11 months) and Zoey (2 years, 1 month) helped scoop, pour, and mix while exploring how it felt and looked.

January 23 2026

### Fruits and Vegetables Discovery

The toddlers continued their interest in kitchen play by exploring fruits and vegetables through pretend cooking. Deborah extended this learning by adding printed pictures of fruits and vegetables in the kitchen area. Augustus noticed the pictures first and said, “corn,” matching it with the toy corn and repeating the word. Other children joined in, pointing and naming items they recognized. Clementine named several foods: “avocado, pepper, tomatoes, corn.” She paused at Kale and asked, “Deborah, what is this?” Deborah replied, “It’s kale,” and Clementine and Owen repeated the word together. The children then matched fruit pictures with toys, naming pineapple, blueberry, strawberry, watermelon, orange, and banana. Brantley also joined in by identifying familiar fruits. The children stayed engaged throughout, strengthening their vocabulary, communication, cognitive skills, and social interaction through meaningful, hands-on learning.



Figure 11, 12, 13, 14 Augustus (1 year, 11 months), Brantley (2 years), Clementine (2 years, 4 months) and Owen (1 year, 10 months) were having fun playing chef, naming and matching fruits and veggies while exploring the kitchen area together.

**February 4 2026**

**The Chefs Are Here**

The children have shown a strong interest in kitchen role play, pretending to cook, serve food, and share meals together. To extend this, Nancy introduced chef hats for them to decorate. Clementine said, "I putting lots of colours," carefully choosing many colours. Zoey said, "Mine blue," focusing on two blue crayons. Augustus and Dante explored all the colours, decorating their hats fully. The children were excited as Nancy laminated and sized their hats. When they wore them, they smiled with pride and enthusiasm. Clementine continued cooking, saying, "Pizza ready" and "Salad here." Dante, Zoey, Lily, and Augustus used sand, pots, and tools in the tuff tray, saying, "Stir stir" and "Hot soup!" Emmie carefully prepared a meal, saying, "Drink," and "Yum... More," as she pretended to eat and drink. The children shared, communicated, and engaged in imaginative play, building creativity, independence, social skills, and early problem-solving through a shared chef experience.



Figure 15,16, 17, 18, Dante (2 years, 10 days ) Zoey (2 years, 2 months), Augustus (2 years old), Owen (1 year, 10 months), Clementine (2 years, 5 months), and Emmie ( 1 year, 11 months) were having a blast pretending to cook, serve food, and become little chefs, while also exploring the sand tray with pots, pans, and spoons, sharing with each other, and decorating their own chef hats.

**February 5 2026**

### **Exploring Paint Through Kitchen Utensils**

Deborah built on the toddlers' interest in kitchen play by introducing real utensils (whisk, sieve, potato masher, spoons, and forks) with paint and large paper. She explained that these are tools used in the kitchen to prepare food and invited children to choose what to explore. The children eagerly dipped, stamped, poured, and painted with the utensils. Revynah said, "yellow," while stamping with the masher. Emmie scooped purple paint and poured it onto the paper. Clementine repeated, "mashed, mashed, mashed," as she stamped. Deborah extended the play, saying, "Mashed potatoes, yummy potato," and Lily and Owen responded, "yummy." Dante and Owen moved the whisk like they were cooking. Robbie said, "big spoon," while painting. Lily explored the sieve, noticing the pattern it made, while others used both hands and tools to paint. The children showed creativity, curiosity, and joy while developing fine motor skills, language, problem-solving, and social interaction through shared exploration.



**Figure 19, 20, 21, Dante (2 years, 11 days) Zoey (2 years, 2 months), Owen (1 year, 10 months), Clementine (2 years, 5 months), and Robbie (2 years and 9 days) are having fun using real kitchen utensils and paint to make patterns and pictures, while learning new words, practicing movements, and playing together.**

**February 5 2026**

**Snow Day Magic: Winter Wonder Indoors**

Nancy brought winter play indoors by placing snow on two blue mats and adding kitchen tools like whisks, sieves, spoons, and a potato masher for exploration. The children gathered and immediately began to investigate the snow. Clementine pressed the potato masher into the snow, saying, “Mash! Mash!” Zoey scooped with a spoon: “Scoop... More snow.” Dante repeated the motion with focus as the snow changed shape. Brantley used a whisk, laughing as snow fell. “Fall!” he said. Emmie explored quietly with her hands and said, “Cold,” noticing the texture as it melted. The children engaged in sensory, hands-on discovery, sharing tools, ideas, and excitement as they explored together. As stated in *How Does Learning Happen?* (p. 7), “Children are competent, capable, curious, and rich in potential.”



Figure 22, 23, 24, 25, Dante (2 years, 11 days), Zoey (2 years, 2 months), Clementine (2 years, 5 months), and Brantley (2 years, 1 month) played with the snow by scooping, mashing, whisking, and squeezing it, using kitchen tools and their hands to explore how the snow felt, moved, and changed while they talked and played alongside one another.

**February 9 2026**

**World Pizza Day Learning Experience**

Nancy set up a hands-on pizza-making activity with laminated pizzas and Velcro toppings for the children to explore, choose, and arrange. She sat with them and supported their play through conversation. “What do you see on the tray?” Clementine said, “A pizza party... I like pineapple.” Nancy replied, “You like pineapple. Where will you put it on your pizza?” Dante said, “Yum yum,” while pretending to eat. Nancy responded, “Yum yum! Does it taste good?” Florence said, “Olive ya,” and Nancy replied, “You found the olive. Can you stick it on your pizza?” Clementine said, “I eat my egg,” and August said, “Cheese,” also pretending to eat. The children laughed, talked, and engaged in imaginative pizza-making together. “Responsive relationships are critical for learning and development...” (Ministry of Education, 2014)



Figure 26, 27, 28, 29, Dante (2 years, 11 days), Zoey (2 years, 2 months), Clementine (2 years, 5 months), Robbie (2 years and 9 days), Augustus (2 years), and Emmie ( 1 year, 11 months) are exploring, choosing, and pretending to eat pizza toppings while talking, laughing, and playing together.

**February 9 2026**

**Extending the Learning: Real Pizza Making**

Nancy extended the experience with real pizza-making using English muffins, sauce, cheese, and pepperoni. The children spread, counted, and built pizzas while saying things like “Spread pizza,” “One, two, three, four,” and “More.” This hands-on experience supported independence, language, and problem-solving through guided support and meaningful social interaction.



Figure 30, 31, 32, 33, Clementine (2 years, 5 months), Emmie (1 year, 11 months), Brantley (2 years, 1 month), and Owen (1 year, 10 months) were actively making their own mini pizzas, spreading sauce with butter knives, placing cheese and pepperoni, counting pepperoni, and exploring textures with their fingers. They talked about what they were doing, made choices, and enjoyed experimenting, showing focus, curiosity, and cooperation throughout the activity.

**February 11 2026**

**Cooking and Drawing Provocation: Food on Our Plates**

The educators extended the children’s interest in cooking with toy food, plates, and markers. The children selected items, named foods and colours, and drew or coloured them, with comments like “toast,” “yummy pizza,” and “I want to colour.” Some also engaged in tracing and pretend play, such as pretending to eat their creations. This experience supported fine motor skills, language development, creativity, and symbolic thinking through a playful connection to food and cooking.



Figure 34, 35, 36, Dante (2 years, 1 month), and Lily (1 year 11 months) explored their interest in cooking by selecting toy foods, drawing them with markers, naming colours and items, and engaging in imaginative play, supporting fine motor skills, language development, creativity, and symbolic thinking.

**February 13 2026**

### Extending Cooking Play: Cookies and Playdough Baking

The educators continued to build on the toddlers' interest in cooking by adding felt cookies, trays, and utensils, followed by brown playdough, rollers, and cutters. The children engaged in pretend baking by scooping, rolling, cutting, and "eating" cookies, with sounds and words like "Cookie!" and "Yum." They used fine motor skills to press, squeeze, and shape the playdough, while also showing imagination through pretend eating and singing "roll, roll, make a ball." This ongoing experience supported creativity, sensory exploration, language development, and fine motor skills through meaningful, play-based learning.



Figure 37, 38, 39, Dante (2 years, 1 month), Clementine (2 years, 5 months), Augustus (2 years) explored their interest in baking by using felt cookies and playdough with tools to scoop, roll, cut, and pretend to eat, supporting fine motor development, imaginative play, and language as they named and described their “cookies.”

**April 18, 2026**  
**Second Drawing**

During the second drawing experience, the children used markers on their plates in different creative ways. Robbie placed a piece of meat on his plate and began colouring it, saying, “I am painting.” Zoey placed food items on her plate and started tracing around them. Brantley picked up the bun and meat together and pretended to eat, saying “yummy.” Dante used his marker to colour a pepper and excitedly showed his friends, with a big smile on his face. The second drawing experience helped the children explore different ways of using markers on their plates and began making connections between art and pretend play. They learned how to use materials creatively to represent food, trace shapes, and express ideas through drawing and role play. This experience also supported their understanding of imagination, cause and effect, and sharing their creative thinking with peers.





Figure 40, 41, 42, 43, Brantley (2 years 3 months), Dante (2 years, 3 months), Owen (2 years, 1 month), Augustus (2 years, 2 months), Robbie (2 years, 3 months), Zoey (2 years 5 months), Emmie (2 years, 2 months) explored their interest show the children using markers creatively on their plates, combining drawing with pretend play. They explored coloring, tracing, and representing food, while expressing ideas and interacting with peers.

April 28th 2026

**Our Favourite Fruits and Vegetables** 🍎 🥬

We introduced two simple charts featuring fruits and vegetables with colorful pictures and printed names to support early word recognition. The children explored the charts by pointing, naming, and expressing their preferences in their own ways. Many toddlers confidently communicated their choices. Vihana said “apple,” Wesley pointed to orange, Brantley chose banana, and Tesia said “Strawberries.” Lily shared both a favorite fruit and vegetable, while others like Florence, Emmie, and Owen also identified multiple items. Some children added imaginative play, like Sebastian pretending to eat a banana while saying “Yum yum.” Overall, the activity supported language development, helped children connect words to images, and encouraged social interaction as they observed and shared with one another.

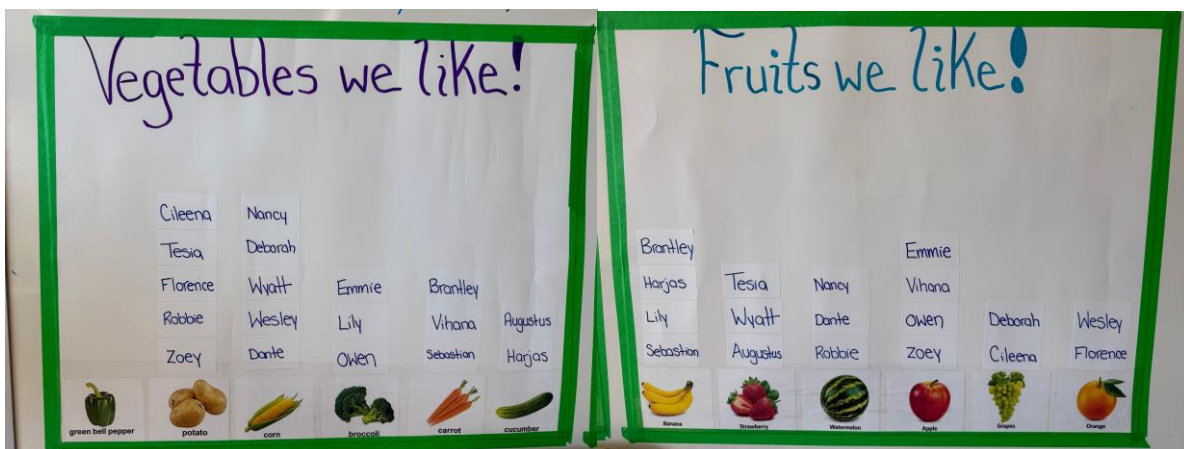




Figure 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, Brantley (2 years, 3 months), Robbie (2 years, 3 months), Vihana (1 year, 6 months) explored fruit and vegetable charts by pointing, naming, and sharing their favorites.

## Phase 3: Concluding the Project

April 29th 2026

### Making Smoothies with Seyi

To conclude our project, we invited Seyi to come in and cook with the toddlers. With her ingredients, tools, and the toddlers gathered around, Seyi went through step by step, asking the toddlers questions and giving the toddlers the opportunity to get hands on to help create a smoothie. As she began, Seyi held up and measured ingredients for the toddlers to see. As she did this she asked the toddlers “what do I have in my hands?” sparking the toddlers curiosity and senses as they watched and smelled the ingredients added into the smoothie’s container. Zoey and Florence were given the opportunity to help Seyi with the bananas by helping cut the bananas into smaller pieces using a butter knife and cutting board. Once all the ingredients were added, Seyi brought out her blender to help mix all the ingredients together before tasting the final product. Seyi’s visit brought excitement to the classroom as the toddlers learned more about what Seyi does in the kitchen, and as they had the opportunity to help out with cooking something of their own.



**Figure 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, Brantley (2 years, 3 months), Robbie (2 years, 3 months), Vihana (1 year, 6 months), Dante (2 years, 3 months), Owen (2 years, 1 month), Augustus (2 years, 2 months), Zoey (2 years, 5 months), Emmie (2 years, 2 months) making smoothies with Seyi.**

## Teacher Reflections

This phase of the project provided an opportunity to reflect on the children's learning and celebrate their accomplishments. Through observation, we noticed that the children's interest in the project was beginning to decrease, and many of their questions about cooking, food, and kitchen experiences had been explored. This indicated that it was an appropriate time to bring the project to a close.

Throughout the project, the toddlers were actively engaged in a variety of hands-on and sensory-based experiences. They explored imaginative play by pretending to be chefs, wearing chef hats, and engaging in dramatic kitchen play. Sensory activities such as making Playdough, exploring fruits and vegetables, painting with kitchen utensils, and bringing snow indoors for exploration supported their curiosity, creativity, and fine motor development.

The children also made meaningful real-life connections through food-based activities. They created their own pizzas using laminated materials and participated in making real English muffin pizzas with sauce, cheese, and pepperoni. Additional experiences like pretend baking with Playdough and felt helped extend their understanding of cooking and everyday routines while encouraging social interaction and independence.

To conclude the project, instead of a traditional project board, we will create a printed project approach book that documents the children's learning journey. This book will include photos, observations, and examples of the children's

work. The book will be laminated for durability and shared with both the children and their families. This allows children to revisit their experiences and gives families a meaningful and lasting way to see and reflect on their child's learning and development.

Families will also be invited to look through the book, ask questions, and engage in conversations with educators about their child's progress. This creates a strong connection between the program and home while celebrating each child's participation.

Overall, this project supported development across multiple domains, including social, emotional, cognitive, and physical growth. It provided engaging, play-based learning experiences that were guided by the children's interests and curiosity.

- Nancy S-P (RECE)

Participating in the "Little Chefs in the Kitchen" project provided valuable insight into how toddlers learn through play, repetition, and relationships. The children drew on their home experiences during dramatic play, recreating familiar routines like cooking and sharing meals, showing a strong connection between home and the classroom.

Throughout the project, children developed communication skills by using simple words, gestures, and actions during activities such as pizza making and pretend cooking. Repeated experiences supported vocabulary growth and encouraged peer interaction.

Social skills also improved, as children began sharing materials, taking turns, and collaborating more independently. In the kitchen area, they invited peers into play and worked together, demonstrating growing confidence and cooperation.

Sensory activities like playdough, painting, and exploring different materials kept children engaged while supporting fine motor skills, problem-solving, and curiosity.

By the end of the project, children showed increased independence and confidence, requiring less guidance and extending their ideas on their own. Concluding the project felt appropriate as their interests began to shift.

This experience reinforced the importance of emergent curriculum, observation, and flexibility in supporting each child's learning. Overall, the project highlighted the children's creativity, capabilities, and enthusiasm for learning through play.

- Deborah O. (RECE)

This cooking project that has stretched over a few months has revealed a huge amount about how young toddlers learn, relate, and grow. Over time, what started out as simple play developed into more intentional participation. Many of the toddlers begin by observing and imitating what the educators did, but gradually they began to take what they saw and expand those actions into their own play and in their own way. Through activities such as paw patrol lunchtime, and playdoh cookie making, the toddlers were able to grow confidence and independence with their play, as well as make connections with their peers as they interacted with each other.

One of the most noticeable outcomes was the development of fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination. Repeated actions like scooping, stirring, and pouring helped strengthen control and precision. At the same time, their language skills blossomed as they learned new vocabulary related to food, actions, and the tools. Words like "mix," "stir", and "hot" become part of their everyday language, often through their play and our activities. Through activities such as "what foods do I like" and vegetables find and match, the toddlers learned more words related to fruits and vegetables and distinguished their preferences of which they liked and which they did not, giving them autonomy of their own choices.

There were of course challenges when it came to a project of this length. Some days felt less productive than others and activities did not go as planned. However, those moments were a part of the learning process and provided more insight into the toddlers' needs, and what they were more interested in and what they were not.



When we saw that the toddlers were becoming less interested in the activities and materials in the classroom, we knew that it was time to conclude our project. Bringing in a cooking experience for the toddlers helped bring the project to a close as they took what they learned through play and saw it implemented in a real situation. Getting hands on and helping to create a smoothie was a highlight for the toddlers and sense of accomplishment as they made something together. Overall, this cooking project supported holistic development, through hands-on, meaningful experiences. It showed how everyday activities like cooking can become rich learning opportunities when given time, patience, and thoughtful guidance.

- Cileena K. (RECE)