

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 think it was the catalyst that grew my interest in health, wellbeing, food and nutrition. I always had been naturally inclined that way but having the Kitchen Garden experience really accelerated things."

"I think it was that you would try things that you normally wouldn't try at home. You were eating vegetables. I know certainly in my household, we weren't eating vegetables, so it was quite an interesting kind of thing... I'd come home and be like, "Mum, we made these at school," and she'd be like, "Okay, we can try it." It did expose me to different food and stuff that I probably wouldn't be eating if it wasn't for that."

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**.