



## A Healthy School Canteen snap shot: Coonabarabran High School

*Focus: a school that has recently made changes to become a good example of a healthy school canteen. Strong parent and student consultation have been critical to its success.*

### Background

Coonabarabran High is a comprehensive, co-educational, high school with an enrolment of approximately 420 students. It is located on the Newell Highway Coonabarabran in Central-West NSW. The school has strong parent and community support. Students from local Indigenous communities form a significant part of the school community.

### Canteen service

The school canteen is run by a subcommittee of the Parents and Citizens' Association. It employs one canteen manager who is supported by one volunteer on most days. It is open five days a week from 8:30am to the end of lunch. It offers a breakfast menu where food can be purchased before school.

The canteen has been making changes to the menu and general operations since the beginning of 2007. A new canteen committee was elected and its members include the school principal, a teacher and four parents. The committee oversees the running of the canteen and the implementation of the *Fresh Tastes @ School Strategy*. The committee has monthly meetings to discuss canteen issues.



All fresh food is prepared on site and students are encouraged to order their lunch. The canteen purchases from two local supermarkets and has deliveries from a local bakery, dairy foods supplier and bulk food supplier. The canteen supervisor uses the *Canteen Menu Planning Guide* when making choices about new food items offered by local suppliers and will liaise with the canteen committee if uncertain about the suitability of a product.

Student leaders assist with selling food. The students handle the money while canteen staff handles the food. This arrangement is of great assistance to the

canteen supervisor as this ensures everyone is served well before the end of recess and lunch, and is especially useful when adult volunteers are not available.

### What's on the menu?



The school's SRC has a strong voice when it comes to the food offered at the canteen. When the canteen committee announced they were going to change the menu, students initiated a survey through the SRC to suggest healthy foods that could be offered. The results of the survey were given to the canteen committee and many of the student suggestions remain as popular choices today.

Toasted fruit bread and muffins are popular for breakfast and a recent trial of breakfast banana smoothies is likely to become a permanent item on the summer menu.

Low fat pies, fresh fruit salads and small serving sizes of fruit juice slushies were well accepted when large sized soft drinks and other RED foods were removed. Small mini zucchini slices have proved to be popular as they sell for a low price and cater for students on a budget. For this school community the canteen aims to keep prices low, especially for the healthier options to ensure regular patronage of the canteen service.



There is increasing demand for Caesar and pasta salad boxes and sandwiches during summer and nachos and soup in winter.

New snack foods such as popcorn, small boxes of almonds, sultanas, apricots and rice crackers have also been well accepted.

An example of one of the school's healthy menus has been provided below.

<http://www.coonabarab-h.schools.nsw.edu.au/information/documents/CanteenMenuTerm1.pdf>

### Promotion of healthy GREEN foods

The school website promotes the canteen and outlines the requirements of the *Healthy School Canteen Strategy*. Information on the types of food available at the canteen and a menu are also included.

A canteen menu is included each term in the school newsletter and the committee always includes short articles to promote the healthy canteen message.

Laminated posters are used to promote new foods, daily specials and healthy eating messages outside the canteen. Regular assembly announcements are made to promote the specials in the school canteen



A wide range of healthy drinks are strategically positioned at eye level and all prices are clearly marked.

The convenor of the canteen committee, Vivian Evans has set up a school canteen website that can be accessed from the school web page. Vivian works closely with the canteen manager and canteen committee and coordinates committee activities. The web site she has developed informs students, parents and local community members about the NSW



Healthy School Canteen Strategy and encourages the school community to be involved with canteen activities. There is also general nutrition links and healthy recipes and lunch ideas for parents and students.

Members of the canteen committee attended a school SRC workshop in 2007 to talk about the Fresh Tastes Strategy and the new healthy foods and drinks that would be replacing soft drinks and sweets. This was an excellent opportunity to engage with students and gain support from the student body for the upcoming changes.

### Challenges and Achievements

The canteen has achieved great things in a relatively short period of time. These achievements include a new menu with increased choice, better promotion of the canteen and engagement with students, staff and parents about healthy food options for the school canteen.

By engaging the student body and encouraging them to have their say about what went on the menu, acceptance rather than resistance to change was slowly achieved over a twelve month period.

Improving profits was an issue even before a healthy menu was introduced and is currently being addressed by continually offering new menu items, promoting specials and encouraging donations of non perishable items by local families.

Increasing volunteer participation has also been a challenge and the canteen committee works very hard to promote the canteen and encourage volunteer support. Face to face invitations and word of mouth works well in this school community for enlisting volunteer support, in addition to using the school newsletter.

Joining a local canteen network is also on the priority list for the school canteen as they offer a wide range of support and networking opportunities for school canteens.

## Promoting healthy eating beyond the canteen

Food Technology staff ran competitions and quizzes on healthy eating during Nutrition Week with canteen vouchers offered as prizes.

The school's Agriculture faculty sells hydroponic lettuces to the canteen and a variety of students have completed work experience in the canteen.

The *Fresh Tastes* Strategy has become a whole school approach. The selling of chocolates as a fundraiser has now ceased. Students are encouraged to look for healthier alternatives.

### Links

Coonabarabran High school website

<http://www.coonabarab-h.schools.nsw.edu.au/>

*Healthy Kids website*

<http://www.healthykids.nsw.gov.au/>

*Healthy School Canteen Strategy information (NSW Health)*

<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/obesity/adult/canteens/resources.html>