

# Yirrkala Active Cooking

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## **What is Yirrkala Active Cooking?**

Yirrkala Active Cooking is an exciting initiative that supports the Yolngu young people of Yirrkala Community located 13km from Nhulunbuy in East Arnhem Land, Northern Territory. This is a collaborative nutrition and physical activity program coordinated by Stacey Dwyer, the Sport & Recreation Officer of Yirrkala Dhanbul Community Association and Angela Colbey and Craig Edwards, Nutritionists from the Department of Health and Community Services in Nhulunbuy. It runs every Tuesday after school and during the school holidays. The program provides regular opportunities for Yolngu young people to learn about healthy food shopping, food hygiene, cooking skills and the health benefits of proper nutrition and to have a fun experience cooking and being physically active in a beautiful location on the outskirts of the community.

## **How was the health issue and target group identified?**

The Sport & Recreation Officer and Nutritionists realised young Yolngu people didn't have the food skills to have a healthy diet. As a result it was identified that nutrition education in school that may occur only 1-2 times per term, was not enough. Regular practical cooking opportunities to complement the education were seen as a strategy. By targeting the young people after school it was recognised we could address this issue early in their lives and at a time of the day when they were looking for things to do. Young people were targeted as the potential to create positive, life-long habits and have an impact on their wider families as well. Yirrkala Active Cooking also uses the 'Youth Committee' co-ordinated by Anglicare staff, the Sport & Recreation officer and the Nutritionists. This is an established committee of young people who have a voice to decide on all initiatives run by these three organisations in

Yirrkala. It ensures that Yirrkala Active Cooking is wanted by the community and it determines what kind of meals should be cooked and what kinds of sports should be played.

## **Collaboration is the key**

The key to the success of Yirrkala Active Cooking is the collaborative approach between Yirrkala Dhanbul Community Association and the Department of Health and Community Services. Once the youth decide what meal they require for the following week, the Nutritionists provide a shopping list which the Sport & Recreation Officer purchases. The Yirrkala Dhanbul Community Association council provides weekly funding for the food ingredients to be purchased. Transport is provided after school and during school holidays every week by vehicles from both the Council and the Nutritionists as the location is on the outskirts

of Yirrkala community on a bushland beach. At the start of each session the Nutritionists run the nutrition and cooking sessions and this is followed by the Sport and Recreation Officer running physical activity sessions. This program could not exist without the strong collaborative efforts of Yirrkala Dhanbul Community Association and the Department of Health and Community Services. During the school holidays this is run twice a week along with 3 on 3 basketball, hip hop dance workshops and bush tucker hunting trips.

## **Innovation**

It has been innovative by addressing the lack of after school activities in the community for young people. This program offers an enjoyable, safe and fun environment every week that equips the young Yolngu community with basic, yet vital life skills. While the children and young people are so busy having



**Nutritionists Angela Colbey and Craig Edwards.**

fun preparing and cooking food to hip hop music on the beach, they don't realise they are learning such important life lessons on nutrition and cooking for themselves and their family. By taking the young people to the beach on the outskirts of town, they avoid the other distractions in town and can enjoy the activities in a safe environment.

A remarkable innovation that has emerged has been the trust and strength in relationships that have developed between the staff and the youth. This has been an unexpected, yet powerful and emotional outcome which has allowed the Sport and Recreation Officer and Nutritionists to deal with social and emotional issues discreetly yet effectively with the children and young people. Without the regular contact with the community, they would not have been able to build the strong bond they currently enjoy and cherish. A future innovation is to involve two young local Yirrkala young people to work with the Sport and Recreation Officer as trainees to learn how to run Sport and Recreation programs in the community.

**Outcomes**

- **Skills** – to develop the skills of young people in order for them to make healthier food choices. Participants are able to identify what the healthy ingredients are and what kinds of foods are healthy and not healthy.
- **Policy** – a new policy has been established for school holiday events whereby only cold water and healthy foods are provided instead of cordial and sausage sizzles.



**Sport and recreation officer Stacey Dwyer with the kids from Yirrkala Active Cooking.**

- **Infrastructure** – when the program started there was no equipment, however one year on, the team won a small grant from the Foundation for Young Australians to purchase cooking equipment and sporting goods.
- **Sustainability** – Yirrkala Dhanbul Community Association has decided to provide funds for weekly food ingredients. Additionally the Department of Health and Community Services has agreed to provide Nutritionists. Therefore there has been the establishment of effective and regular 'after school' and 'school holiday' activities.
- **Partnerships** – strong partnerships now exist between Yirrkala Dhanbul Community Association Sport and



Recreation and the Department of Health and Community Services Nutritionists to ensure a collaborative approach to services for children and young people.

- **Knowledge** – the young people are now able to recognise the names of ingredients and how to cut and prepare a variety of meats and vegetables that they didn't know how to do in the early sessions.

#### **The future?**

- Yirrkala Dhanbul Community Association has recognised the success and are planning to refurbish the Sport and Recreation room to install a kitchen for more cooking activities on other days and to run Yirrkala Active Cooking inside during washouts in the wet season.
- The vision is also to trial this program at another Yolngu community in Mangarr during the term 2 school holidays in

2007.

- The traineeships for two local youths will increase the capacity of these young people and provide employment opportunities.

Special thanks must be given to the Yirrkala Dhanbul Sport and Recreation Officer, Stacey Dwyer for making this program possible in 2007.

#### **For further information**

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