



# School veggie gardens: The story and the potential.

## 2023 and beyond...

A case study from Gateway's  
Health Promotion Team

<b>Aim</b>	To highlight the coordinated effort by the Health Promotion team to support school veggie gardens in the Rural City of Wangaratta.
<b>Rationale</b>	School veggie gardens have the potential to increase access to nutritious foods, improve health and wellbeing and contribute positively to our community's food system. Coordinated support for this can build on local efforts to reach potential benefits.
<b>Partnerships</b>	Gateway Health, Whitfield and District Primary School, Whorouly Primary School, Bunnings Wangaratta
<b>Links to state policy/initiatives</b>	<a href="#"><u>Vic Kids Eat Well</u></a> (VKEW) <a href="#"><u>Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation</u></a> (SAKGF) <a href="#"><u>VicHealth</u></a>
<b>Resources</b>	<a href="#"><u>Veggie Garden Mapping Reports</u></a> (VGMP) <a href="#"><u>Local Vegetable Gardening Resources and Programs</u></a> <a href="#"><u>Whitfield Primary School after school cooking activities</u></a> video <a href="#"><u>Whorouly Primary School OSHC Case Study</u></a> <a href="#"><u>Victorian Funding for School Food Education</u></a> <a href="#"><u>Victorian School Gardens Program</u></a>

# The Story



## 1. VKEW and Veggie Gardens

There is opportunity to align support for the Vic Kids Eat Well program with school veggie gardens. Current support for the program's implementation through veggie gardens provides a basis of knowledge that will be helpful for future engagement with schools and for them to add value to the effectiveness of their gardens.

## 2. Veggie Garden Mapping Project

In a VGMP project conducted, 16 of the 16 schools that completed the project's survey, reported to have veggie gardens, about half of these are actively in use and the other half are used seasonally or for some of the year. Like previous research shows, the main reasons for gardens that were not used all year round were reported to be lack of time, resources, and maintenance. While gardens that thrived were reported to have strong community partnerships, volunteer involvement, and curriculum integration.

There is growing evidence to suggest that school gardens can positively influence children's health and wellbeing, including learning in areas of science and sustainability, personal skills such as respect, ownership and understanding of food systems. School gardens may also increase fruit and vegetable consumption, dietary fibre and vitamin intake in children (VGMP Report, 2024).

Survey respondents, expressed their interest in receiving support and resources for their gardens and so this is taking place by the Health Promotion team. Further, following these findings, the Health Promotion team distributed a total of \$5000 (5 x \$1000) to schools to support their veggie gardens. Alongside this, a partnership with Bunnings Wangaratta was developed to offer schools support to use their funding efficiently.

The schools used their funds to:

- establish a school orchard
- purchase materials for veggie garden construction, such as timber sleepers for edging, soil, mulch, vegetable plants/seedlings
- support their Agriculture and Horticulture programs where students grew seedlings to sell to their community.

## The Story (continued)

### 3. VicHealth and Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation Partnership

Opportunities have come out of a recently established VicHealth and Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation partnership to ensure more young Victorians develop lifelong cooking and gardening skills. These are:

1. A Growing Healthy Students Resource tailored to educators with knowledge and inspiration to deliver fun, hands-on food education in schools,
2. Grant opportunities for 30 Victorian schools to be provided with a two-year Kitchen Garden Program membership, plus a \$1500 infrastructure grant.

Health Promotion staff shared Information about these resources and grants and are offering support for schools, for example, to apply for them and deliver them. There are more opportunities to come. Health Promotion staff are liaising with VicHealth to provide on the ground information to help inform their next steps. This is exciting and the Health Promotion team have let schools know they're here to support these opportunities locally.

### 4. Victorian School Garden Program - Training Undertaken

**Training will be undertaken by Health Promotion staff to build their skills in supporting school veggie gardens. The event being attended will look at:**

- how veggie gardens relate to the curriculum, provide tangible learning for the students and benefits the local community.
- key curriculum linkages to veggie gardens.
- How schools can save money and even make money through veggie gardens.
- How schools can get assistance to transform gardens to aid the wellbeing of students.

## What difference did we make in the community?

- Supported VKEW implementation to create more nourishing food environments at schools
- Five school gardens enhanced
- Partnered with Bunnings Wangaratta for effective resourcing
- Advocated for gardens to be incorporated into the VKEW program
- Developed recipe booklet to meet VKEW bites, encouraging use of veggies from gardens

## Outcomes

Because of a). experience of Health Promoters in apply a school veggie garden to achieve a VKEW program areas, and b). the Veggie Garden Mapping Project; two local OSHC services have incorporated their school veggie gardens into the implementation of the VKEW program. Both have achieved the related program area (referred to as a 'Bite'). In both cases, the program rewards received as a result of this achievement have been used to fund and support the school's veggie garden further which is a fantastic outcome.

Following this, one of the services, Whitfield District Primary School OSHC, was a recipient of the Vic Kids Eat Well end of 2024 competition based on the inspiration of the creative and innovative ways they are improving nourishing food and drink options; produce from the garden is cooked by OSHC students and shared. Further to this, VKEW showcased the school on their social media platforms. The post content was based on the 'Bite' information that was submitted by Health Promotion staff to apply for program areas including incorporating their garden into the program with students growing and then cooking food to share for afternoon tea, such as zucchini slice. It is fantastic that the school will be promoted and acknowledged for their support for students growing and cooking their own food as part of the program.

During the process of support with this school, it was discovered that the school is registered with the SAKGF program but wasn't aware of this due to staff turnover. With the support of Health Promotion staff connecting the school to the program resources, professional development and support they are entitled to, they are now accessing the program to it's full potential. There may be other local schools in this position that can be supported and/or have an underutilised garden and Health Promotion staff will be following up on this.

## What did we achieve?

11

VKEW registrations (schools and OSHC services)

9

School SAKGF memberships (existing)

16

School VGMP survey responses

5

School gardens funded (of \$1000 each)



## Quotes and Reflections

“As part of Vic Kids Eat Well’s ‘bite-sized’ changes, OSHC students are now offered a variety of fresh, tasty and nourishing snack options that include fruit and vegetables, such as berries and carrot and celery sticks” Kylie McAuliffe, Whorouly OSHC Coordinator

“It was great to chat with the kids and to base the new menu on their preferences. It means the new food options are more likely to be consumed and enjoyed. The students also feel part of the process, empowered and have an increased understanding about nourishing foods” Felicity Kennedy, Health Promotion Coordinator.

Jess Young, Whitfield District Primary School OSHC Coordinator has made some brilliant menu additions, and they’re all homemade! Zucchini slice, apple pancakes and plain popcorn now feature on the service’s menu and students are giving them 5 stars. They prepare afternoon tea together and share it as a group.

## Lessons learnt

- Use VKEW as a framework but base Health Promotion support on where school is at and the support they request
- Work with schools prior to providing funds to develop an understanding of their capacity and needs regarding their veggie garden to ensure spending of funds runs smoothly and schools achieve the best outcomes



## Recommendations and next steps

Future support will see continuation of schools being supported with their veggie gardens. This support will be linked to the VKEW and SAKGF programs to provide structure, resources and rewards. Results from the VGPM will be utilised and the contact listed gathered through this project will be used to continue to share resources about veggie gardens as an identified need from the VGMP. The partnership with Bunnings Wangaratta will continue. Training on school gardening will be undertaken. Ongoing evaluation will assess the effectiveness of this support provided. Future plans involve the scoping of a local event hosted by representatives from Gateway Health, VKEW, SAKGF and VicHealth. Keep an eye on this patch, we'll be getting our hands dirty!

