



Gagebrook Community Centre

There's no beatin' healthy eatin'!

A needs assessment project with members of the Gagebrook Community



Project Report

March 2004

Introduction and Background

Eating a healthy diet and having an active lifestyle are very important for overall health and wellbeing. We know from evidence-based research that:

- Good nutrition is fundamental to health and wellbeing, to support growth and development and to help prevent a wide range of chronic conditions.
- Poor nutrition is a significant risk factor for chronic conditions such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes as well as a number of cancers.
- In the last 10 years we have seen a significant rise in the rate of overweight and obesity in Australia¹.
- Dietary surveys indicate that fat intake among Australians is high, and that consumption of vegetables and fruit is low¹.

Nutrition promotion activities seek to enhance community nutritional wellbeing using a range of strategies. The most effective health promotion programs are based on the action areas of the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion².

- Building healthy public policy
- Strengthening community action
- Developing personal skills
- Creating supportive environments for health
- Re-orienting health services.

The Ottawa Charter tells us that at the heart of health promotion is the empowerment of communities – their ownership and control of their own endeavors and destinies². So to help us plan nutrition promotion activities in the Gagebrook Community in the future, it was considered essential to first ask community members what was important to them in terms of health and wellbeing, and specifically nutrition.

This summary report describes a project called *There's no beatin' healthy eatin'!* The project was based on the theory of enabling communities to define the values that should underpin health promotion activity. After all, it is their health we are talking about!

The project involved a banner painting activity to encourage participants to express their perceptions about healthy eating, followed by a focus group to further explore these perceptions, identify barriers and to consider what is important to community members in terms of enhancing nutritional wellbeing.

The project was carried out by the Gagebrook Community Centre in partnership with Eat Well Tasmania.

Our Goal and Objectives

The long-term goal of *There's no beatin' healthy eatin'* was to raise awareness of healthy eating in the Gagebrook Community.

The objectives were:

- To identify community perceptions about healthy eating.
- To identify community nutrition needs using an alternative model.
- To enable the community's craft group to participate in a creative activity.
- To create a healthy eating banner that can be hung up in the community centre and used at community events.

- Food label reading
- Food safety, specifically hand washing
- Gardening
- Recreational activities
- Mental health, specifically reducing stress
- Physical activity
- No smoking

It would appear from what was depicted on the banner that participants do not necessarily consider healthy eating in isolation but that they see it as part of a bigger picture of total health and wellbeing.

The focus group also explored the barriers to healthy eating in Gagebrook. “Laziness” was the first suggestion but the discussion evolved to focus largely on factors that make being healthy difficult. Some of the identified barriers included lack of access to quality vegetables and fruits, costs associated with purchasing foods, transport costs particularly taxi costs for those without transport and limited options in terms of having food delivered in the community.

The group then discussed some of the particular activities that they would like to progress and that may help overcome some of the identified barriers. Suggestions included:

- A food co-op linked with local growers and suppliers – the Centre could act as a distribution point
- Workshops – skills in cooking, supermarket shopping, exploring what ‘healthy’ is, working with the young mums group
- Easy access gardening
- Thai Chi
- A walking group

The banner will be hung in the Centre and will be available for use throughout the community. Post cards were also produced from the banner (refer to Appendix A). The postcards include a detachable discount voucher that community members can use to purchase vegetables and fruit at a local retail outlet. This part of the project was considered valuable in terms of building positive relationships within the community and in this case with the food industry, which can help create an environment that supports healthy choices.

On reflection, some participants felt that the banner was “not good enough”. These comments probably related more to creative ability. The project coordinators were not as concerned about the quality of the artwork but were more interested in *what* had been depicted. Future activities such as this should ensure that participants are also satisfied with their efforts and contributions. Subsequent activities in Gagebrook will provide opportunities to “do a better job” in the eyes of participants.

Unfortunately, the Family Food Patch Educator who was going to be involved in facilitating the thought processes of participants during the activity left the Centre prior to the project commencing, however both the Centre Coordinator and Craft Group Tutor reported that they were satisfied with the project and found it a worthwhile activity. Working with an existing group and implementing an activity that already appealed to that group contributed to the successful completion of the project.

The suggested activities listed above will be incorporated into the Centre’s strategic plan and the Gagebrook Community Centre will continue to work with its partners to implement these activities and enhance community health and wellbeing into the future.

Conclusion

Community needs assessments are often carried out using survey tools or focus groups. This project provided an alternative method for stimulating thoughts and perceptions.

Despite an element of frustration, there is no doubt that this project was successful in stimulating thought processes. Following up with a focus group discussion was also worthwhile as it allowed us to further discuss particular issues.

Health promotion works through concrete and effective community action in setting priorities, planning strategies and implementing them to achieve better health². In planning health promotion activities let's not forget to ask the community what's important to them and let's be creative in how we ask these questions.

Acknowledgements

The following people are thanked for their involvement and contribution to the *There's no beatin' healthy eatin!* Project:

- Gagebrook Community Centre Craft Group participants: Colleen Pedder, Nancy Hayes, Julie Tuttle, Jill Duggan, Barbara Henderson, Lyn Smith and Jan Oates
- Julie Tuttle, Craft Group Tutor
- Helen Manser, Coordinator of the Gagebrook Community Centre
- Miriam Herzfeld, Executive Officer of Eat Well Tasmania
- Julie Williams, Coordinator of the Community Nutrition Unit
- Health Promotion (South East District), Department of Health & Human Services for funding this project

References

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1997, *1995 National Nutrition Survey - Selected Highlights/catalogue no. 4802.0*. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.
2. World Health Organisation 1986, Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion, 1st International Conference on Health Promotion, Ottawa, 21 November 1986.

