

The Secondary Years Kitchen Garden Project

Evaluation summary



With one in four Australian adolescents suffering from overweight or obesity, effective secondary school-based food education programs are critical for the health and wellbeing of future generations. In 2018, the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation (SAKGF) began work on an exciting three-year project to adapt their unique kitchen garden program to meet the needs of secondary schools. What resulted was the first ever curriculum-integrated kitchen garden program in the history of Australian secondary schools: the Kitchen Garden Program for Secondary Years (KGPSY).

With support and funding from AstraZeneca Australia's Young Health Programme, the project entailed close collaboration with educators and experts to develop a comprehensive package of sector-specific professional development, resources and support tailored to the needs of Australian secondary schools. This package was piloted in 14 schools, who used the program to achieve an array of health, wellbeing, learning and community engagement objectives.

Who was involved in the pilot?



14 Secondary Schools



1115 students in 2020, 822 students 2018-19, aged 12-18 years old.



111 educators

What did we find?



84%

of students and teachers agreed that all schools should have a kitchen garden program.



61%

of students said they better understood the benefits of cooking and eating seasonal fruit and vegetables.



64%

of students reported an increased confidence in growing and/or cooking fresh food.



58%

of students had started growing fruit, vegetables or herbs at home, or were more inspired to do so.

These findings were complemented by survey data collected from **educators** and school staff, which found that:



91%

of educators agreed that students were more confident growing and/or cooking fresh food.



100%

of educators believed students **better understood the benefits** of cooking and eating seasonal fruit and vegetables.



94%

of educators found students were more willing to try new foods and flavours.



94%

of educators thought the program had a positive impact on school enjoyment for students.

By fostering an inclusive, hands-on learning environment, the program provided students with a unique opportunity to explore and develop new interests, capacities and learning styles. The combination of curriculum-integrated learning, soft skills and hands-on experiences even led to new academic, vocational and/or employment pathways for some.

When asked about their experiences in the program, students identified a range of benefits well beyond kitchen and garden skills. They discussed **improvements to their wellbeing, confidence and the school environment** as a result of the program.



... it's really, really relaxing and it helps take your mind off the things and it de-stresses you. It's really good and helpful because school can be really stressful."

Educators also identified a range of soft skills that students were developing through their involvement in the program, such as:



Leadership



Forward thinking and planning ahead



Teamwork and collaboration



Problem solving



'Giving back' and reciprocity

Health benefits

The diagram to the right is a blend of the 5 Action Areas from the World Health Organisation's **Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion**, and the **biopsychosocial model of health and wellbeing**. Combining these models shows the breadth and depth of the KGPSY, capturing the Program's holistic and integrated approach to health and wellbeing.

The outside circle demonstrates how the KGPSY meets all 5 Action Areas while the inner circle maps student outcomes from a case study to the biopsychosocial model. The diagram represents how a person's health and wellbeing is inseparable from the complex web of relationships and interlinked systems in which they live.



Sebastian's story

Before participating in the kitchen garden program, Sebastian was described by his teachers as an involved but disruptive student. His lack of confidence and focus resulted in him performing as the class clown. When Jo, the Garden Specialist, first met Sebastian in Year 8, he "wasn't very impressed".

As part of the Year 9 Food Science cohort involved in the KGPSY at his school, Sebastian embraced the challenges of the outdoor learning environment, and developed a respectful relationship with Jo.

During COVID-19 when Jo was tending to the garden, Sebastian regularly went into school to assist Jo – helping him

build a fence and greenhouse for the school garden.

Jo sees the changes in Sebastian's **behaviour, health, confidence, and engagement** as a direct consequence of the teamwork and commitment that kitchen gardens necessitate. As far as Jo sees it, growing a kitchen garden instils an ongoing sense of **responsibility, maintenance and care**. This empowers students to be leaders across the whole cycle of pleasurable food education – from planting to harvesting and beyond, into the kitchen, home and wider community.

Where to next?



Continue to support and learn from secondary schools across Australia



Develop more sector-specific resources



Disseminate the program nationally



Monitor, evaluate, and continue to build the evidence base