Written Submission to Parliamentary Committee – Parliamentary inquiry into the potential for developing opportunities for schools to become a focus for promoting healthy community living

Established in 1991, The Healthy Kids School Canteen Association (SCA) is a health promotion charity. The mission of Healthy Kids is to promote and influence healthy food choices for children. The Association works according to the principles and values articulated in the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion and the guiding principles for Health Promoting Schools. Healthy Kids works closely with health professionals and educations to promote healthy eating in schools.

Specific health promotion programs

What health promotion programs (if any) have your organisation run for schools (or a school)?

Healthy Kids has been responsible for supporting the NSW government’s Healthy School Canteen Strategy. The Fresh Tastes @ School NSW Healthy School Canteen Strategy came into effect in 2005. It is mandatory for all NSW Government schools (from Term 1, 2005) and strongly supported and endorsed by the Catholic and Independent Education Sectors. The strategy is all about giving students across NSW a taste for healthy foods. It herald a move beyond nutrition guidelines for school canteens to a government-endorse approach that helps schools determine the healthier types and frequency of foods that are available for sale in their canteens.

The Canteen within a Health Promoting School Community

School Principals can ensure that their school is one that promotes health in a number of ways. Principals of a Health Promoting School recognise that the school canteen is an integral part of the school not only for the healthy food that it provides but also in the way that it can link with classroom and homework activities that help students and parents learn about a healthy diet. The school canteen contributes to the community spirit of the school by providing meaningful work for volunteer parents and in some cases valuable healthy fundraising.

Teachers can provide learning experiences that assist students to understand good nutrition enabling them to make healthy food choices. School canteens can assist Teachers by providing healthy food that reinforces nutrition lessons, assist with healthy fundraising and provide healthy food for special occasions such as sports days. Teachers can assist Canteen Managers by facilitating the school’s SRC to help survey students preferences and provide advice on new menu items and ways of promoting healthy foods to students. Teachers can provide learning experiences for their students that will assist in the running of the school canteen. Examples of this are students using computers to design canteen menus and promotional activities.

Canteen Managers and the Canteen Committee can make a real contribution to the health and well being of their students, staff and parents and are a vital part of a Health Promoting School. They do this by providing healthy food, assisting with healthy fundraising and linking with classroom and homework activities that help students and parents learn about a healthy diet. The Canteen Manager contributes to the community spirit of the school by providing meaningful work for volunteer parents.

Volunteers in the school canteen make a vital contribution to the well being of students and staff by helping to provide healthy food for the canteen and by assisting with healthy fundraising activities. Their contribution helps to build community spirit and networks within the school and can provide a link between the school and the wider community.

Parents can provide guidance to their children about making healthy food choices whilst at

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school. They assist Teachers to facilitate their child’s learning about good nutrition. Parents assist school canteens in creating a food service where the healthy choice is the easy choice by providing input to the school Canteen Committee and its policies, by volunteering their services in the canteen and assisting with healthy fundraising.

**Students** can provide input into the school canteen by helping to taste test new foods and provide information on student food preferences. They can assist Canteen Managers by providing information about how healthy foods can be marketed to the students in their school and information that will be helpful in formulating a school canteen policy. Their computer skills can be invaluable in designing menus and promotional activities. In some schools, students can gain valuable work experience by serving in the canteen and assisting in other ways in the running of the canteen.

**Health Professionals** can play a vital part in the creation of a Health Promoting School. They can assist Canteen Managers to develop canteen policies, provide information on the running of the canteen, menu development and links with classroom and homework activities. Health professionals can help to create canteen networks that provide a supportive environment for Canteen Managers and their committees to learn from others and improve their canteen services.

**Healthy Kids School Canteen Association** provides support to school communities wishing to operate economically viable, hygienic canteens that offer nutritious foods to their students. It recognises the contribution that Canteen Managers, Teachers, Principals, students, parents, volunteers, health professionals and the food industry make to a Health Promoting School.

**The Food Industry** ensures that students and Teachers can make healthy food choices by providing appropriate food items that meet the HKSCA criteria. They also have a role to play in educating students, staff and parents about good nutrition through their advertising and packaging. Food industry can also contribute to a Health Promoting School by providing healthy fundraising opportunities.

**'Healthy Kids’ Product Registration Scheme** plays a vital role in a Health Promoting School by partnering with the Food Industry to encourage the development, production and promotion of healthy foods for school canteens. Central to this partnership is the Healthy Kids School Canteen Buyers’ Guide, which aims to make healthy choices easy choices at school. The Buyers’ Guide is a user-friendly, colour coded list of healthier ‘Green’ and ‘Amber’ food and drink products recommended for schools. School communities can be assured these products meet strict ‘Healthy Kids’ Nutrient Criteria and Government Healthy School Canteen Strategies across Australia. Available online and mailed in hard copy to all Australian schools twice a year, the Buyers’ Guide also includes a Canteen Resource Directory and practical food tips to make healthy choices easy choices at school.

**Programs**

The Healthy Kids (nee NSW School Canteen Association, ran a Healthy School Canteen Award Program in NSW from 1994-2004. This was an incentive Program that provided clear steps for a canteen to improve in all aspects in particular the delivery of healthy foods and linking the activities of the canteen to the classroom. It was also a way of rewarding school canteens that were doing a great job.

Since September 2007 Healthy Kids SCA has been responsible for the support and management of the Crunch and Sip® program in NSW. This program aims at increasing primary school-aged children’s’ consumption of fruit, vegetables and water by incorporating a set break in the classroom where students can refuel with fruit or salad vegetables and rehydrate with water. In a recent qualitative evaluation, we received positive anecdotal feedback indicating great outcomes in student food choices, attitudes and classroom activities.

To assist high schools that are having trouble implementing the Fresh Tastes @ School NSW Healthy School Canteen Strategy, Healthy Kids SCA has also runs the Booster Program. It aims to provide intensive assistance in fully implementing Fresh Tastes and build capacity throughout the whole school community. We have seen many positive changes in the canteens and in the attitudes of those involved since the program inception with the school and canteen working together to create a whole of school approach to healthy eating. This program
involves students, parents, teachers and school canteen staff in improving the healthy food provided by the school to the students.

We also run a Product Registration Scheme whereby food companies can register their products with us and receive benefits such as direct marketing to schools and inclusion in our Buyers Guide. To be included products have to meet strict nutrient criteria. The Healthy Kids Buyers Guide has become one of the leading resources for product selection in school canteens across Australia. As such many companies have reformulated products to fit the nutrient criteria. There are now healthier versions of commonly sold products such as pies and, in some cases, serving sizes have been dramatically reduced.

**What health promotion programs (if any) has your organization run for the wider community?**

Healthy Kids SCA now also offers a range of parenting seminars around nutrition and healthy eating for children and young adults. So far we have provided these seminars to primary schools and play centre facilities in Sydney and we aim to further promote these seminars throughout 2009. This program is still in its infancy.

Healthy Kids SCA has two staff members accredited in Triple P (Positive Parenting Program) and we hope to be able to provide the Lifestyle Triple P series to the wider community when it has been released later in 2009.

Our Product Registration Scheme has also affected the nutritional profile and the serving sizes of some products showing up on the supermarket shelf. For example popular snack foods like Kettle chips, once only produced in 50g individual serves, are now available in 28g bags. We work closely with industry in reformulating products to be healthier and more appropriate for children. Unfortunately this program is difficult to evaluate so we have no hard data on its outcomes and impact.

**Are you aware of any other especially successful health promotion programs for schools or communities, from within Australia or overseas?**

New Zealand, as a part of their Mission-On campaign have implemented Fuelled4School, a lifestyle campaign aimed at improving the eating habits and physical activity levels of young New Zealanders. It focuses on eating breakfast, choosing healthier meal and snack options, drinking more water and staying active. This is facilitated through providing a framework and resources for students to develop their own health improving solutions.

The campaign is based on research, which suggests that health promotion campaigns within this age group (years 7-13) are more likely to work if they have ownership over the strategies. This highlights the importance of providing adolescents with the skills and resources to facilitate positive self-regulation. The Healthy Kids SCA is at present working with key stakeholders to implement this program in NSW.

Europe has recently set up the Healthy Eating and Physical activity in schools project (HEPS) to support countries in Europe to promote healthy eating and physical activity in schools in a positive and sustainable way. HEPS uses the health promoting schools approach as an effective way of developing school health policy. Further information on this project is available at [http://www.hepseurope].
The role of schools in promoting healthy community living - Do you believe schools should have a role in promoting healthy living in the wider community? Why or why not?

Yes, we do. Children and adolescents spend a significant part of their day in school and what happens during this time is important for life learning. Food and lifestyle habits developed during childhood and adolescence tend to follow through to adulthood. Schools present a unique opportunity for a captive audience that can be maintained over time. Available evidence indicates that school health programs, which are comprehensive and integrated, and include the curriculum, the environment and the community, are more likely to lead to advancements in the health of school children and adolescents.

The Health Promoting Schools principles dictate that a whole of school approach be taken in promoting the health and wellbeing of all members of the school community including students, teachers, parents and community members. This means ensuring that the school environment is compatible with the themes of the health promotion program.

Schools should also adopt a comprehensive approach through wider promotion and acceptance of established guidelines. They should also recognise ‘best practice’ in the design, implementation and evaluation of school-based programs. Health principals should also be integrated into other subjects in the school curriculum. A focus could also be taken on programs and activities that empower students and give them ownership of the concepts to acquire healthy life skills.

How could health, education and other organisations work together more effectively to coordinate health promotion activities between communities and schools?

Health, education and other organisation can work together effectively. We need to recognise and acknowledge the time that needs to be allocated in the school curriculum for health promotion activities and that teachers will need to allocate time to liaise and work in partnership with health and community representatives. This will also require coordination in maintaining contacts between schools and health services. Teachers will require education and an understanding how to apply the principles of health promotion to their teaching practice. This can be done and is achievable if there is a willingness to work together.

Health services need to recognise that health promotion activities in a school setting are secondary to core education of students. Achievement of health behavioural goals will have to be done in constant consultation and mindfulness of circumstances and school priorities. Health and other organizations can provide skills and knowledge training for school staff. School facilities could also be used in work with the broader community eg. Using hospitality facilities for hosting programs with parents; sporting fields available for community use etc.

To fully take advantage of the broad range of people involved in the school community and the opportunities for providing information, action learning and behavioural change around healthy eating the following issues need to be considered and actioned:

- Ensure that there is commitment and ownership by both Health and Education departments of the value of health promotion in the school environment.
- Ensure that teacher education includes health promotion principles
- Ensure that there is adequate funding of schools and the organisations involved with schools to implement and support health promotion/ health education programs in schools
- Ensure that there is consistency in language (terminology) that is used at all levels of promotion – eg every day foods, sometimes foods, occasional foods.
- Don’t reinvent the wheel, build on what exists and build on current programs and material