

Tasmanian Award schools: progress after one year

A summary of the evaluation of Award schools, 2013

1 BACKGROUND

Move Well Eat Well (MWEW) is a joint Australian and State Government initiative funded under the National Partnership Agreement on Preventive Health. It is managed by Population Health Services within the Department of Health and Human Services, with the cooperation and support of a range of partner organisations and services. Move Well Eat Well promotes a healthier Tasmania in which children can enjoy healthy eating and physical activity every day. It contributes to a healthy lifestyle and to the prevention of a range of chronic conditions such as obesity, diabetes, heart disease, some cancers and dental decay.

The Move Well Eat Well Award is available to Tasmanian early childhood services and primary schools. Schools and services that become Members of the program are supported to meet key criteria which reinforce healthy eating and promote physical activity.

Since 2011, Move Well Eat Well has undertaken evaluation of Tasmanian primary schools that had achieved a Move Well Eat Well Award within the last twelve months ie had been awarded for one year.

This report builds upon previous evaluation work with Move Well Eat Well (MWEW) Award Schools. During 2013 the Consultant was contracted to conduct interviews (telephone and face to face) with six additional Award schools around the State. This brings the cumulative total of Award schools interviewed over the past three years to 28.

2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The MWEW program continues to be embraced with a great deal of enthusiasm by participating Award schools. When considered in terms of the International Union for Health Promotion and Education ¹ 'critical success factors' for sustaining health promotion in schools, this year's round of interviews demonstrate that Award schools:

- are establishing and integrating all elements of their health promoting strategy as components of daily life of the school – in fact many see it as a core part of the school identity.
- are seeking and maintaining recognition for health promotion actions both within and outside of the school (e.g. inviting the Local Mayor along to present awards, promoting their school to prospective parents as a MWEW school, having the MWEW sign proudly displayed at the entrance to the school).
- Identify one or two staff members who act as resources for other staff. While time and resources remain a challenge, some schools reported innovative approaches to capacity building for staff and key partners.

¹ International Union for Health Promotion and Education www.iuhpe.org



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- Report that implementation of the MWEW program has had an impact on staff health and wellbeing in some instances (e.g. healthier foods in staff rooms, participation in more physical activities by staff members). However, schools which have a staff team with a pre-existing interest in health and wellbeing themselves clearly tend to embrace the program with greater enthusiasm.
- did not usually see the implementation of MWEW as something for which they need additional resources. However, a couple of schools noted that they could do more if they had a full time PE teacher or funding for a professional cook/ Stephanie Alexander Garden Program.
- have used a range of approaches to coordinate MWEW including specific committees and existing coordination mechanisms for other activities.
- are involving students actively in the implementation of the program (e.g. students as daily PE leaders). The level to which students and the whole staff team are involved in planning varies considerably across schools. Some schools are beginning to see the opportunities to involve students more in planning across the whole program (e.g. involvement of the SRC in planning MWEW activities for the year).
- are integrating health promotion with other relevant strategies very effectively and there are some good examples of this 'in action' from the interviews conducted (e.g. embedding health promotion messages in the morning Positive Behaviour Support sessions).

Sustaining Health Promotion in schools: critical factors

- Enable the integration of the health promotion in schools strategy with other relevant strategies relating to the health, welfare and education of young people.
- Seek and maintain recognition for health promotion actions both within and outside the school.
- Ensure there is continuous active commitment and support to the ongoing implementation, renewal, monitoring and evaluation of the health promoting strategy
- Establish and integrate all the elements and actions of the health promoting strategy as core components to the working of the school.
- Allocate time and resources for appropriate capacity building of staff and key partners.
- Provide opportunities to promote staff health and wellbeing.
- Review and refresh after each 3-4 years.
- Continue to ensure adequate resources.
- Maintain a coordinating group with a designated leader to oversee and drive the strategy with continuity of some personnel and the addition of new personnel.
- Ensure that most of the new and ongoing initiatives involve most of the staff and students in consultation and implementation.

Source: International Union for Health Promotion and Education www.iuhpe.org



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3 PURPOSE OF THE INTERVIEWS

The purpose of the interviews was to gain knowledge from schools about:

- What receiving the Award meant to their school community
- How well they think the MWEW Program works
- New strategies which they might have used in their school in implementing MWEW
- How they have embedded the key messages across the curriculum and school life
- How they have brought everyone with them on the MWEW 'journey'
- Ways of engaging their broader local community and creating sustainability in the longer term
- Any flow on effects from MWEW for staff health, wellbeing and behaviours
- Structures and processes used for coordination and engagement of staff and students
- Links to other whole school initiatives and the new Australian Health and Physical Education curriculum

Information from the evaluation interviews will be used to inform future planning in relation to the MWEW program.

4 PROCESS

Each school was approached by the Manager of the Move Well Eat Well Program initially. Once agreement was gained for an interview the Consultant organised the appointment time and conducted the interview. The schools located in the south of the State were visited by the Consultant and the interview conducted face to face. For those schools located outside of the southern metropolitan area telephone interviews were conducted.

The consultant wrote up a set of notes from each interview and emailed this draft back to the interviewees for feedback. This year the provision of feedback about the write up was made optional rather than an expectation in recognition of the volume of correspondence that school Principals receive. The notes of the interview were then provided to the Program Manager and were used to develop this overall summary report. Schools were advised that they would not be quoted from the interview without specific permission being gained from the Principal by the Program Manager. Rather general themes would be identified from the information collected from the interviews with the eight schools.



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5 COMMENTS ON THE VALUE OF RECEIVING AN AWARD AND OVERALL EXPERIENCE

Many of the schools viewed gaining the Award as the end point of a significant period of work even though it might have built upon previous work in promoting health and wellbeing.

“MWEW has really offered a good value add to what else we were doing in terms of health and wellbeing.”

Some talked about the Award application process as helping them to be aware of what they were actually doing in promoting health and wellbeing already.

“To embed it across the whole school was initially viewed as being lots of work but while there was a bit of extra work to begin with it is really easy to do now.”

“The beauty of MWEW is that it really doesn’t take any real effort once you have the systems and momentum established.”

For some by the time they received the Award the health promoting strategies were already embedded in the way their school worked.

All schools had proudly displayed their MWEW sign, including one school which does not normally display signage due to heritage issues. Some had received some publicity in their local newspaper or had the local Mayor come to present the Award.

The process of preparing for the Award had provided the opportunity for many schools to have a dialogue about what they were trying to achieve as a school with their broader school community. In some schools the MWEW process was initiated by staff while in others it came from parents themselves who had concerns about the lack of healthy choices available to students or who knew about the MWEW program.

A couple of schools noted that being a MWEW school was seen as a positive thing by prospective parents/families who were making decisions about where to send their child to school.

All schools thought that MWEW was a good ‘fit’ with other initiatives within the school (e.g. Active After School, Kids Matter) and some commented on how well it fitted the style of their community.

There were a few suggestions for improving how the MWEW program works including:

- Newer staff to the program coordination role may not necessarily know about the role of the Program Manager in providing links to good resources or about what is available on the MWEW website
- More ideas for indoor activities when the weather is wet
- Opportunities to share best practice with other schools and perhaps to visit other schools to see their program in action
- Adding a section on the MWEW website for the daily PE leaders within schools to access for ideas on activities they could use in daily PE
- More support to teachers in how to incorporate planning units into their teaching.

There was positive feedback about the way schools are supported by the Program staff and the resources available to assist them to implement the Program.



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6 OBSERVATIONS IN RELATION TO THE CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS FOR SUSTAINING HEALTH PROMOTION IN SCHOOLS

Many of the schools viewed gaining the Award as the end point of a significant period of work even though it might have built upon previous work in promoting health and wellbeing.

6.1 ESTABLISHING AND INTEGRATING ALL ELEMENTS OF THE HEALTH PROMOTION STRATEGY AS CORE COMPONENTS OF THE WAY THE SCHOOL WORKS

To date the evidence suggests that schools which have successfully integrated MWEW into their culture and values have embraced the *philosophy* rather than just the actions associated with MWEW. A number of schools saw the implementation of MWEW as a way of progressing and reflecting their school community values.

For the schools interviewed it is not seen as different to their normal daily business – it was described by many as ‘simply what we do’.

“Staff tend to look for cross curriculum ways of embedding healthy lifestyles learning and use a range of different learning sequences to achieve this.”

The main value identified in the MWEW program has been the way it assists schools to ‘pull it all together’ and have a comprehensive approach. Others used the language of it ‘providing a structure’ for addressing healthy choices.

Schools talked about MWEW providing a common language to talk about health and wellbeing with the school community, a way of guiding decision making towards healthy choices or simply raising the opportunity for dialogue about fundraising or catering for events for example.

Some schools talked about the importance of being able to link what they are doing to theory and research (which they can easily access via MWEW). Other schools indicated that MWEW was part of their School Improvement Plan.

The interviews have raised some challenges faced by schools in relation to whole school approaches to the promotion of healthy eating and physical activity. Schools reported a range of issues requiring new strategies, such as

- Families’ confusion about what constitutes a healthy lunch for children
- Parents’ concerns that their children may not drink water instead of sweetened drinks
- Resistance to replacing sweet sales with other fundraising options
- A need to consolidate the links between the canteen and the wider school’s MWEW message



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6.2 SEEKING AND MAINTAINING RECOGNITION FOR HEALTH PROMOTION ACTIONS WITHIN AND OUTSIDE OF THE SCHOOL

All schools interviewed have gained recognition for their health promoting activities from a range of community sources. These included supermarket donations, funding of school support personnel, and volunteer working bees for gardens. In working with the wider community, some schools acknowledged the need to promote consistency in understanding the concept of 'occasional foods' in the context of food and drinks supplied to children.

Parents in particular are recognising and supporting MWEW activities by participating in and organising walks, dance events, sporting events eg as bicycle support 'instructors', or helping in school gardens or with cooking. Members of the broader community have been involved in schools in mentoring roles, Active After Schools programs and participating in events. Other service providers like Police have been involved in bike safety programs.

6.3 ENSURE ADEQUATE TIME AND RESOURCES

Many schools manage the integration of MWEW into the school as they do with the other whole school programs and initiatives. They do this by ensuring that responsibility for the program rests with more than one staff member, ranging from the HPE teacher and others such as the senior teacher or AST, or using a health and wellbeing team. MWEW is a part of the normal staff meeting agenda for many schools so it just becomes part of regular discussion.

Amongst the schools interviewed, there was little staff turn-over during the last few years, thus little staff induction to manage. For these schools 'refreshing' the materials and key messages are important. Induction was described in some schools as more 'osmosis' than a formal process (e.g. it is seen as being so well embedded in policy and actions that a new staff member cannot fail to take in what is expected). More structured approaches are used by some schools and involve meeting individually with new staff to review the policies, inclusion of MWEW in the staff handbook and use of the Positive Behaviour Support meet and greet sessions held each morning to impart key messages about MWEW to staff and students. In some schools it was noted that students are now so familiar with the expectations in relation to MWEW that they 'induct' new staff if they forget to offer a MWEW activity or use the MWEW approach.



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6.4 PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES TO PROMOTE STAFF HEALTH AND WELLBEING

In many schools, staff appear to be very engaged in MWEW activities, even after school hours, and for many this probably represents a pre-existing interest in health and wellbeing.

“Our staff are quite interested in health and wellbeing issues and are a pretty active bunch”

“Last year on National Ride to School Day, the staff rode as well and some teachers who would not normally ride borrowed bicycles so they would participate”

In addition, there are some reports of staff becoming more interested in their own health and wellbeing as a result of their role with MWEW (e.g. cutting back on sugary foods, changing what is offered in the staff room). In some schools, staff contribute to a fund to purchase healthy snacks for the staff room or are going for walks together after school on a regular basis. Many schools talked about the importance of modelling healthy behaviours and staff becoming more conscious of this role. In one school significant changes in the foods brought by staff had been noticed from a past focus on ‘sweet treats’ to more fruit and cheeses for snacks.

6.5 PROGRAM COORDINATION AND THE INVOLVEMENT OF STAFF AND STUDENTS

Most schools have one person or two sharing the key role which provides an identifiable contact point in the school for MWEW. In many schools this is the HPE teacher, and it was noted that this works best if the HPE teacher is full time in their role. In one school the coordination function was filled through an internal expression of interest process.

As noted earlier many schools have MWEW as a standing agenda item for staff meetings thus involving everyone in planning and review and providing for the process of allocating tasks for events etc. Not all schools have a health and wellbeing committee. Some had one for the application process but now do not feel that they need a specific committee in place as the work is integral to the work of the whole school.

Students are involved in coordination and running the program in a variety of ways including: as daily PE facilitators, in reminding teachers about fruit and vegetable breaks or events, working in school gardens producing fruit and vegetables and disposing of excess supplies or working in school canteens. In some schools the SRC has MWEW as a standard agenda item.

“Some children from a farming background thrive in the garden as they can show some leadership using skills they already have to gain recognition from their fellow students”



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6.6 INTEGRATION WITH OTHER RELEVANT STRATEGIES AND THE NEW AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

While a number of schools could not yet comment on the “fit” between MWEW and the new Australian HPE curriculum, they anticipated that using the MWEW framework would position the school well for meeting the new curriculum needs.

“We assume it will dovetail together. They should interlock well.”

For those who were well underway in planning for the new Curriculum, MWEW was seen as very useful.

“MWEW supports the new Australian curriculum beautifully. The new curriculum is not really new. We have already got most of this in place.”

“The benefits of being a MWEW school in terms of the new curriculum are enormous. We are already doing many of the things required of us by the new curriculum so it helps us to ‘tick lots of boxes.’”

Strong interconnections were identified by most schools between MWEW and other programs they were implementing including KidsMatter, The Stephanie Alexander Garden Program, Positive Behaviour Support, Sustainable Schools and Active after Schools Programs. Some did not see them as separate programs but rather just part of their overall approach.

“It all fits together so well.”

“There are strong links between MWEW and the community garden in that it enables us to demonstrate the value of paddock to the plate.”

“They are all about self-esteem, health behaviours and looking after themselves and others... running MWEW alongside these other programs is helpful in terms of the culture of the school.”

“Yes, having these other programs does make it easier to implement MWEW. There are links between the activities at all levels.”



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7 HIGHLIGHTS AND INNOVATIONS

A feature of the school interviews was the way schools adapt MWEW to their school community. It demonstrates how the program sets a broad framework which allows for innovation and local responsiveness.

Schools interviewed identified these aspects of MWEW that they believed made it 'particular' to their school community:

- An inner city school responding to the challenge of active travel through organising 'block walks' and Apple Picnics.
- Children take any wrappings or rubbish home as a way of making parents aware of what they are eating at school.
- Facilitation of a "Healthy Brain Snack" including a short sharp physical activity break to energise students.
- Selling school garden produce at stalls set up within the school.
- Organisation of a healthy lunch box expo with day and evening sessions to enable all families to attend.
- Development of a DVD of the daily fitness program which has been distributed across Australia.
- Pairing of students with mentors from the broader community for cooking
- Working with Council to build bike storage racks at the school
- Induction of new families into MWEW through an individual appointment with the Principal where it is discussed.
- The 'Walk to the Park with the Principal' reward is an innovative way of recognising students demonstrating the schools values.
- Using the fruit and vegetable break as a time for stories, for having fun and making food an enjoyable experience.



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