

STEPHANIE ALEXANDER
KITCHEN GARDEN
FOUNDATION

Growing Harvesting Preparing Sharing

Submission No. 1
(Inq into Obesity)

JE 28/04/08

14th April 2008

Inquiry into Obesity in Australia
Standing Committee on Health & Ageing
PO Box 6021 Parliament House
Canberra
ACT 2600

**RE: Inquiry into Obesity in Australia
Food Education for Primary school children in Australia**

Health professionals and educators in the developed world are increasingly concerned about the growth of childhood obesity and of the need to find a way to influence the food habits of our children, both now and for future generations. Pamphlets, guidelines, ticks and pyramids are acknowledged to have made little impact. We know what is best to eat for optimum health. Why then do the children not want to eat it?

I believe that children need to be educated about food, where it comes from, how it is grown, and how to prepare it for maximum enjoyment and maximum nutrition. They need to discover that difference is exciting not alarming, and learn new skills for life. They also need to experience the social importance of the table. Children learn best through doing, through positive examples, through trial and error. We need to capture their interest, curiosity, and energy as well as their appetite.

The Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation is piloting a program that addresses these needs. The program has the support of both the Victorian State Government and the Federal Government. Currently 27 Victorian primary schools are receiving State funding to assist in establishing the necessary infrastructure of a teaching kitchen and a productive garden. Over the next four years the pilot program will be progressively expanded to a further

250 primary schools via a partnership between the Australian Federal Government and the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation.

We receive more than 30,000 hits a week on our website, an indication of the interest in our work. Daily we receive enquiries from schools from all over the country wanting to know how they too can have a Kitchen Garden. The reality is that there are more than 7000 government primary schools in Australia . 250 primary schools will be a good start but there is plenty more to be done.

We believe that every primary school ought to be able to apply for a grant that enables it to construct a teaching kitchen and create a teaching garden so that every primary school can offer a comprehensive and pleasurable program of food education to its students. The Kitchen Garden program also offers classroom teachers unparalleled opportunities to expand on the concepts being explored in the practical classes.

As well as the need for infrastructure there is a need for effective training of specialists who can deliver this program in a manner that maximises the likelihood of students making positive changes in food choices for the longer-term. These specialists will need to be supported in the establishment phase by skilled project officers, based in every State and Territory.

If every Australian child had access to food education that stressed seasonality, freshness and flavour, and that delivered the skills and the enthusiasm to reproduce some of this food at home we would have come a long way to solving what all experts seem to agree is THE public health challenge of the near future.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephanie Alexander". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Stephanie Alexander OAM