



**CHILD AND YOUTH WELLBEING STRATEGY SUBMISSION
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The Tasmanian School Canteen Association in delivery of its SmartFood Program (previously known as Canteen Accreditation Program) and other school based programs identifies the importance of all six domains in the State Government Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Framework.

- Being loved and safe
- Having material basics
- Being healthy
- Learning
- Participating
- Having a positive sense of culture and identity

In regard to providing Children and Youth, safe, nurturing and supportive environments this framework must be integral to the establishment of resilient, food secure Tasmanian communities, including schools. Our unifying vision for the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy should be that 'children and young people are loved, confident, happy and healthy and empowered to reach their full potential in a safe environment wherever they are – home, school, community.

Introduction

The Tasmanian School Canteen Association (TSCA) is a statewide organisation that promotes and facilitates the provision of a nutritious and healthy food service in all Tasmanian schools, such as canteens. We are a not for profit, non-government, health promotion organisation currently jointly funded by the Tasmanian Department of Education and the Tasmanian Department of Health. We also derive funding from other appropriate sources. The TSCA supports the broader school community by ensuring a variety of nutritious and safely prepared foods and drinks are served at the canteen and across the school community. The work of the Association is supported by a small staff team and a volunteer Board. Our 2020-2025 Strategic Plan Outcomes are:

- **Educated and activated communities**
- **Building capacity through our work**
- **Tasmanian children eating Tasmanian food**

Churchill Fellowship

Between October until late December, 2019 I was able to travel within the United States of America, England, Scotland, Finland, Italy, France and Japan as part of a Churchill Fellowship to investigate international trends in schools feeding all children well. The following key learnings from the study trip will inform our work over the next five years and are relevant to the goals of the Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy.

Children ate a school lunch, prepared by a skilled and food literate workforce who enjoyed cooking from scratch, using fresh, local and seasonal produce. Menus were planned by school members and dietitians. The schools had infrastructure to cook food and to enable children to sit to eat with other students for at least 20 minutes.

Diverse foods were offered reflecting both cultural and dietary needs. The five food groups were always represented – fruit, vegetables, meat and meat equivalent, grains, and dairy products. The only drink options were milk or tap water and confectionary was not an option.

So, how does our work assist and support the six domains of the Child and Youth Wellbeing Framework?

Being loved and safe

Food cooked from scratch and with love is a common element in many cultures. Our society has over the years moved to utilising ready to eat meals that are often cheaply made and definitely not cooked from scratch. There are many reasons as to why this happens and there is no finger pointing. What we saw during the early stages of COVID19 was a movement to more cooking at home and growing of our own food – involving our children in this shift. Children feel loved and safe when they sit down to eat with family and friends with food cooked from within these structures.

Having material basics.

One of the major elements of having material basics is to have access to nutritious food and clean water. Providing children with access to nutritious food whilst at school enables children to be nourished, connected and have the ability to enjoy school and learn to the best of their capabilities.

Providing a universal – equitable nutritious food service at food delivery points such as breakfast, recess, lunch and emergency food relief across the school day will provide over 50% of a child's daily requirements of their energy needs.

We also utilise our Well Fed Tasmania Food Truck (in partnership with Families Tasmania – formally known as CHAT) to support access to nutritious food, connecting at the community and school level and providing tastily cooked local and seasonal produce with an emphasis on vegetables.

Being healthy

Good food underpins most health elements. From being physically healthy, emotionally well and mentally well – food is a common denominator. Therefore nutritious, tasty, locally sourced, minimally process and seasonal food should be available to all of our children. We grow some of the best food in the world and our children should have priority to access it.

Learning

Evidence shows that well fed children – grow, learn and develop social skills – to the best of their ability.

What are the benefits for students and health and education outcomes?

1. Assists the Tasmanian government to deliver against recommendation #62 from the PESRAC interim report and #31 from the final report.
2. Improves the food security of Tasmanian primary school aged children by ensuring they get a healthy lunch each day, rich in vegetables and fruitⁱ.

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3. Improves the eating culture of young Tasmanians by normalising sharing healthy seasonal food.ⁱⁱ
4. Improves concentration, mood, and behaviour so children are ready to learn.ⁱⁱⁱ
5. Improves educational outcomes.^{iv}
6. Improves attendance at school of children in low-income communities.^v
7. Using food that is local and seasonal improves freshness and nutrient density AND reduces waste.^{vi}
8. Impressive return on investment – for every \$1 invested returns 3 to 10 times the economic return from improved health and education among schoolchildren and increased productivity when they become working adults.^{vii}

Participating

We also know that programs such as kitchen garden programs - enable children to learn about the food that they are eating, to try new foods and therefore expanding their taste buds and enables them to sit down with their friends and experience the joy of food as well as aiding digestion. During the School Lunch Pilot in Term 4, 2020 we observed children attending school in a consistent and connected manner because they were able to access food. There is evidence that parents keep their children at home if they don't have food to pack in their children's lunchbox.

Our Well Fed Tasmania Food Truck allows us to connect with schools and communities all around the State and remote and rural schools benefit from this reach.

Having a positive sense of culture and identity

Children sharing their culture through food, is a rewarding, connecting and equitable experience for children. Food is a leveller. Sharing of food and equitable access to food enables a positivity of sense of culture and identity. All children should have access to culturally diverse food that nourishes the soul and enable our children to have full tummies so that they can be happy and interact with their peers whilst learning to the best of their abilities.

School Lunch Pilot

During Term 4, 2020, we received a small amount of funding from a *Healthy Tasmania* grant, Department of Health, to pilot a sit down, cooked from scratch, two course school lunch over 20 days for 201 students at three schools. The School Lunch Pilot was evaluated by Dr Kylie Smith of the Menzies Institute of Medical Research. The following findings were made:

- a sit-down cooked meal from scratch at school is possible with the right mix of staff and resources
- average food cost was \$1.91 per student for ingredients only (without any procurement factored in) and \$4.72 for ingredients and labour costs. The cost per lunch would decrease if more students were involved in the lunch program.
- **children enjoyed sitting down with their friends to eat,**
- children enjoyed eating vegetables in the dishes,
- **children were able to concentrate better in class before lunch and after lunch,**
- **reduced number of behavioural issues after lunch,**
- increase in student attendance during the pilot period of a month,
- decrease in food packaging litter,

- **Most (89%) parents were willing to pay \$3, with discount for families with multiple children.**
- **Most parents (90%) would like a cooked lunch available every day.**

In particular Dr Smith indicated that **‘a larger study is needed to determine if the School Lunch Pilot can be upscaled. This would involve providing cooked lunches for all students, at a larger number of schools, for a longer duration of time’.**

What are we proposing?

The TSCA has been in operation since 1994 with a major focus on food and drink served at school canteens in Tasmanian Government and Non-government schools. The delivery of nutritious food and drinks at school is in need of a review, in light of the learnings from the COVID19 pandemic. **This submission proposes a creative, community and school based planned approach to achieve a necessary shift in how and what children eat whilst at school, focusing on the delivery points of: breakfast, recess, lunch and emergency food relief.**

We propose that the TSCA supports the achievement of happy, healthy children through the following initiatives:

SmartFood Program – historically, currently and for the next few years - our major focus. A rigorous whole of school accreditation process that guides and supports schools to provide a food service (currently mainly a school canteen) through a four-part process. This program is a jointly funded program funded by the Department of Education and Department of Health.

School Food Plans – during the 2020/21 budget we received funding from the DoE to work with six schools to explore their School Food Plans and develop a toolkit for other schools to address their school food plans. School Food Plans need to be present in all schools to provide some robust, coordinated structure for delivery of food delivery points, such as breakfast, recess, lunch and emergency food relief.

School Lunch Program – the Menzies Institute of Medical Research completed an evaluation of the School Lunch Pilot, in March 2021. This pilot involved three schools in Term 4, 2020. We see the expansion of this pilot to be pivotal in a child’s wellbeing and has been identified and supported in recommendation #31 in the PESRAC Final report.

Underpinning these suggestions are the following necessities:

- A shift from an Emergency Food Relief reliance to a community and school based food security model.
- Integrating food literacy and food education learning within communities through the curriculum and through food related activities.
- Ensuring a health and wellbeing in all policies approach is common practice in our government Departments.
- Evaluating all that we do is crucial to any shift in behavioural change. We need to utilise our talent at the University of Tasmania/Menzies Institute of Medical Research to monitor and evaluate our progress in happy healthy children and young people.

ⁱ Centre for Food Policy, 2021. 42 policies and actions to orient food systems towards healthier diets for all.

ⁱⁱ Oostindjer M et al, 2016 Are school meals a viable and sustainable tool to improve the healthiness and sustainability of children's diet and food consumption? A cross national comparative perspective

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10408398.2016.1197180>

ⁱⁱⁱ [https://theconversation.com/why-your-kids-need-a-national-school-food-program-](https://theconversation.com/why-your-kids-need-a-national-school-food-program-83135#:~:text=While%20this%20may%20seem%20like,to%20improvements%20in%20educational%20achievement.)

[83135#:~:text=While%20this%20may%20seem%20like,to%20improvements%20in%20educational%20achievement.](https://theconversation.com/why-your-kids-need-a-national-school-food-program-83135#:~:text=While%20this%20may%20seem%20like,to%20improvements%20in%20educational%20achievement.)

^{iv} Dunbabin, Julie 2020 (Churchill Fellowship Report) Investigate the factors that enable school lunch programs to impact positively on student health and wellbeing. <https://www.churchilltrust.com.au/project/the-elvie-munday-churchill-fellowship-to-investigate-factors-that-enable-school-lunch-programs-to-impact-positively-on-student-health-and-wellbeing---uk-netherlands-france-finland-usa-japan/>

^v <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-12-10/students-who-get-free-hot-meals-more-likely-to-attend-school/12966772#:~:text=Key%20points%3A, costs%20around%20%244%20per%20meal>

^{vi} Eat Well Tasmania, 2020 Rapid review - Local Food Procurement What are the co-benefits for local and regional economies? <https://www.eatwelltas.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/EWT-Local-Food-Procurement-What-are-the-cobenefits-for-local-and-regional-economies.pdf>

^{vii} World Food Program, 2016 Cost-Benefit Analysis School Feeding Investment Case