



OPAL Case Study Clever Faster Stronger Children

Mid Murray Council

Goal: Home Meals

Theme: Make it a Fresh Snack

Strategy: Education

Summary

Staff and volunteers from across the Mid Murray district who work with preschool children were trained to implement the Eat a Rainbow program which aims to encourage children to eat more fruit and vegetables. OPAL also supported the Morgan Kindergarten with their focus on good nutrition to build healthy young bodies.

Our approach

Early in 2013 Mid Murray OPAL ran two Eat a Rainbow training sessions for local interested childcare workers, teachers and volunteers. A total of 23 staff were trained, enough to cover three schools, three kindergartens, two kindergyms, three playgroups, one library and two (private) childcare businesses. The Rainbow Sisters (hailing from Fleurieu Foodies¹), train adults to be proficient in the delivery of the Eat a Rainbow program and they helped make this a fun, practical program.

Morgan Kindergarten was interested in going further and with other members of their community education network (the library and school) they

implemented a healthy eating focus for a whole term. Under the theme of 'Clever. Faster. Stronger', there have been weekly Eat a Rainbow sessions with opportunities for children and parents to come together to create recipes and meals and shop for food. Other strategies included: increasing the fruit and vegetable resources (for example books, toys, puzzles and posters); building a successful partnership with the local library; school garden developments; visits from the Veggie Man; a healthy graduation ceremony and a cereal label reading session with parents.

Mid Murray OPAL assisted the work in Morgan through training, guidance on health resources, advice on basic nutrition principles, ensuring links to the national Early Years Learning Framework² and providing grant funding which helped purchase new children's cooking equipment for the school and kindy to share, as well as children's cook books and other resources.

Our achievements

Children are trying lots of new fruit and vegetables and parents and staff have increased knowledge, motivation and practical tips to encourage healthy eating. By promoting the methodology and success of the approach at Morgan Kindergarten, other kindergartens and

schools have been further motivated to set themselves up to run similar programs. Six of the sites have now begun implementing tailored Eat a Rainbow programs. Swan Reach Kindergarten ran a six-week Eat a Rainbow program, and while the Mannum Kindergarten and Rural Care has already started to embed principles of Eat a Rainbow into its daily activities, it is planning to dedicate time to ongoing delivery of the weekly program in the near future.

Why

Consultations with local kindergartens during the establishment phase of Mid Murray OPAL revealed teachers and centre coordinators were constantly looking for new ways to incorporate healthy eating into their daily activities. Many child care workers voiced their concern at the foods children were, and were not, eating, and believed that while parents had the main responsibility and opportunity to ensure healthy eating, the education setting could engage the children in positive nutrition experiences. The Eat a Rainbow program offered a well-tested program that could be easily implemented.

The logo for Opal, featuring the word 'Opal' in a bold, white, sans-serif font with a blue outline, set against a colorful, abstract background of overlapping shapes in shades of blue, purple, and yellow.

Who

Children attending preschools and their families were the key focus, with preschool staff a secondary focus.

Rationale

The pre-school years are the ideal time for children to learn to eat a variety of nutritious foods. Although children can be fussy it's important to keep offering a variety of foods at regular meal and snack times and taste testing, cooking, growing and having fun with healthy food at a young age offers an opportunity to do this. Increasing fruit and vegetables in the diets of children and families is important given the low rates of consumption, especially of vegetables, by all South Australians despite the clear evidence of short and longer term health benefits.³

Resources

Eat a Rainbow materials from the Community Foodies website were used and tailored specifically for these sessions and OPAL prepared various resources including: CDs of the Rainbow Rap, interactive games and flash cards and posters around each week's theme. Veggie Man also made two visits to the kindy. Staff ran sessions at the child care centre to give the staff a chance to see the delivery in action and feel confident enough to run the sessions themselves.

About OPAL?

The OPAL (Obesity Prevention and Lifestyle) initiative supports children, families and their communities to eat well and be active. It is South

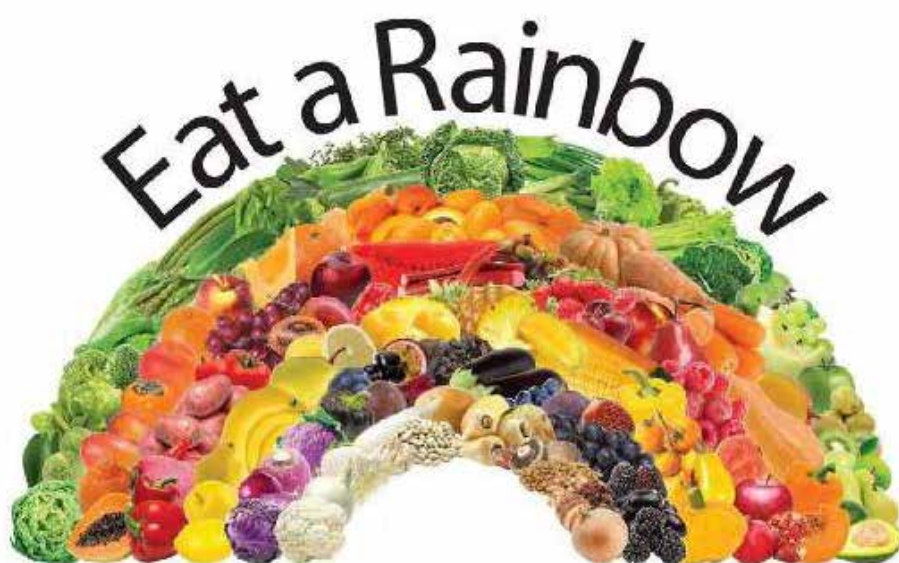
Australia's largest ever investment in obesity prevention. OPAL uses a range of interconnected strategies to build knowledge and skills and change policies and environments in partnerships with others to support healthy behaviour. This case study is one of many linked projects that together are helping children, through their families and communities, to be healthy now and stay healthy for life.

Contact:

OPAL Council Manager
Mid Murray Council
Phone: (08) 8569 01794
Website: www.mid-murray.sa.gov.au

The Eat a Rainbow program is new and exciting, and offers so much more practical educational material to children on nutrition than I've ever seen. The Eat a Rainbow training we had delivered in Term 1 by OPAL has inspired many of us in the Morgan community to work together to support the health of our children. This actually works ... the kids are trying everything!

Morgan Kindy Director Wendy Norman



¹ See www.communityfoodies.com/Eat%20a%20Rainbow for more information

² See deewr.gov.au/early-years-learning-framework

³ SA Health. OPAL stakeholder sheet Make it a Fresh Snack. [on line]. Available from: www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/public+content/sa+health+internet/healthy+living/healthy+places/where+we+live+and+play/opal/make+it+a+fresh+snack. Accessed 11 July 2013)

