

Healthy Cooking Program with 4 Ingredients or Less at Ramahyuck District Aboriginal Corporation

The Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO) Nutrition group had a yarn with Karen Templeton, Clinical Nurse Specialist, from [Ramahyuck District Aboriginal Corporation](#) in Sale. Karen shared her knowledge and experience of Ramahyuck's Healthy Cooking Program.

How does the program run?

Ramahyuck's *Healthy Cooking Program with 4 Ingredients or Less* has, so far, run in 2016 and 2017. Sessions were delivered every fortnight over three months. Around five to eight women came along to each session, which is a great number for cooking programs and there's limited space in the kitchen! Brenda Farnham, Aboriginal Health Worker, and I coordinated the sessions.



Ramahyuck District Aboriginal Corporation, Sale

Why did you start the program?

The program was designed to create social connections, share skills in healthy food preparation, food safety, meal planning, food budgeting and reduce the frequency of takeaway foods purchased. It was loosely based on the use of four ingredients or less to keep recipes uncomplicated and affordable.

How was nutrition information provided?

Whilst preparing the meals together, nutrition information was discussed in an informal way. We talked about:

- reducing fat, salt and sugar (for example using apple puree in recipes instead of oil, reducing the amount of sugar in recipes but having little effect on taste);
- reducing salt and using herbs and spices to add flavor instead;
- choosing leaner cuts of meat, cutting fat off meat before cooking, cooking in stock for flavor;

- healthy serving sizes; and
- using a healthy portion plate.

We'd talk about how to add more veggies into meals, such as grating carrot into spaghetti bolognese – no one will notice and it's good for you! We also took into consideration participants' literacy levels and paired participants with lower confidence in reading with those with greater confidence. We also made use of images where possible.

What are the benefits to the Community?

After meals are prepared (and while a healthy, tasty dessert is cooking) we'd share the meal. This is a lovely way for us to have a yarn about anything and everything. We'd often share tips and hints about cooking, food and housework.

We've had participants go on to cater wonderful in-house events to much praise from attendees.

Sometimes we'd be having a laugh and staff would come into the kitchen and say, "You sound like you're having such a good time!" It really strengthened connections between staff at Ramahyuck.

What challenges have you faced?

Having enough people come along each week is always a challenge but seeing around five to eight women show up every session is huge! These women take new skills and knowledge out to their families. It really creates change.

Enthusiasm to keep going with the program can be a challenge. Even if only one person comes along, you need to know that the program is doing good things for that one person and then extending to their family and friends.

What advice would you give to others?

Don't go into the program thinking that you're going to change the world. Take it one step at a time.

Make it all about the participants. Make meaningful change and share how change can happen when it comes to preparing healthy meals. When talking about reducing high fat, sugar and salt foods, provide ideas about what healthy, tasty meals people can make instead.

A healthy cooking program is something that every Community organisation should do. The nutrition side is important but equally important is supporting people in the Community who might be feeling alone. Seeing the change in people who come along and feel empowered to take more opportunities in life is extraordinary.

For more information, contact:

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