



## Successful Healthway Projects

# Lunch Right Project

The Lunch Right project involved pilot testing a menu planner and educational program to help parents provide healthy lunch boxes for their primary school-aged children.

Case Study

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# Lunch Right Project

<b>Organisation:</b>	North Metropolitan Health Service - Population Health
<b>Healthway funding:</b>	\$4,920 (Funded: Design and printing of planner and stickers, ingredients, venue cost and stationery)
<b>Program period:</b>	5 months
<b>Year:</b>	2004
<b>Target group:</b>	Parents and carers of primary school students
<b>Number of participants:</b>	20 parents/carers and 20-40 primary school students

## What was the project about?

The Lunch Right project pilot tested a menu planner and educational program to help parents provide nutritious school lunch boxes for their primary school-aged children. The project aimed to improve children's nutritional intake to prevent diet related health problems in adulthood and establish healthy eating habits in childhood before preferences are formed.

Formative research with staff at a local primary school showed that children's lunch boxes contained expensive snack foods high in fat, sugar and salt. This led to the development, with input from parents, of a menu planner and recipes.

School nurses from the North Metropolitan Health Service (NMHS) recruited 11 families with children from a local primary school to trial the recipes and menu planner. Parents attended a series of recipe demonstrations, including educational and hands-on activities, to prepare nutritious school lunches and snacks. Parents then used their new skills to trial the Lunch Right menu planner at home for four weeks. Children were encouraged to tick off the food groups they had consumed on a simple chart. After the trial the Lunch Right menu planners were made available to other families.

## What strategies were used?

- Parents helped develop and pilot the menu planner and recipes.
- Parents attended a healthy breakfast launch, menu planner recipe demonstrations, information sessions and Foodcent\$ nutrition education and food purchasing workshops.
- Parents could sample prepared foods after the recipe demonstrations.

- Parents were provided with lunch boxes and drink bottles for use by their children and were encouraged to involve their children in choosing and planning lunches and snacks from the menu planner.
- A lunch box sticker was developed as a reminder of the food groups and to assist children record the foods they had consumed each day.

## What did the project achieve?

- A menu planner with 20 lunches and 20 snacks was developed with the assistance of, and feedback from, parents.
- The menu planner was successfully used with positive results by the 11 families recruited to the pilot project.
- Parents increased their use of healthier food alternatives in lunch boxes e.g. white bread was replaced with wholemeal.
- Many parents were surprised by the range of healthy nutritious foods their children enjoyed.
- Parents reported that the menu planner provided simple ideas and suggestions that were effective in encouraging their children to choose healthy food.
- The project produced a high quality resource that was convenient, easy to read and nutritionally sound. School nurses gave copies out to new pre-primary and primary parents.

## What the coordinator of the Lunch Right project had to say about the project:

The resource meets a need that other recipe books do not, by providing choice and involving children in choosing food from the illustrations.

The strength of this project came from engaging the community through discussions and focus groups to test the design and implementation of the resource.

# What Were the Effective Health Promotion Elements?

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## PLANNING

Extensive formative research was conducted to gather background information on the issue. This included:

- Consultations with community health and school nurses, who identified overweight children and poor eating habits in schools.
- Interviews with the principal, school registrar, canteen manager and teachers in a northern suburbs Perth school.
- A focus group with parents of school-aged children

Further consultations were conducted to develop the pilot menu planner with:

- A convenience sample of parents.
- Edith Cowan University School of Community Services, Education and Social Sciences.
- NMHS Population Health Program, Diabetes Program Dietician.

Edith Cowan University School of Biomedical and Sports Science provided nutrition students to assist with cooking demonstrations and nutrition education for parents.

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## IMPLEMENTATION

Community health and school nurses assisted with the recruitment of families and the trial of the menu planners.

Parents participated in a four week pilot of the planner during Term 1, 2004, which involved attending recipe demonstrations and trialling 20 lunch and 20 snack recipes at home. This ensured the final product was understandable and appropriate for the target audience.

Weekly telephone contact from project staff provided parents with support and collected feedback on the use of the menu planner.

Project updates were provided through:

- The local community newspaper.
- Letters to the principal and parents.
- School newsletters.
- Parent discussions with nurses.

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## EVALUATION

Project evaluation was conducted through:

- Pre and post parent-completed questionnaires to measure behaviour, food preparation practices and nutrition knowledge. Questions on the layout, size and convenience of the planner were also included.
- A daily food record was kept by participants to record Lunch Right foods trialled by their children.

Six months after the completion of the pilot a telephone survey was conducted with parents to collect information on continued use, reasons for use/non-use, nutrition behaviours and other comments relating to the menu planner.

Results were reported to stakeholders and outcomes were communicated through:

- Articles in professional association newsletters.
- Promotion of the menu planner during parent nutrition education sessions run by The Cancer Council WA.

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## SUSTAINABILITY

Project sustainability was planned through:

- Dissemination of the Lunch Right menu planner by community health nurses and health promotion staff.
- Modification of the resource for distribution through the Osborne Division of General Practice.
- Consultations with organisations such as Meeralinga, The Cancer Council WA and the WA School Canteens Association.
- Negotiations with other organisations to identify opportunities to further develop and disseminate the menu planner.

### What lessons were learned?

- Parent interventions are essential to support curriculum teaching and school policy. Lunch Right was found to be a useful strategy as part of an integrated approach.
- Projects need to recognise the busy lives of families and their need for quick meals, including recipes that can be made in advance and frozen.
- Parents may underestimate their child's willingness to try new healthy food options.

- Creativity is needed when encouraging children to try unfamiliar nutritious foods.
- An adequate budget must be allocated for professional photography of food, design and printing.
- Healthy food advice for parents should include simple follow-up actions.
- Food safety information should be included in future nutritional resources.



Postal Address:  
PO Box 1284  
West Perth WA 6872

Telephone: (08) 9476 7000  
WA statewide: 1800 198 450

Facsimile: (08) 9324 1145  
Email: [healthway@healthway.wa.gov.au](mailto:healthway@healthway.wa.gov.au)

Web: [www.healthway.wa.gov.au](http://www.healthway.wa.gov.au)