

ewba in action...



Morphett Vale and Murray Bridge communities share how they've put *eat well be active* into action

Name of site and Author of this story:

Morphett Vale East Kindergarten

Director, Shelley Mair

What has your site been doing in relation to ewba's **key message/s** and **strategy/ies for action**? Who has been involved?

Growing and cooking healthy foods with our children...

When our Kindergarten joined the ewba project in 2006, we decided to focus on the idea of the children growing their own healthy food and tasting it!

We built 2 raised, 'no dig' vegie garden beds and since then we have grown and tasted eggplants, cabbages, strawberries, pumpkins, green and purple carrots, broad beans, zucchinis, herbs, garlic, tomatoes, silver-beet, lettuces, and more!

From this project our children have learned valuable information about the food cycle, healthy foods, gardening and problem solving skills, e.g. how do we keep the possum from eating our crops!

We compost our scraps, or feed them to the chooks, or put them in our worm farm.

At our Kindy, we only cook healthy food every week. We try and use our produce, including eggs from our chooks, or we walk to the shops to buy our healthy ingredients. Our children are very discerning at picking out which foods are 'healthy' or 'sometimes' foods.

We have also tried to broaden children's food knowledge and tastebuds, so, along with standard favourites, we have also made Russian fish pie, Sushi, cold rolls, Cous Cous, Bruschetta, and various dips and muffins. We all sit down to 'taste' the foods and while there is no pressure for the children to eat, they are strongly encouraged to taste (often then finding out they like it).

In addition, we talk to our families 'all' the time about making healthy food and drink choices, supporting what we teach the children through our programme and giving parents healthy tips and ideas to follow up at home. For example, at least twice a year we also have a healthy family breakfast at Kindy (all in our PJ's!). Over the years we have analysed the labels on various cereal packets, measured the sugar content in each box and displayed it for families to see. These mornings have proven to be very popular and have certainly changed some children's breakfast choices.

Has this been a new event/project/activity/practice/environmental changes/policy for your site, or does it build on existing elements?

Our weekly healthy cooking program, establishing a vegie garden and growing our own vegies, have all been new additions to our programme since joining the ewba project in 2006.

ewba has supported us in a number of ways in relation to these initiatives:

- Providing sample nutrition and physical activity policy templates to use to develop our site policies to support our growing and cooking initiatives.

- Developing and providing various, colourful nutrition and physical activity themed educational displays and handouts for parents, which we regularly display (on a rotating basis) on our large display board which we have designed as our 'eat well be active' parent noticeboard.
- Providing us with 2 comprehensive nutrition and active play newsletter inserts packages. We regularly insert these in our newsletters, along with descriptions of our latest growing and cooking activities and related educational activities to educate and inform parents.
- Provision of healthy recipe ideas and 'Go for 2 fruit and 5 veg' promotional resources.

What has been the best part of your site's action/s?

At the end of 2007 we gave each family a "Healthy recipe book" of all the recipes we had cooked that year. It was a very popular Christmas present from the children.

What has been the biggest challenge (if any) that has had to be overcome?

The journey has been quite simple really. The parents and our Governing Council have been very happy for us to implement all parts of the ewba program, especially the growing and eating fresh produce project.

What have been some of the outcomes so far, what changes have you noticed, or what are you hoping for as a result of your new activity/project/policy?

Our healthy gardening and cooking program at Kindy has **changed the way our children (and families) view cooking and healthy food**. We have tried to **broaden children's food knowledge and tastebuds**. The children have been engaged with the whole process of planting, growing, picking, cooking and tasting, and **it is firmly embedded in our curriculum**.

Our healthy family breakfast mornings have certainly **changed some children's breakfast choices to healthier ones**.

The children have learned good **food hygiene skills** and have been very careful at washing hands, not tasting or licking fingers, no matter how tempting!

We have also **shared the recipes with our families so they can make them at home**. Sometimes we also make extra food, so the parents can also taste what we make.

All our children, including those who attend our playgroup, eat fruit (and only fruit) at fruit time and bring healthy lunch boxes if they access our lunch care programme.

Being part of the ewba Morphett Vale project has been an exciting learning experience, with positive outcomes for staff, children and families.

What do children /students / young people /parents / the community say about this?

We have lots of positive comments with parents asking for our healthy, tasty recipes etc.

The children have astounded us with how quickly and easily they have learned to distinguish 'Healthy' and 'sometimes' foods' and identify/discuss these through play, cooking, eating, looking at books, etc. We have even heard them explaining healthy and 'sometimes' foods to their families!

Where to for the future?

We will continue and build upon all our existing teaching. We discuss ewba regularly at our staff and Governing Council meetings to ensure healthy eating and physical activity remain a priority on our agenda.

We have just been accepted into the 3rd round of the Department of Education and Children's Services 'HEPA' (Healthy eating and physical activity for the early years) project and look forward to extending our knowledge and skills in these areas.

What advice would you give to others who would like to start a similar project?

My advice would be to just have a go! Start small and build on! Involve staff at every level, so they own the teaching and learning and may become as enthused as we are! Involve children / parents / families/ community/playgroup / Governing council etc at all times.

When you are tackling a vegie garden project like our 'No dig vegie garden' start with a working bee. We had a fabulous response at our working bee; it created a real sense of ownership for the families and us.

Consider 'no dig vegie garden beds' for growing projects. Although relatively expensive to set up, 'no dig vegie garden beds' are very user-friendly so are very worthwhile to consider as an option for growing vegetables in any setting. The beds are at the children's height, easy to maintain and turn over, attractive and productive (until the possum finds it!!). They have encouraged families to grow their own vegies at home and encouraged our children to plant, grow, pick, cook and taste our produce. This initiative has also encouraged parents to ask questions and seek further information about nutrition, gardening and healthy eating. Our families are now more discerning about healthier choices and cooking with their children.

Share everything with children's families! We constantly share the healthy recipes from our cooking sessions with the children, articles, useful websites, ideas and positive stories about the children making great choices related to healthy eating habits.

Celebrate and promote children's learning about healthy eating! We celebrate our learning through visual tools, such as display boards, art work, snippets of information in the newsletters etc. We also have specific Learning Stories about our children learning about healthy food/eating (for everyone to see), we go out in the community, set up displays etc.

Extend children's learning with additional nutrition education resources. We have also purchased additional resources to enhance children's learning around healthy eating and cooking, such as healthy food-themed puzzles, games, books (for children and families), posters, play food, parent education DVD's, etc.

Embed healthy eating across all aspects of the program/curriculum. Healthy eating is happily embedded across all areas of our program, curriculum and learning at Morphett Vale East Kindergarten.

If you would like to ask any questions or follow up further about this story, please contact Shelley (Director) at Morphett Vale East kindergarten, email: kindy.director@mvek.sa.edu.au

Do you have a photo/s you would like to share to accompany this story?

