

2005 Public Health Awards for Excellence and Innovation:

Public Health Spotlight Award for Excellence

Be Active, Eat Well

Colac Area Health

Imagine a town where children play after school, watch less TV, eat plenty of fruit and drink lots of water. Families have healthier takeaway food options and are supported to make healthy choices by child care services, kindergartens, primary schools, sporting clubs, local health services and the local shire. Too good to be true? Not in Colac.

Be Active Eat Well promotes healthy eating and physical activity, with a focus on children aged two to 12 years. Funded by the Department of Human Services, this project implements a unique 'multi-setting, multi-strategy approach', successfully combining evidence-based practice with community needs, and producing exciting outcomes.

Be Active Eat Well works with children, their parents and schools, local retailers, community groups, sporting clubs, health services and the local shire to address healthy eating and physical activity in all children's settings. The project is also developing community skills and knowledge to support ongoing promotion of healthy eating and physical activity.

With guidance from Deakin University, the Colac community has devised solutions to address barriers to healthy eating and physical activity. These solutions respond to local issues and represent best practice. This is reflected in the key interventions, which include a schools initiative, an after school activity program, an arts program, parenting information and support, and a strategy that engages hot chip retailers to use healthier oils and cooking techniques.

The results achieved at the midpoint of the project's implementation are certainly exciting. Some examples include:

- Greater awareness of key health messages (93.3 per cent of families had heard of *Be Active Eat Well*).
- More than 500 children (67.9 per cent of children in Colac) have participated in the after school activity program.
- Six of seven primary schools have implemented water policies, with 68.2 per cent of parents reporting that their children are drinking less sweet drinks.
- Six primary schools have implemented school nutrition and fruit break policies (57.1 per cent of parents reported making healthier children's lunchboxes).
- Seven food retailers are involved in the Choice Chips program.

The achievements of the Colac community have attracted interest from across Australia and overseas. The innovative *Be Active Eat Well* action plan has travelled far and wide, with a recent copy being sent to Africa.

Contact

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