

Social determinants of health: Opportunities for youth through education and social support

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Introduction

Youth who do not attain a Year 12 certificate or post-school qualification have fewer employment opportunities and are more likely to suffer chronic disease and mental health problems in later life.¹ Improving health outcomes for youth disengaged from school requires a collaborative approach that addresses social determinants of health through development of knowledge, social and self-management skills, social support networks and self-efficacy.²

Background

The Youth Opportunities to Education (Yo2Ed) program creates opportunities for youth who are disengaged from mainstream school, to participate in nationally accredited courses through TAFE New England Institute, Tamworth. The Yo2Ed program is based on a wrap-around service model to support the mental health, wellbeing and healthy lifestyle development of participants. It addresses social determinants of health by providing a safe and supportive environment for:

- education and skills training
- workshops from health and social services and
- opportunities for participants to give and receive support from the community

The Yo2Ed Project is a partnership brokered by Careers Network under the Links to Learning funding program. The Yo2Ed wrap-around services have been developed in collaboration with Hunter New England Health Aboriginal Drug and Alcohol Team and Tamworth Aboriginal Medical Service.



The University of Newcastle Department of Rural Health (UONDRH) community engagement program provides opportunities for students on rural placements to engage with communities and conduct community health education workshops under academic guidance. This project was undertaken as an Independent Professional Practice placement as part of the Bachelor of Nutrition and Dietetics at The University of Newcastle.

Nutrition workshop development

It was identified that Yo2Ed participants had limited cooking skills and poor nutrition awareness. This led to a community nutrition project being developed in conjunction with students and staff from the UONDRH community engagement program and Yo2Ed Tamworth. The program aimed to improve Yo2Ed participants cooking skills and nutrition related health habits.

Barriers to education included low functional literacy and numeracy, low self-esteem, varying ages and learning or mental health issues. To engage participants in nutrition workshops a tactile, participatory approach to education was used incorporating experiential learning.

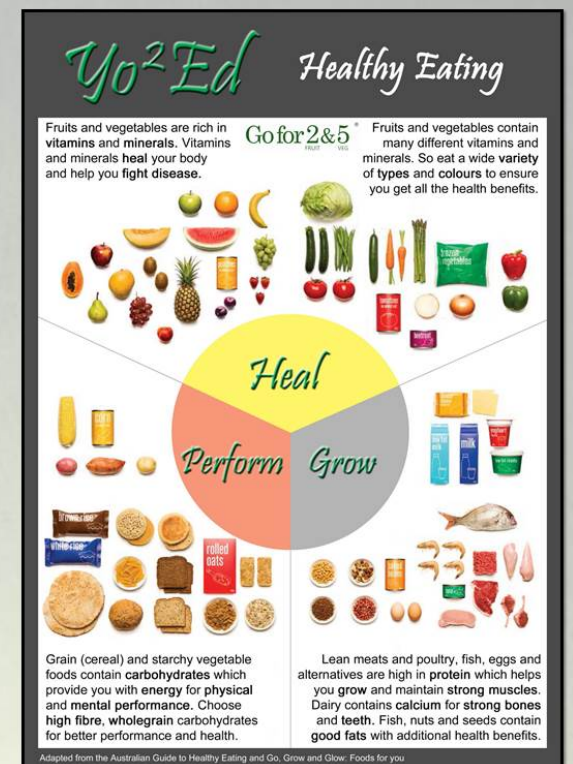


Three nutrition workshops were conducted and an end-of-year presentation night offered an opportunity for participants to give back to the community and showcase skills and knowledge learnt by preparing food for family and community members. Existing nutrition resources and recipes were modified, and new ones developed in collaboration with Yo2Ed participants throughout the program. Resources and recipes developed throughout the program were compiled into a booklet and presented to participants during the final cooking workshop. A semi-qualitative group program evaluation method was employed to gauge participant satisfaction and program impact while encouraging discussion and reflection upon program components.

Results

In response to questions relating to the impact of program components on unhealthy nutrition habits (i.e. skipping breakfast, low intake of vegetables and excessive intake of fast foods and high sugar drinks):

- participants demonstrated a good understanding of contributing factors to unhealthy food related behaviours and
- expressed a strong desire to make positive changes to all unhealthy nutrition habits identified during the needs assessment



Group evaluation of recipes and resources developed in collaboration with participants throughout the program revealed:

- a high level of participant satisfaction with meals cooked throughout the program and
- improved cooking skills and confidence in their ability to replicate recipes at home

Feedback from the Yo2Ed program coordinator suggested:

- participants eating patterns and attitude toward healthy food had improved
- participants received great feedback from community on food at presentation night,
- increased confidence and resilience, complementing the overall program aims

Collaboration between the Yo2Ed program and UONDRH has the potential to provide at risk youth with the skills and self-efficacy that will enable them to better manage the emotional and social pressures that lead to the adoption of detrimental nutrition-related health habits.



References

1. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Health and Wellbeing of Young Australians. Canberra, ACT: Australian Government; 2010. Available from: www.aihw.gov.au.
2. Bandura A. Health promotion by social cognitive means. Health Educ Behav. 2004;31(2):143-64.