

# Elliott Heads State School 1999

Elliott Heads State School is located on the outskirts of the Elliott Heads township, 22km east of Bundaberg. The school operates a preschool to Year 7 campus and caters for 80 students drawn from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds. There is a relatively high enrolment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Many students are highly motivated and exhibit patterns of strong academic interest. The school offers a high level of pastoral care and a balanced curriculum to meet the needs of a diverse range of students whose interests, abilities and prior experiences vary considerably.

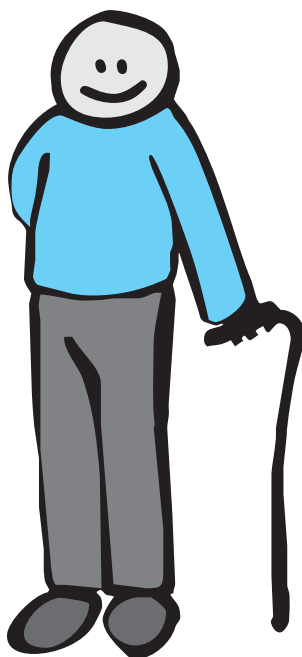
## starting out

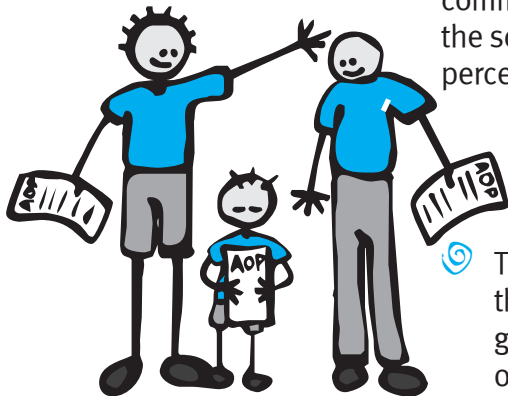
All schools in Wide Bay were invited to submit for funding under a Wide Bay Health Promoting Schools Seeding Grant program, through the Central Public Health Unit—Wide Bay. The Elliott Heads State School submission for a social networking program was successful, along with 11 other school communities in Wide Bay.

For some time staff had wanted to improve the links between the school and the wider community and increase the level of community involvement in the school. As the local population consists of many older and retired people, the school wanted to put in place ongoing strategies that would encourage and enable older people to be involved in the school.

The population of older persons was considered a significant part of the community. Many students did not have regular contact with older people, such as grandparents. It was important to the school to provide an avenue for students to have regular contact with older persons/generations to encourage a rapport, understanding and respect between these two groups. The school believed that quality contact with 'elders' is intrinsic to the well-being and general development of students. Thus, with funds, motivation and support from the local Public Health Unit, the Adopt-a-Granny/Grandpa social networking program was initiated in 1997.

The Adopt-a-Granny/Grandpa social networking program was designed using the *health promoting schools* approach





and aimed to give students contact with older people in the community. It was also hoped that the activity would improve the school's image and generate a more positive public perception of the school.

## what happened?

“The older people are actually, making these things for a reason. We thank them and acknowledge the contribution they have made to our school.”

principal

“The craft class got the residents out of the retirement village and sharing their knowledge with parents and the adult community. What they were doing was really appreciated.”

principal

- ④ The social networking program was included as part of the school's Annual Operational Plan and budget. The goal was linked to Education Queensland's strategic goal of 'confidence in public education'. By linking it in this way, it was thought the *health promoting schools* activity would more readily become a formal part of the school's program.
- ④ Two volunteer Community Liaison Officers were engaged to coordinate and manage the social networking program. These people were members of the Parents and Citizens' Association and possessed extensive knowledge of the local community.
- ④ The social networking program was publicised in the school newsletter and local newspaper. The feature article in the newspaper generated much public interest and as a result, local, younger people joined the program. However, the specific, local target group of senior citizens did not initially perceive they had a lot to offer and gave a limited response.
- ④ Personal letters were sent inviting older people who possessed particular skills and talents to share these within the school. The letters highlighted the involvement the school would like people to have.
- ④ Funding was used to transport retirement village residents to the school once a fortnight as, due to travel restrictions, some initially declined the opportunity to participate. They joined with members of the Elliott Heads Parents and Citizens' Art and Craft club to make handcrafts that are donated and sold to generate profit for the school.
- ④ The school thanked the retirement village residents for their contribution. A bus was provided to transport the residents to the school's 'cent sale' where their contributions were publicly recognised. Residents thoroughly enjoyed the day and entertainment provided.

- It was initially thought that the older people would be able to work with the students on an individual basis. However, they found that for a number of reasons, the older people were anxious about working with students and preferred to work more directly with other members of the school community. To overcome this concern, the older people began working with parents and other school community members, who together work with students occasionally.
- Four local people are involved in the school on a weekly basis and another two who participate in special events. One of the latter is an elder of the local Indigenous community and the other is an ex-serviceman who participates in ANZAC Day activities.

## enablers and barriers

The Community Liaison Officers played a vital role in the success of the program. Throughout the program the personal approach used by the Community Liaison Officers to invite and encourage participation of elderly people has greatly enhanced outcomes. The funding received from the Wide Bay Health Promoting Schools Seeding Grant was also a strong enabler.

The rural location of Elliott Heads State School posed some barriers to easy access and transport for older people. The school overcame this by providing a bus service. However, finding the funding to continue and expand the social networking program may be a barrier that will need to be addressed by the school and the Parents and Citizens' Association.



The school found that although they wanted to involve more retirees in school activities, many of these people already had a wide range of other commitments and really did not have time to be involved. Those people who had time to be involved did not have easy access to the school.

“We’ve gone a long way in enhancing public confidence in our school. This was our school’s strategic goal. More members of Elliott Heads and the broader community have come to know our school. Because the elderly program has been viewed in such a positive light the whole view of the school has been enhanced.”

principal

## benefits

Initiating the Adopt-a-Granny/Grandpa program has changed the way the school works with the broader community. It has demonstrated an approach of greater contact, interaction and more open communication with the local community. It has raised more opportunities to include older people as a part of school activities. This is appreciated for the links and relationships the students and school are able to establish. Public confidence in the school has also been enhanced.

It is felt that the mental health and well-being of the older participants in the program have been enhanced. The program helps to reduce the isolation of older people and provides an opportunity for them to share their knowledge. Retirement village residents were also given a purpose to their tasks (for example, making craft for the school cent sale) and felt a connection to the outside community.

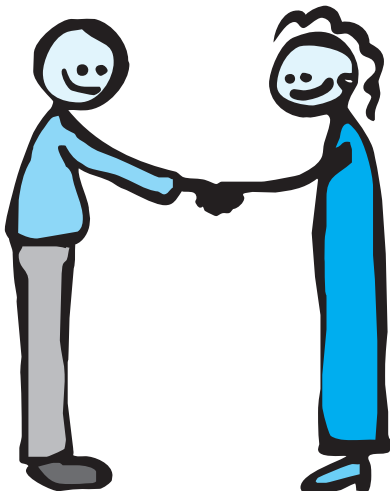
Outcomes for students are difficult to measure. For students directly interacting with older people, it appears that the contact can be invaluable. Conducting a survey about attitudes of the students and the older people may provide interesting data about outcomes.

## the future

The school is currently discussing how it can viably and financially maintain its involvement in the Adopt-a-Granny/Grandpa program as *health promoting schools* activities become dependent on sole funding from the school. As a small school Elliott Heads finds that future *health promoting schools* activities will need to be funded through the school budget and Parents and Citizens’ Association funds.

The social networking program fits within the informal curriculum. It is expected that the release of the new Year 1-10 Health and Physical Education Syllabus will provide more opportunities for the school to link the program with the formal curriculum. By including the social networking program in the Annual Operational Plan, it is hoped that the activity will become a formalised part of the school program.

The school is hoping to work more closely with the Indigenous community by including the local Indigenous people in the social networking program. It is felt that direct student contact



“We acknowledge good nutrition makes a difference to concentration and learning. You can’t teach them if they are hungry. It’s a really basic need.”

teacher

“We had a plan, but it didn’t work. We really had to change things as we went along.”

principal

with this group is needed to genuinely assist in making Indigenous culture a valued part of the school community.

There is also opportunity for including more people from Bundaberg in the social networking program on a more regular basis. Alternative approaches (such as a more personal or mentoring approach) and finding other networks will be needed to achieve this. The school hopes to operate with an approach that people can come in and regularly work more directly with the students. The school also plans (if funding allows) to provide transport (a bus circuit) to the school for targeted, local people. If the school is able to allocate funding to continue the program, the school will consider collecting data about outcomes on which to base further actions.

The school is currently considering how it can introduce other initiatives that will enhance the health and well-being of students. A need has been identified to provide a breakfast and lunch program for students whose nutritional needs are not being met. This together with the introduction of a Healthy Tuckshop policy would enhance students’ nutrition.

## reflections

The school has learnt much from their involvement with the social networking program. Of greatest significance is an appreciation of the difficulty of involving the whole school community in school-based activities. To overcome these difficulties, the school recognises the valuable contribution that existing networks can make in providing access to individuals within the school community.

“An effective way to teach diversity is:

- to let children experience diversity
- to meet people from diverse age groups and cultures
- to encourage respect for diversity, including age
- and therefore to encourage respect for elders”.

“Our core business is education – not just academic education, but also social education. If you can add that into the school to enhance what children learn, that’s even better.”

# Jundah State School 1999


Jundah State School is a small outback school with an annual average enrolment of 20 students across five year levels. The school is located 220km south west of Longreach in a small town of about 100 people. Staff include a full-time teaching principal, a part-time teacher aide, administrative assistant, cleaner and grounds person.

## starting out

*Health promoting schools* literature and information was received by the school's Parents and Citizens' (P&C) Association and tabled at one of their meetings. It was decided that the school would like to pursue further information. The school had an existing health program that involved health talks and strong links with the Primary Health Centre and other community groups in Jundah. There had also been some discussion within the school community about addressing sun safety issues. The P&C Association and teaching staff felt that adopting a *health promoting schools* approach fitted with what they were already doing and the direction they wanted to take.

The school was offered the opportunity to obtain a funding grant and support from the local Queensland Health, Central Public Health Unit. A sun safety proposal was designed using the *health promoting schools* approach and submitted for funding. The *health promoting schools* approach has since been applied to the school in many more areas other than sun safety.

## what happened?

 Prior to learning about the *health promoting schools* approach, the school had a number of activities in place. These included:

- a health program consisting of a series of fortnightly health talks, attended by students voluntarily after school. This program strongly involved staff from the local health centre
- an 'Adopt-a-Cop' who had been with the school for the previous five years. The 'school cop' interacted

with the students in the Project Club

— an interest in addressing sun safety issues.

- ④ As part of the school's *health promoting schools* approach, these strategies expanded and become more structured through using the *health promoting schools* framework.
- ④ Initially, teaching staff had chosen the health talk topics. Health issues were later chosen by the students with some interesting topics arising, including hair and skin care, and visits to the hospital. The aim was to provide interesting, fun and educative health talks. Health talks were well attended despite being voluntary, with attendance ranging from at least half the students to almost full attendance.
- ④ Addressing the issue of sun safety had gained support from the teaching principal and the P&C Association, but the support of the whole school community was desired. To ensure that this issue was important to all, a survey (the 'sun protection' survey) was sent out to parents through the school newsletter. Those surveys received by the school showed overwhelming support for pursuing sun safety within the school. This information was gained before going ahead with the *health promoting schools* submission.
- ④ A Queensland Cancer Fund education officer was invited to the school to talk with the students about the risks of sun exposure and skin safety.
- ④ A "No Hat — No Play" policy was already in place in the school and continued to be enforced.
- ④ Wide-brimmed hats were added to the school uniform and compulsory wearing of these hats was enforced. The school was able to talk with retailers about the *health promoting schools* approach and how wide-brimmed hats and sun safety were an important issue in their school community. The school felt that this gave them greater bargaining power and resulted in reduced cost of the hats, allowing the school to purchase Jundah State School hat badges.
- ④ The school celebrated the arrival of the wide brimmed hats with a launch that included 'Syd the Seagull' and the Queensland Cancer Fund education officer as special guests. The whole community was involved with the launch with parents and the community invited.

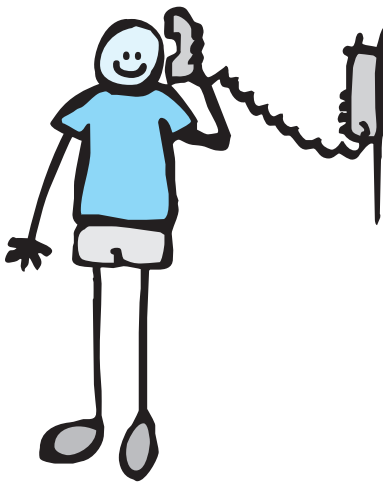
"We did a survey to check that this was everyone's opinion, not just the P&C executive's and mine."

teaching principal

"If agencies work together, it can be a win-win situation for both parties."

staff member

- 🌀 The application of sunscreen was incorporated into the students' visits to the pool.
- 🌀 'Portashades' (portable shade shelters) were purchased for use at outdoor events for protection against the sun.
- 🌀 The school maintained the Adopt-a-Cop program as it felt that strong community relations were important, especially in small communities.



“Ensure that projects are attainable. If we had made it too huge, we would have lots of barriers. We made sure the project was attainable – we sat down as a group in the beginning and worked out ‘what’s reasonable here’.”

staff member

## enablers and barriers

A phone call every now and again from staff at the Central Public Health Unit in Rockhampton provided support that the school community felt they needed. It was also encouraging to receive acknowledgment, acceptance and praise from other schools for adopting the *health promoting schools* approach.

The *health promoting schools* approach provided a structure and framework in which the school could place what it was already doing. The input and role modelling of staff and parents was important to success.

School community members were inspired and had a better understanding of the *health promoting schools* process after accessing the Queensland Health Promoting Schools Network homepage on the internet and reading the available case studies. Other resources, such as “Working toward a Sunsmart Queensland” by the Queensland Cancer Fund, were also useful.

It was felt that more time would have allowed greater promotion and awareness raising of the *health promoting schools* process and activities within both the school community and the wider community.

Another barrier was remoteness that is something the school community lives with all the time. Limited human resources were a potential barrier to such a small school, but this was overcome by setting attainable goals and objectives based on consideration of available resources.

## benefits

The trips to the hospital arranged through the school's health program have resulted in reduced stress surrounding

“..the students have been the winners here: they’ve got their parental support, education and awareness of sun safety has increased and that’s what our schools are all about – increased learning outcomes for our kids so we’ve achieved that.”

staff member

“I suppose it’s (the health promoting schools approach) given us a direction too.”

staff member

“Sunscreen is not a problem now. The kids form a kind of chain and do each others backs when we go to the pool.”

staff member

medical procedures for the students. Due to their experience with medical procedures in a non-threatening, supportive environment, the trauma of immunisation was greatly reduced. Also, the students became familiar with the flying doctors’ nurse, ambulance officer teachers’ aide.

There has been a change in attitude and behaviour for both students and staff in their hat wearing behaviour. The wearing of hats and application of sunscreen has been easy to enforce as students and staff are aware of the risks and prevention strategies.

The hat launch was fun! The celebration included races between staff in erecting the ‘portashades’.

Adopting a *health promoting schools* approach had benefits for all parties involved. Community links were strengthened and expanded to other government agencies. Parents became more involved and had a say in the school.

The school community felt they were more focused as to what issues were important to the school community. The *health promoting schools* approach provided “the academic rigour” and a more formal basis to the direction the school was seeking already at a chalk-face (grass-roots) level.

This approach has raised the awareness of students about a variety of health issues that are important to them and the rest of the school community. The Life Education van teacher commented on the sun safety knowledge of the students. This was evidence that the students’ learning had increased.

Differences have occurred and continued to occur in the way that teaching and learning was approached – through the increased use of out-of-school resources and the greater involvement of students in selecting topics that will be addressed in the school program.

## the future

The school is currently planning activities for Melanoma Day this year in conjunction with the Cancer Fund. Compulsory wearing of wide-brimmed hats will be linked into the ‘supportive school environment’ document.

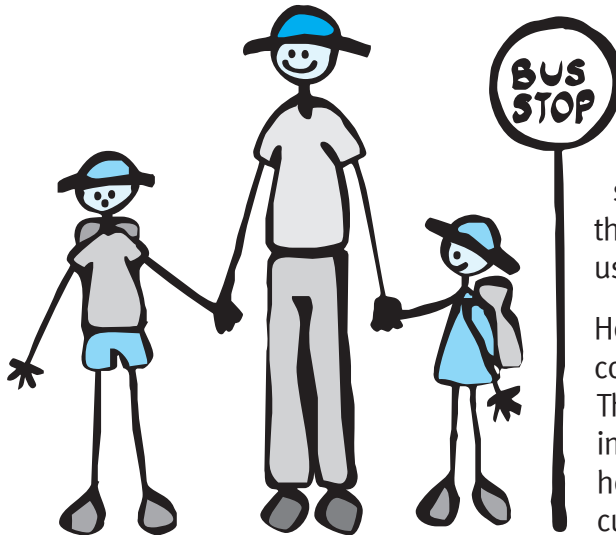
The future will involve working to maintain what has already been established. It is easier to start programs than it is to maintain the programs, practices and awareness levels. The school community may look at starting a new project next

“If you’re not in it, you can’t win it.”

staff member

year but they remain aware that this is only worthwhile if the school has the ability to follow through and maintain present projects.

The school community plans to continue expanding the sun safety project to include swim shirts for use by students when swimming. Consultation with parents on the design of a new school uniform is also under way and will be continued.



Members of the school community involved in the ‘Save Our Skin’ project plan to sit down together and reflect on the achievements and processes used so far.

Health talks are currently conducted outside of school hours. The school intends to look at integrating the promotion of health issues into the mainstream curriculum.

## reflections

“In a positive way I’ve learnt that if you’re prepared to make the effort and pick up on things, there can be lots of great initiatives out there that are going to have benefits for your whole school community – if you’re prepared to nurture it and make it happen.”

staff member

When the school reflected upon what had happened, they were pleased with what they had done and how much they had achieved. However, at the time, they did not consider it to be that special and they did not anticipate the benefits.

Although difficult, it was important to maintain the practices started and continue them all the way through. “We were able to achieve because we set an obtainable goal.”

The school recommended reading the *health promoting schools* correspondence. They felt that it expanded their awareness of initiatives and provided ideas and advice.

“For **our** school community, what we’ve done and the way we’ve gone about it, has been appropriate.”

“Overall it’s been very positive for our school community to be involved in it.”

# School of Today 1999



The School of Today is a small, independent primary and secondary school consisting of 35 students and seven staff. It is situated at Pandoin, just outside Rockhampton. The school caters for a wide variety of students including those with learning disabilities and chemical sensitivities.

The school aims to provide every child with a safe, healthy, caring learning environment. The staff of the school believe that this environment can minimise the effect of chemicals and other health problems on academic and social development and performance.

## starting out

The school had adopted a health promoting philosophy since its inception by a naturopath, two years ago. The school first heard about the *health promoting schools* approach when contacted by staff from the Central Public Health Unit in Rockhampton. Prior to this, the School of Today was already following many of the principles of the *health promoting schools* approach.

## what happened?

- It was the belief of the initiator of the school that improving the physical environment could lessen the toxic effects of the environment on children's health. Based on this philosophy, the school set out to provide the environment that the students required.
- The school employs supportive and dedicated staff who understand the children's problems and therefore, contribute to a healthy, happy environment.
- The academic approach adopted by the school is to develop student-centred curriculum ie. curriculum that is designed to meet the individual needs of each student. Students are provided with a learning environment that allows progress at their own individual rates rather than

"We use a very broad and holistic approach to the health and education of students."

teacher

The school “tries to promote [health] in all spheres of the school – through the way we make our fundraising, through the curriculum, through our own staff actions and through [educating] parents [to] carry it through at home.”

teacher

“We put as much emphasis on the students’ social and emotional health as we do on their physical health.”

teacher

being expected to perform to a standard set by the school system. Students still have certain requirements to fulfil for completion of each year level. However, because students can work at their own pace, this means students are rewarded for hard work by reaching their goal sooner.

☺ The school’s commitment to catering for individual needs means that the school can often be more flexible than most. For example, a child diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) who finds sitting still for the entire morning session impossible, may be allocated extra playtime, or be encouraged to work on a number of different activities during that time. The other students understand that this is not favouritism but a necessary part of providing an appropriate environment for this student.

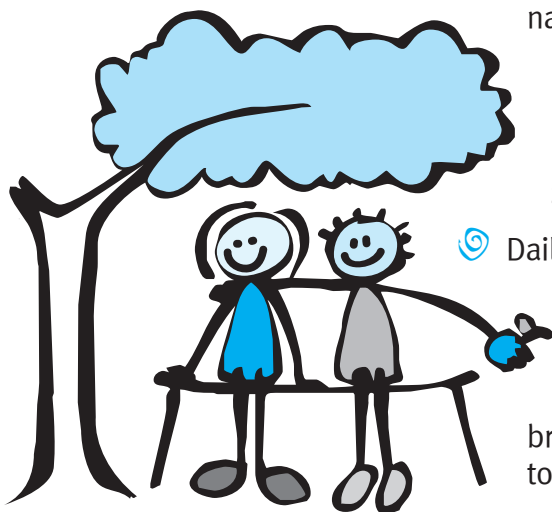
☺ Providing a clean and unpolluted physical environment for students and staff is of vital importance to the school. In addition to encouraging the use of only natural, organic, unscented personal care products, the school:

- uses only water-based paints for art and classroom activities (the paint used on classroom walls is also water based)
- uses non-toxic ‘edible’ glue
- does not use pesticides or herbicides
- limits the use of whiteboard markers.

☺ The school has a policy that strongly encourages healthy food at school for both staff and students. Staff are encouraged to set an example. Healthy food and snack ideas are often provided to parents in the school newsletter. A small school tuckshop offers only pure, natural and healthy food.

☺ Special curriculum units include cooking, food and nutrition (including learning about the chemical quality of food), vegetable growing and general health.

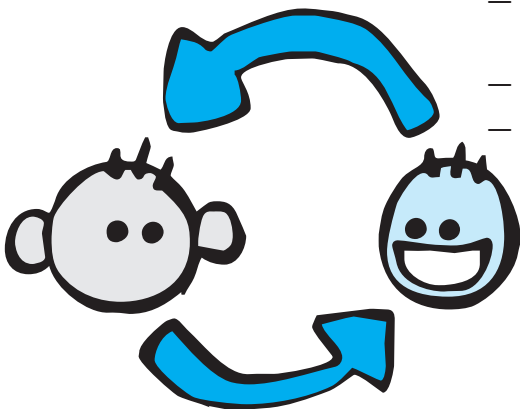
☺ Daily exercise is incorporated into the school day with half an hour of morning activity. This includes cross-patterning exercises (aerobic style exercises) which aim to improve coordination and communication between the two sides of the brain by encouraging the left and right hemispheres to work together.



“People volunteered because they could see the social benefit that the school community was giving the community at large.”

teacher

- ④ Volunteers (including parents) are valued in the school and encouraged to be involved with school activities, including work in the classroom.
- ④ School staff noted that low self-esteem of students stemming from their academic and/or family problems was affecting their school work. The staff felt some of these problems were too big or too personal for them to deal with themselves. Therefore, the school employed a full-time school counsellor to provide support and assist with the mental and emotional health of students, their families and the rest of the school community (including staff and their families). The counsellor’s role also includes:
  - teaching social behaviours and how to work effectively within a social situation
  - educating students and families in areas such as respect of self and others
  - parent/child communication and family conflict resolution.
- ④ The location of the school was chosen with consideration of the type of environment it would provide for the school community, that is, it is set in two and a half acres of bushland away from the chemical pollutants of the town.
- ④ The school is committed to raising community awareness of the adverse effects of chemicals, preservatives and additives in food on everyone’s health, and in particular, children showing symptoms of ADD.
- ④ The broader school community is encouraged to become involved through:
  - family bar-b-que days where food with no preservatives is provided
  - the use of newsletters which include brochures, information and seminar invitations
  - parent evenings
  - the welcoming and valuing of volunteers.



## enablers and barriers

The dedication of staff and the large proportion of volunteers have been very helpful in maintaining and implementing the policies and approach of the school. The school principal is a full-time volunteer.

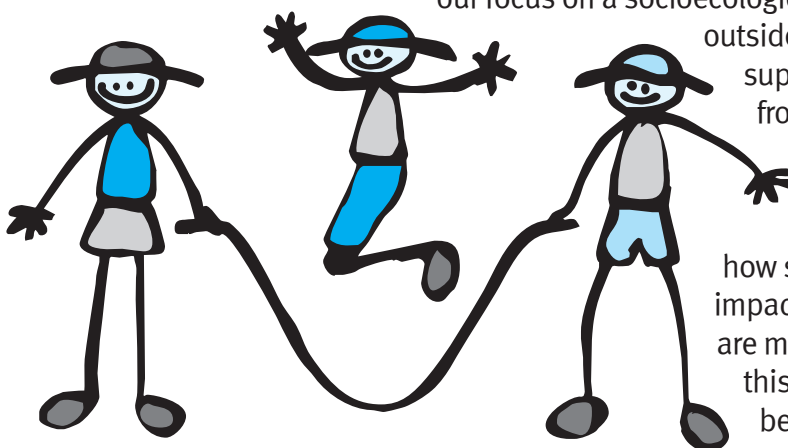
Financial support was gained from the government who recognised the school as deserving of some funding. This financial support allows the school to accept all students, regardless of socioeconomic background as fees can be adapted to suit family needs.

Parents who understand the principles of the school are important to the success of the school. These parents understand the limitations placed on what students can do, eat or can be around and help to uphold the policies of the school. However, a lack of understanding in the community, in the families of students, and in the students about their own conditions, can be a barrier. Time often has to be spent educating the parents as to how they can help their children cope better with their conditions.

The constant change that is necessary to cater for the individual needs of students can be very challenging for the whole school community. This is particularly obvious when new students come to the school. The process of making decisions that is sometimes necessary to ensure the best processes/plans are identified for a particular student can sometimes lead to disagreement among those involved.

An unexpected barrier was the difficulty the school has had in convincing professionals and agencies to acknowledge that there is “more to health than the five food groups” and that what the school is doing is actually beneficial. Because of our focus on a socioecological model of health, support from outside agencies has been limited. The

support that is received is usually from the academic community rather than the health sector where people have a broader understanding of ‘health’ and how significantly our environment impacts on our health. These people are more likely to recognise the benefit this school can offer students with behavioural or learning difficulties.



“My own lifestyle away from the school has changed from working here.”

staff member

“The more contact [people have] with the school, the more they tend to integrate the ideas we promote into their own lifestyle.”

staff member

“If the benefits are obvious and can be seen, this is the best way to promote the school and to promote health in general.”

staff member

## benefits

The philosophy and principles of the school attract dedicated staff and a strong group of volunteers. The dedication of staff to the school’s principles is evident in the lifestyle changes they are prepared to make in order to work in the school.

The management and control of the environment can, in some cases, lead to reduced medication for students and better behaviour at home.

The school has had an impact on the staff, volunteers, students and the families of students because the school encourages a whole lifestyle change. The use of natural, organic products, healthy eating and daily exercise is commonly continued in the homes of school community members. The secondary students are especially aware of what they eat.

The impact on the community as a whole is questionable, but individuals have often come into contact with the school and left with one or two facts that can be used to create a healthier lifestyle for them.

Improving the quality of food consumed by students has resulted in a significant improvement in student behaviour. Students have a greater ability to concentrate, which improves their school work, have a greater comprehension of what the teacher is saying, and are more willing to follow directions. Such improvements in diet have a positive impact on general health as well.

## the future

The School of Today intends to continue with their current ideas by trying to promote health in all spheres of the school. This includes continuing to:

- promote the importance of the school’s principles and policies to parents through newsletters, parent interviews and family events at the school
- give families simple advice on how to incorporate the health aspects adopted by the school into their own life without ruining the family
- demonstrate that the benefits of considering health and

“I think the most important aspect though, or how we transmit most of the knowledge to the students is through conversation with them or setting the examples ourselves.”

staff member

the surrounding environment for a child with problems will also apply to the entire family.

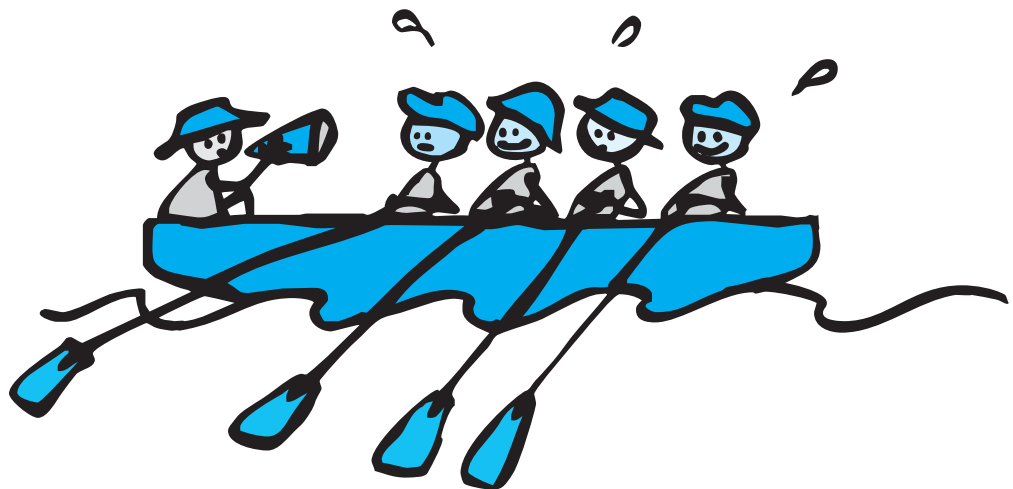
The staff of the school hope to increase the awareness of the community by promoting health. They expect to set an example for the community and prove by the quality of their students that what the school is doing is beneficial.

Members of the school community plan to embark on some fund-raising ventures that also promote the school and its emphasis on health. Instead of chocolate or pie drives, the school hopes to sell organic based, naturally scented shampoos or cosmetics.

“Ideally, we would like to see all our students following a healthy approach to life—in all areas of their life, not only at school but outside of school, as well as the staff and the parents involved in the school.” The school will keep striving toward this ideal in the future.

## reflections

It is often a battle for the school to convince parents that health is one of the most important aspects of the school’s behaviour management policy. “If an idea is not widely accepted within the community as a whole, you can’t expect it to be instantly, widely accepted within the school community.” It is likely to take some time and effort. It is important to educate the parents, the staff and the volunteer helpers so that everyone is working in the same direction.



## acknowledgments

The school communities represented in these case studies willingly shared their *health promoting schools* experiences. The valuable contribution of key people within these schools is acknowledged. Their enthusiasm and contribution is greatly appreciated.

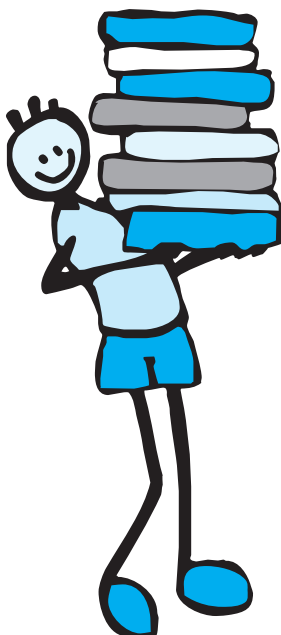
Thanks to:

- Browns Plains State High School
- Chevallum State School
- Eatons Hill State School
- Elanora State School
- Elliott Heads State School
- Jundah State School
- School of Today

and Queensland Health staff at:

- Rockhampton Public Health Unit
- Wide Bay Public Health Unit
- South Coast Public Health Unit
- Sunshine Coast Public Health Unit.

## references



- 1 Cotton R (1996) *Gerbusters! Improving hygiene in your school: A 'step-by-step' guide for school communities*. Gold Coast Public Health Unit, Elanora State School Student Council, Program Development Branch Queensland Health: Brisbane
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- 3 Carter J (1998) *Kidpower: Kids reducing injury in schools*, Queensland Health Promotion Council, Education Queensland (Metropolitan West Region), West Moreton Public Health Unit, West Moreton Community Health and Nursing Services: Brisbane



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