

Nunga Kids Café

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This abstract describes a successful model of working with Indigenous children to develop their skills in food preparation and increase their knowledge of healthy eating. It also demonstrates the role that shared meals can play in developing social relationships.

This model evolved over a two-year period after trialling several different approaches in working with Indigenous children and their parents to enhance skills in preparing healthy food. The cornerstone to this program is a successful working relationship between an Aboriginal health worker, a community health dietitian, a local primary school and a neighbourhood house.

- The program is planned and implemented by the Aboriginal health worker and the community health dietitian.
- Eight children from a specific year level are selected by the school to participate one day a fortnight for a term.
- The children meet at the neighbourhood house that has a well-appointed kitchen and a large dining area.
- The children's task is to cook a main course and a desert and to invite their parents to share a meal for lunch.
- The initial task is to read and interpret the healthy recipes as a group.
- The children are then divided into two groups, where they learn food preparation skills.
- The children are also shown how to set tables and serve food and tidy up.
- A guest speaker is organised from the Aboriginal community to talk to the children and parents about their story and to encourage the children to continue with their education.
- Non-Aboriginal people present at the time are also encouraged to participate in the meal.

This program has successful outcomes across the disciplines of education and health. The children gain practical experience in healthy eating, their literacy and numeracy skills are further developed, there is an increase in their self-esteem and confidence and they are exposed to food industry work. This process is a reliable way to engage parents to reinforce the importance of healthy eating. Parents also show an appreciation of their children's achievements.

This model has great potential for future positive outcomes, particularly if supported over a number of years. Not only are these outcomes measured in terms of illness prevention and education, but it also shows the role shared food experiences can play in building relationships across the community to enhance communication and facilitate reconciliation.