



## **Matron Swinton Child Care Centre, Warrnambool**

This case study has been created in collaboration with the [Healthy Eating Advisory Service](#), the [Achievement Program](#), the [Smiles 4 Miles program](#), and the [Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation](#). The purpose of the case study is to demonstrate the services and support offered by these programs, and how any early childhood service in Victoria can use them in combination to make healthy eating and oral health changes in their setting.

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### **Growing healthy, happy children at Matron Swinton**

All children deserve to eat well so they can learn better, be more alert, and grow and develop to their full potential.

Matron Swinton Child Care Centre, in Warrnambool, is a service that is committed to giving all its children a healthy start and understands the positive impact early childhood services can have on helping children establish healthy eating habits.

The service has drawn on the expertise of evidence-based community programs including the Achievement Program, Smiles 4 Miles, the Healthy Eating Advisory Service (HEAS) and the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program (SAKGP) to create a healthier environment.

Alicia Bates, kindergarten teacher and educational leader, said, “Being supported every step of the way has made promoting healthy eating a rewarding experience for everyone. It’s great that the healthy changes are aligned to the healthy eating requirements of the National Quality Standard, Quality Area 2 – Children’s Health and Safety.”

“Our service joined the Smiles 4 Miles program in 2015 and we’ve been participating ever since. Smiles 4 Miles gave us the foundations and referrals to the other programs, helping us to strengthen our initiatives.”

“Children take part in outreach dental visits twice a year to have their teeth screened and we’ve noticed the confidence it’s given them to not be fearful of the dentist. Oral health information sessions have also been delivered, with Smiles 4 Miles take-home packs given to families,” Ms Bates said.

To ensure a whole-of-service approach to support healthy eating, the service also joined the free Achievement Program.

“We really wanted to embed healthy eating in our service’s policies, practices, culture and physical learning environment. The Achievement Program gave us focus and direction and we aimed to receive Victorian Government recognition for meeting the program targets,” Ms Bates said.



Part of the journey through the Achievement Program and Smiles 4 Miles saw the service transform its menu with support from HEAS. Service cook, Carolyn Pulham, worked closely with HEAS to assess their menu, using HEAS’s online FoodChecker, which recommended healthier changes to the foods and drinks served. The healthy changes Matron Swinton made were small and simple, for example adding more vegetables, swapping puff pastry for a healthier filo pastry and swapping out butter for margarine.

In addition, Matron Swinton staff completed HEAS’s free training about planning healthy menus and used HEAS resources to implement their learnings in the centre’s policies and procedures.

“The support I received from HEAS was great and I now feel confident and proud of the healthy options provided to our children. This welcome knowledge-boost has led to staff now role-modelling healthy eating behaviours,” Ms Pulham said.

“For example, the service has set up a ‘supermarket play space’ with healthy pretend food and drink toys to help children develop positive associations with them. Each day at lunch, educators chat about different food groups with the children such as vegetables and fruits.”

“Healthy behaviours such as drinking water are now daily challenges, with children filling their own drink bottles and cups. We make drinking water fun by having drink races and making our own ice blocks to put in drinks or to have like icy poles.”

The centre also participates in the SAKGP program, providing both children and staff with a hands-on, rewarding and enriching experience.

Ms Bates said, “The exposure children have had in growing, harvesting and tasting a diverse range of fruit and vegetables has been wonderful. Children have been more willing to try new vegetables after having grown and picked them themselves, we then take them to the kitchen and watch Carolyn prepare them for our meals.”

“Children have been asking if we can share recipes with their parents which we do via our online platform. Being able to see the excitement in the children’s eyes and the expressions on their faces when trying new foods is a joy.”

“Our service has appreciated the tailored support we’ve received from our local health promoter and the community programs to deliver positive change,” Ms Bates said.

By linking with evidence-based community programs, Matron Swinton Child Care Centre has been able to take a holistic approach to supporting health and wellbeing, including:

- on-the-ground programs such as SAKGF and Smiles 4 Miles to engage children, staff and families in healthy eating experiences and oral health care
- receiving strategic support from HEAS to assess and plan healthy menus using FoodChecker and free HEAS training and resources
- bringing it all together in the Achievement Program’s framework to develop a policy and clear practices that have the support of the whole service community as well as receiving Victorian Government recognition for their healthy efforts.

