



## WHAT'S COOKING?: EVALUATION OF THE LONG-TERM IMPACTS OF THE STEPHANIE ALEXANDER KITCHEN GARDEN PROGRAM

The **Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program (SAKGP)** provides children with a hands-on introduction to food education. Expanding from a single school in 2001 to **87 Victorian primary schools by 2012**, the original model (since adapted to be more flexible and to suit a greater range of education environments) targeted primary school students in Grades 3-6 (aged 8-12 years) and included a weekly minimum of **forty-five minutes in the garden** with a garden specialist and **ninety minutes in the kitchen classroom** with a kitchen specialist, as an ongoing part of the school curriculum. This evaluation was conducted to assess the long-term impact of participation in the SAKGP.



### ONLINE SURVEYS

**1006** females  
(103 took part in original SAKGP)



Age: **18-23**



Studying: **84.3%**

**149** males  
(15 took part in original SAKGP)



Living with family: **72.7%**

Living independently: **27.3%**

### RESULTS

**84% OF PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS REPORTED THE PROGRAM INFLUENCED THEIR LIVES IN THE FOLLOWING WAYS:**



cooking skills **75%**



cooking behaviours **64%**



enjoyment of school **58%**

Others: gardening **51%**, food choice **51%**, health **45%**, wellbeing **32%**, study choices **13%**, career aspirations **11%**, friendship group **9%**, community connections **8%**

WHEN ASKED ABOUT THEIR **COOKING IDENTITY** SAKGP PARTICIPANTS RATED THEMSELVES SLIGHTLY HIGHER OUT OF 10 FOR:



Satisfaction from preparing meals

**8.4 vs 7.9**



Enjoyment in trying new recipes

**8.4 vs 8.2**



Perceived cooking competence

**7.2 vs 6.9**



### SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

**19** interviews conducted  
**17 female & 2 male**



### RESULTS

#### MAIN THEMES



All recalled how much they enjoyed the SAKGP with some describing it as the **highlight** of their primary school years



Positive influence on cooking skills and confidence to prepare meals at home as a young adult



Influence on the enjoyment of fresh food and continued use of seasonal produce



Appreciation of gardening skills and knowledge gained

**"I would definitely recommend it to people. I feel like it was a really big highlight of my schooling"**

**"I was thinking about it [the program] and I got bullied a lot at [my school] and I think that that was the only thing that actually kept me going through school and wanting to go to school. I have really my only memories of that school are – the only good memories are at the garden or in the kitchen. That was really cool."**

### CONCLUSION

This is the **first study** to evaluate the **long-term impacts** of a primary school kitchen garden program. Notwithstanding extended recruitment efforts, only a relatively small sample size was achieved for SAKGP participants, meaning that the study was not powered to detect meaningful differences of statistical significance. Despite this, positive trends suggest that the **program is promising in terms of long-term impacts**, with a larger trial needed to confirm these. Positive trends are supported by the qualitative findings, survey findings of self-reported benefits, and other studies which have shown the **benefits of learning to cook in childhood**.