

Family Food Educators
Family Food Pattern



Storybook

Eating well and being physically active is important for our health and wellbeing throughout life. From time to time we all need support, encouragement and guidance, as well as opportunities, to be able to eat food that is good for us and to stay active. In this booklet, the Family Food Patch program is proud to showcase the wonderful work of our volunteer Family Food Educators in providing such support to families and children across Tasmania.

Family Food Patch is a community program that aims to improve the health and wellbeing of Tasmanian children by creating a network of motivated volunteer parents and community workers, known as Family Food Educators.

Family Food Educators are offered practical training on how to address the common food and physical activity concerns of parents of both pre-school and school aged children. They are then encouraged and supported to spread the message about healthy eating and physical activity to children and families within their local community.

Family Food Patch began in 2001 and to celebrate the achievements of Family Food Educators over the past ten years we invited Educators to share their experiences and reflections. Their stories were collected during August and September 2011. They demonstrated the range of ways in which Family Food Educators have used their knowledge, skills and confidence gained through completing the Family Food Patch training course. The stories highlight the role Family Food Educators can play in encouraging both their own families and the families around them to eat well and be physically active.

The Management Committee and Program Team would like to sincerely thank the Family Food Educators who contributed to this storybook and the parents and community workers who have been involved in the Family Food Patch program. We would also like to acknowledge the contribution of Miriam Herzfeld in collecting and collating these great stories.

Family Food Patch is a partnership program between the Child Health Association Tasmanian and Community Nutrition Unit (Department of Health and Human Services). This National Partnership Agreement on Preventative Health initiative was funded by the Australian Government.

**Emily Shepherd,
Family Food Patch
Program Manager**





Starting Small

Changes I've seen

Over the years I've seen lots of things that have made me think that my efforts as a Family Food Educator have been worthwhile. One thing that really sticks in my mind is when I was doing a Family Food Patch activity at a Messy Fun Day in Rosebery. This young boy was hanging around. I had some celery boats on the table and he said he'd never had celery before. I let him try one and he couldn't believe how much he liked celery. It was such a wonderful moment!

I've been really pleasantly surprised at how keen people are to try new foods and new ideas for preparing healthy meals. Some people have adopted a whole new outlook on vegetables and fruit. They just needed someone to show them.

I've done quite a lot of work with playgroups and at my children's primary school. I've noticed that some teachers are doing more in the school now to promote nutrition through the school curriculum. I hope I have been able to contribute to that change.

At our school canteen we now have a Healthy Day every Wednesday. I do all the cooking on that day. It's a day when 'normal' canteen food isn't available. I make a hot meal and smoothies for the kids. The canteen isn't quite accredited yet with Cool CAP but hopefully some day it will be. I hope that when my children move on to another school that the canteen will continue to have those Healthy Days for other children.

The school has also established a veggie garden. I wasn't responsible for that but I hope that I have helped to create a view within the school community that nutrition is important for our kids.



My approach

I used to work as a chef so getting out in front of a crowd and showing people how to cook isn't a big deal to me. When I stopped working as a chef I promised I would never get back into cooking unless it was healthy. Then Family Food Patch came along and it was just what I needed. It gave me the resources and information I needed to make a difference in my community. I had access to dietitians when I needed to ask them questions. It's been just wonderful.

Cooking is my passion. I try and pass on my cooking skills and give people the confidence to make healthy meals. I'm a single Mum and my approach is "healthy food fast".

My Family Food Educator roles have moved from playgroup to primary school and hopefully into high school as my children grow up. I've looked for opportunities throughout these stages.

I try and come up with new ideas and seek the support of others to help me to implement them. I ran some cooking courses with the support of Women Tasmania and our local playgroup. I've also initiated a program in the school where all children receive a special 'healthy eating' school leaver bag. The bag is given to all grade 6 students when they finish primary school. It contains a veggie peeler, drink bottle, nutrition information, magnet, cookbook and other bits and pieces that promote healthy eating. The hope is that they will continue to eat well as they move on to high school.

What it means to me

I was a Mum on government support payments and I wanted to give something back to the community when I couldn't work. So I volunteered as an Educator. It's all been worth it. I've got as much out of it as I've put in.

Jo, Strahan





The Water at Greens Beach is Magic

Changes I've seen

I trained as an Educator years ago - I can't even remember the exact date! I have seen a whole lot of little changes over the years.

I'm always surprised at the reactions from people when they realise how much sugar is in some foods. People say, 'I didn't know that' and I think they really take it on board.

I've also seen some small but important steps forward at the places where I do my volunteer work. Like at the Beaconsfield Child and Family Centre where we help run the Free Fun with Cooking Program. The Program wasn't set up to focus specifically on healthy eating but, together with another Educator, we've introduced some healthier ideas like using wholemeal flour, cutting down on sugar and using reduced fat options. We make subtle suggestions, like when the staff wanted us to make pumpkin soup with the kids and they suggested adding chicken noodles to it. We said, 'I don't think we need that, it's got too much salt in it'. And when we made rissoles, instead of honey and soya, we suggested adding herbs.

Some of the parents of the children that come to the Cooking Program have really taken to our recipe ideas. They say they can't cook but then they come back the next week and tell us that they tried our recipes during the week and they're as proud as punch!

I also do quite a lot of physical activity programs with children, as well as adults. I've seen people get involved and be active, where before they were doing very little.



My approach

You have to be persistent and keep chipping away at people. I think people are slowly responding and taking our messages on board but it takes time and perseverance.

Doing practical activities like cooking is a good way to go about it. Cooking is hands on and everyone loves to eat. We're not there as the experts, just if there is a bit of a slip up in a recipe, we can suggest a healthier option. We're pretty subtle but I like to think it's effective.

Another Educator and I have worked together on the Cooking Program at the Child and Family Centre. It's been great to work together because I wasn't that confident at first. The program runs for 8 weeks and I now feel like I have more confidence and if I was asked to do something similar again in the future, I'd be happy to do it alone.

I do a lot of volunteer work. I volunteer for the Neighbourhood House and do things like Exercise for Seniors and contribute to the Women's Information Network. I also do active after school activities at the Primary School. I always sneak a few Family Food Patch ideas in to every opportunity. All my work is voluntary.

What it means to me

I love it! I get especially excited when I see kids drinking water. I say that the water at Greens Beach is magic because its rain water and they love that!

Lainie, Greens Beach



What it means to me

Family Food Patch is so tremendously rewarding. The messages are really very simple. It's great to be able to pass on something that is good for people's health and show how easy it is.

For me, Family Food Patch has been a way to connect with my local community and it's happened far more quickly than I expected, and I feel really lucky. It's very rewarding to know that you might be able to help make a difference to other families, which will have lots of benefits down the track.

Anita, Cambridge





Whenever I get invited to go along to something I always take my Family Food Patch hat with me

Changes I've seen

I trained as an Educator when my daughter was only about 2 years old back in 2003/04. She's now 9 years old.

I work in a child care centre in Cygnet. Over the years, I've used my Family Food Patch knowledge on many occasions. There's still a long way to go, in terms of improving nutrition and getting people to be more active, but I have seen some positive changes over the years.

It's the things that we don't see so much (in children's lunchboxes at the child care centre) anymore which is really good. Like the heavily marketed foods that aren't actually great choices. One of the things that shocks parents the most is the impact that marketing has on their decision making.

I've seen changes in the amount of healthy food that parents put in their children's lunchboxes and I attribute that, at least in part, to my continual promotion of Family Food Patch messages.

My approach

I try and have the conversations about nutrition and physical activity with all the people I work with, so that it empowers them to have the same conversations with families at the centre. Our child care service takes nutrition very seriously so it's important that we are all 'singing from the same song book'.

Having conversations with parents is really important; just talking to them. It also helps to have some props or illustrations. I have a box in the kitchen in the child care centre and in it I've collected



packaging of really common foods that I can talk to the parents about. I'd get them out and say to parents, 'look, compare these.' I'd get out my muesli bars and then I'd pull out the Uncle Toby's ones and I'd talk them through the comparison, and they realise just how much sugar is in them.

What it means to me

Every time I change a parent's ideas or attitudes, even just a little bit, I think, that won't be just one because it will be that child's life time habits. Hopefully when they are an adult and making their children's food choices they will pass it on. I kind of hope there will be a rippling effect. I find it immensely satisfying to know that I may have helped that family and also that the benefits may extend into the broader community.

Angela, Huonville





Fundraising is good but there are other ways to do it

Changes I've seen

I was trained as a Family Food Educator in 2007.

My son and I used to go to a playgroup in our area and I used to try and be a role model. I'd try and give my son a healthy lunch or snacks in his lunchbox. I used the opportunity at playgroup to talk to other parents just on a very informal basis.

I'd talk about why I'd give those types of foods. Over the course of the time we'd been involved in the playgroup I saw subtle little changes in the behaviour of the parents and in what they were giving their kids to eat.

These days, I work at a doctor's surgery. Recently someone put a box of chocolates on the counter for fundraising. I was concerned that this was sending the wrong message to people and together we decided that it was a bad idea. Now it's gone and I'm very happy! Fundraising is good but there are other ways to do it.

My approach

I always make sure I tell people I've done the Family Food Patch course. I think you become, not an authority, but it gives you a little bit more credibility and confidence.

I just try to be a good role model and talk to people. Because we went to the playgroup for a long time we were able to form relationships with people and get to know them a bit better. I think that helped a lot in terms of encouraging others to give their kids healthy choices.



I wait for windows of opportunity, through my work at the doctor's surgery and elsewhere, to try and pass on information but there isn't always a lot of time. As soon as there is an opportunity I try and make the most of it.

I hope to become more involved with the school canteen and maybe help less fortunate children, who access the canteen for food, to at least have a healthy meal.

What it means to me

It helps you feel that you do have something to offer. There is so much need out there. I'd like to be able to do more.

Louise, Burnie





The Confidence to Make Informed Choices

Changes I've seen

Family Food Patch has given me lots of really useful information that makes sense for people's every day eating decisions.

I've used my knowledge as part of parenting groups that are run through the community house. I've also done some lunchbox sessions at my children's primary school.

I've had people coming up to me weeks after I've run activities and tell me how much it has helped them. The main thing I notice is that it just gives people that confidence to make better decisions for their kids. For example, parents are really surprised how bad fruit juices are for children's teeth. The information I am able to pass on gives parents the confidence to make informed choices.

We have a lot of young Mums come to the community house where I work. I've been able to work with them to boost their confidence in the kitchen to make something healthy for their children.

My approach

I try and keep all my Family Food Patch activity fairly informal. I often run cook and talk type activities. I make sure everyone has a turn and feels included. I always try and have a hands-on activity.

I think people can relate to me because I'm a volunteer and a Mum of two children. I don't stand out the front and I make sure I tell people that I'm not a nutritionist.



I try and keep my groups to a maximum of 6 participants so that I can get around to talking to everyone individually as well to answer their questions or just have a chat. People tend to open up more if the group is small and they all like to listen to each other's questions.

I use the Family Food Patch recipes and resources. I especially like the fat/sugar/salt guide - it's been really useful.

What it means to me

It's great to know you've helped someone. It's not just the parents, it's the kids as well. There are lots of Mums that think they are doing it ok. I was like that too. It wasn't until I did Family Food Patch that I realised some of the decisions I was making weren't so good. Now I'm able to share that with others and it's very rewarding.

Angela, Lachlan





I just try and keep it simple by offering basic life skills and a friendly conversation

Changes I've seen

I've run a number of workshops since training as an Educator 10 months ago. I do a lot for the Devonport Play House. We do Kidz in the Kitchen once a month where we make morning tea together. We pick a recipe and the kids get in and help. The kids are aged 0-5 years.

It's usually the same 15 or 20 children over and over again. They come with their parents or carers. A lot of them can now recognise the vegetables and fruit, and they get excited about using those ingredients. Instead of just getting excited about making muffins, they get excited about making muffins with the carrots.

It's great to show them how much fun it really can be. Last Wednesday we just made some apple pieces with little umbrellas. It's just simple things to make food fun.

I also do a lot for the Salvation Army. They have their Make and Bake Program and I help out as an Educator. We just get back to basics. Like last week I taught some people how to peel potatoes. A lot of these people don't have basic cooking skills.

There are people that come along every week now. Some of these families struggle to put a meal on the table but we are helping to change that so people are able to prepare a proper meal for their families. Instead of the food that they might get from the Salvos going brown in the cupboard, they can actually use it.



My approach

My approach to Family Food Patch is getting them involved; allowing the kids and adults to touch and feel, and get their hands in there. Now they want to know what the new fruit or vegetable is every week during the workshops. They are so eager to learn. Once they get involved they just can't get enough.

I try and get the parents involved. Some family day carers come to the community house workshops with five children so they can't be involved with every child. I always have some printed material like recipes or a hand out. I always make sure I have enough information for them to take home.

At the Salvos, I just try and keep it simple by offering basic life skills and a friendly conversation.

What it means to me

You don't think you're doing a lot but then someone comes up and tells you that they had a roast meal, when 12 months before they never would have done that - it makes it very worthwhile!

Cheryle, Devonport





I'm a Mum just like them

Changes I've seen

I trained as an Educator some time ago; probably about 7 years. These days I do a lot of cooking sessions with parents/carers and grandparents. The main changes I have seen over the years are the keenness of families to try new foods or new recipes. I've had people who get really enthusiastic about eating better and who are just so keen for ideas. I love receiving feedback from people who have participated in my cooking sessions. Sometimes they have success and other times they don't but that doesn't matter, they are always eager to share their experiences. I've come across lots of fussy eaters, and I don't just mean the children.... parents can be fussy too! But when they try something new, it's really exciting.

I also love it when people bring a recipe to share. It's really a two way street.

My approach

Getting back to the basics - that's what I'm all about - simple, quick 'n' easy, low budget meals. I use the Family Food Patch recipes but also hunt out recipes from my own collection of cook books, magazines or the internet.

My other key message is to "look on the back of the packet and tin" for recipe ideas. I also try and encourage people to start to read the nutrition labels on the food they buy. I provide them with the Family Food Patch information so they know what it means.

I'm very hands on with my activities; everyone gets involved in preparing and eating the food, and the cleaning up. It's not the Jamie Oliver Cooking Show, with me out the front. It's about the participants and what we all "bring to the table".



I work closely with the staff at the place where I'm doing the cooking sessions. I ask them what kinds of recipes they think will work with the group. Sometimes the group decides the recipe.

The other thing about my approach is probably that I'm 'just' a Mum. I make it clear from the start that I'm a Mum just like them and I did the Family Food Patch training because I'm passionate about my children's and all children's/families' health. I'm not an expert, I just care, and I know that it's easy to eat well.

I work with the Child Health Association and run CHAT and Munch (Playgroup) sessions in George Town and Waverley. I always try and incorporate some fun physical activity into our sessions such as games, use of kiddies sporting equipment, dancing or going for a walk.

What it means to me

To be honest, Family Food Patch has taken me right out of my comfort zone. I used to be the Mum cooking the meals at home, rarely cooking or supplying food for large numbers. Now I'm cooking or organising cooking sessions for two playgroups on a weekly basis, Family Food Patch sessions several times a term (at School Playgroups or Community Houses) and have even trialled one-on-one sessions in the past. It's been a very rewarding experience personally and I've loved meeting new people.

Kathryn, George Town





I just help people find the right answers if they are not really sure.

Changes I've seen

I've been an Educator for about 4 years. When it comes to nutrition and physical activity, I've noticed parents want to do things right. As a Family Food Educator, it's mostly about letting parents know what is healthy and encouraging them where they are doing a good job.

I've had a few Mums that think they are not feeding their kids the right things or think they are missing something in their diets. So I've just talked with them about it. Sometimes I've found that they are meeting most of the basic requirements anyway and they are doing better than they think they are. It's wonderful to be able to give them confirmation. That is one of the more prominent things I've noticed.

My approach

My approach is talking and listening, and answering questions. I have three children myself and it helps me remember the information. I'd just had my first child and was pregnant with my second when I was doing the Family Food Patch course so it was very relevant for me. I was really interested in knowing what children need and what they don't need. So I've been able to be a role model and speak from experience. It helps me to relate to other people and their experiences. I know what it's like. I've asked myself, 'Am I doing the right thing, I've never done this before?' I just help people find the right answers if they are not really sure.

What it means to me

It makes me feel good to be able to give people that reassurance and say, 'you are doing a really good job with what you've done so far.' It's good to be able to ease somebody else's worries a little bit.

Pamela, Ulverstone





A Resource for the Community

Changes I've seen

I trained as an Educator about 10 years ago. I've done all sorts of things over the years from one-on-one stuff to displays and fairs, through to trying to shift the school canteen.

The biggest changes I've seen are probably to do with my involvement with the school. Initially I didn't feel I was having much impact, particularly at my children's primary school. I suggested they go for Cool CAP accreditation but there wasn't the interest at the time. But all that nudging away about nutrition gave me a bit of a reputation I guess, as someone who is passionate about healthy eating. What I'm seeing now is that people are wanting the information, they are actively seeking it. It's funny how things work because teachers from the primary school still ring me (even now that my children no longer attend the school because they are in high school) when they want to know something about nutrition. I think that the overall level of awareness about nutrition has grown. I'd like to think that I was part of that shift in my local community.

I've done the same thing at the high school: just constantly and quietly reminding them about healthy eating. They don't sell soft drinks in the canteen any more. They may be sick and tired of me but it doesn't really matter, in the end I've seen the impact that my pester-power can have!

My approach

My approach is to be approachable and realistic. I'm a parent of four children and I know that parenting is what it is and it's not always easy. I try and be sensible in my approach. So instead of saying no to all 'junk food', I might suggest something that is slightly better nutritionally than another junk food item. I found the information



about the nutritional value of frozen foods in the course really useful because people often feel guilty about eating frozen food but you can suggest it as a healthier 'fast food' option.

I use Family Food Patch as part of my job too. I'm a Child Health Nurse and it's really helped enhance my knowledge. I'm able to pass that on when I'm seeing clients.

I've found it more difficult to promote physical activity than nutrition. I'm not sure why exactly. Maybe it's because I think it's really important that we don't blame parents. Sometimes the way families' can function is by making computer games/TV etc part of their lives. It's difficult to challenge that if there are other things going on for families that make life difficult. I think creating opportunities in the community that encourage fun and participation are a better way to go.

What it means to me

It's been a real privilege being an Educator! It's really rewarding when people in your community know you've done the Family Food Patch training and they ask you for information and ideas. It's nice to be thought of as a resource for the community.

Sally, Wynyard





I'm not afraid to ask those tricky questions

Changes I've seen

I trained as a Family Food Educator last year and work in East Devonport. I use Family Food Patch on an almost daily basis.

I am involved with young Mum's Group, we often do some cooking and I use Family Food Patch recipes. We talk about lunchboxes and about all the different things the Mums can put in them. The Mums explore ideas about healthy options and then go home and put it into practice. I'm there as a facilitator and I throw in my 'two bobs worth' here and there.

I am also part of a Walking Group. Someone always turns up, and we always talk and walk! Often we talk about healthy eating and get some exercise at the same time. I've seen parents who weren't doing any exercise getting out and about, and being social at the same time - it's fantastic!

I'm based at a school at the moment and have the opportunity to be a part of some of the class lesson plans related to healthy eating. I was able to give them information on things such as healthy eating, sugar contents in drinks etc. I organised a bus trip for a group of 75 children, (three classes) to go on a field trip to a farm, apple orchid and the strawberry farm. We had the dental educator come in and talk about healthy teeth and we were able to provide all students with drink bottles and plenty of stickers. The teachers finished the 6 week lesson plan with a healthy afternoon tea for the parents and the children got to take home a recipe book of all the recipes they had used.



I am always encouraging water instead of fruit box's when it comes to rewarding children at special events. I feel I have been a positive influence and will continue to ask questions and suggesting things be done differently.

We have just started Kommunity Kids each Monday and we have about 50 children participating in outside activities. The first night we had the apple corer there. We went through two boxes of apples. The kids just went crazy over the apples.

It is lots of little subtle changes all the time.

My approach

I am a talker. I'm not afraid to ask those tricky questions like, 'Why do we do this?' On Monday this guy said, 'Orange juice is alright its sugar free'. I said, 'Read the label'. It still had (the equivalent of) four cubes of sugar in a glass. We've still got a long way to go but we need to talk about it constantly. It's also about leading by example - making sure there are always healthy choices available.

What it means to me

I call it a high 5 moment!

Sue, East Devonport





That's what I like to do, just give people a taste for something new

Changes I've seen

A lot of the activities I've done as an Educator have been one-offs so I don't know if I've made a difference a lot of the time but they have all been really positive experiences. Giving people the opportunity to try something new, I'm sure has an impact on influencing future choice.

When I was at Table Cape Primary School, for example, participating in a session for parents and children about healthy snack and lunchbox ideas, there was definite enthusiasm and I certainly hope that I was able to inspire some change. They asked a lot of questions and took away shared experiences and ideas. We had really positive feedback from the participants about the activity.

My approach

I've been involved in a wide range of Family Food Patch activities.

We were approached by the Burnie Life Saving Club to present a 'healthy' alternative at one of their get-togethers. They have a regular dinner at the club and they asked us to organise the dinner for them one night. It's a social event and anyone can go. They wanted something different and healthy to try. We made salads, falafel, and trays of fried rice - it was a real success! I don't know that it changed their long term menu ideas but it gave them food for thought. That's what I like to do, just give people a taste for something new, a different way to think about things.



I've done a session at Playgroup on introducing solids. My role was to facilitate the group. They shared stories and experiences. That's another way I like to approach my role, rather than being seen as the 'expert', I encourage everyone to have input and share their experiences and I'll provide my input based on my Family Food Patch training.

I like to get people involved. Small groups are usually the best so no one feels intimidated or too nervous to ask questions. Participation is key.

What it means to me

I feel fabulous when I do Family Food Patch activities. To be part of getting people to think about healthy food ideas is really worthwhile. Feeling that you are participating in potentially improving the health of our children makes me want to do more of it. It's nice to get good feedback but it's also helpful to get negative feedback because it makes you reflect on what you've done so that you can do it better next time.

Family Food Educator, North West





I really enjoy cooking with others

Changes I've seen

Over the years I've done a lot of activities, many of them have involved cooking. I've also done some talks and lunchbox demonstrations. Cooking is my passion and I'm really happy to be able to share it with other people.

The thing that has stood out for me during my time as a Family Food Educator is that people do take notice of what you say or what you show them. I've had lots of people giving me feedback or asking me for further ideas or information after a Family Food Patch session. From the feedback people give me I know that they take at least some of my suggestions on board.

My approach

I'm a big believer in people needing to eat more vegetables so I try and make that my key message. I always incorporate vegetables into my cooking sessions.

I try and keep it interesting by introducing different ways of preparing common ingredients. I try and inspire people to experiment.

I focus on building some rapport with the participants in my sessions. I give out my email or phone number to people in case they have any questions they want to ask me later. I often get contacted by people after a session so that way I know they are listening and keen!



I try and do sessions for both parents and children, sometimes together and sometimes apart. I encourage people to get involved and share their ideas with each other.

I try and give people practical ideas that can make their life easier such as crushing and freezing garlic in advance.

What it means to me

I feel very happy about my role as a Family Food Educator. It's really rewarding when people get back to you and let you know how they've gone with a recipe or to ask you more questions. I've met many lovely people over the years and I really enjoy cooking with others.

Lydia, Launceston





Starting Small

Changes I've seen

Family Food Patch has enabled me to learn about healthy eating and to pass that information on to others in my community. I work as a teacher assistant at St Helens District High School.

I've passed on lots of information to families and provided people with recipe ideas. I have seen families change the way they eat, after showing them easy nutritious recipes.

It takes time to get people to take your messages on board but I have seen some real change in our community. One particular family that I have had contact with over a period of time have started playing outside, exercising and drinking water!

I've seen families who lived on coke and cordial change their habits; (and) families that didn't eat fruit, let alone a balanced diet, are now eating fruit! One family used to play computer games all day but they are changing their ways now and the kids are really enjoying the outdoors. It's fantastic to see and I think I have been able to provide some ideas and support to help.

My approach

My approach is to start with people wherever they are at, if you know what I mean. Showing people that starting small and taking one step at a time can help them to change their lifestyles. Some people are so far from where you want them to be, you just have to be patient and persistent. You have to provide interesting and practical ideas that people can relate to and take on board.



When I'm doing a group activity, I sit down along with all the other parents. We talk about food and make sure that everyone has the opportunity to share ideas. I never ever tell people they are wrong! It's about bringing them on board with your way of thinking. Telling them off would never enable that to happen.

What it means to me

It's really rewarding to see real change among the families I have had contact with. Some of the families really need support to change their ways and I think Family Food Patch is really helping with that. I'm really pleased to be part of it.

Rachel, St Helens

