



MEDIA RELEASE

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## **STEPHANIE ALEXANDER KITCHEN GARDEN FOUNDATION ANNOUNCES NEW SCHOOL IN THE REVOLUTION IN CHILDRENS EATING**

The Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation is proud to announce it will begin the implementation of a new Kitchen Garden Program at Nunawading Primary School on April 3. The Program is aimed at teaching young children how to grow and eat good food, every day of their lives.

Stephanie Alexander said, "Having received 54 submissions from around Victoria, it was an extremely difficult decision to make. There were so many enthusiastic schools but at present the Foundation only has the funds to support one school, in addition to Collingwood College. The aim is to conduct an evaluation of the program with Deakin University School of Health and Social Development at Nunawading Primary School and Collingwood College to investigate the effectiveness and benefits of engaging children in growing and preparing food in a pleasurable way and to ascertain whether this Program does result in positive changes affecting food knowledge and food choices that will benefit a child for life. "

The introduction of the Program at Nunawading Primary School will see each child in grades 3 -6 spending one period each week in the garden learning about soil, planting, propagating and harvesting. Once the garden is producing fresh, seasonal food each child will spend 1.5 hours every week in the kitchen preparing meals using the produce from the garden. They will then spend time together sharing the meal and learning to engage with others around the table.

There is considerable work to be done in establishing the garden and building a kitchen and meal sharing area and it is hoped that the work and associated costs will be supported by the parents, the local community and some corporate sponsors.

"We are incredibly excited to have been chosen to implement the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program at the school. The pupils and teachers are very keen to get started. We have had enormous interest from the parents and we look forward to involving the wider community in our project", said Glenda Gauntlett, Principal at Nunawading Primary School.

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## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

There is widespread agreement that the eating habits of Australian children are directly or indirectly leading to serious health problems. Proposed solutions and projects by government departments over the past 20 years have almost all involved negative messages about foods and have been ineffective. Obesity rates continue to rise. Many children continue to choose foods from an increasingly narrow range and many families increasingly rely on convenience foods and appear to ignore the importance of sharing meals with their children.

Stephanie Alexander has devoted the last five years to formulating the program and overseeing the best-practice model established in July 2001 at Collingwood College in inner Melbourne. Her commitment stems from a passionate belief that children will only develop positive attitudes towards a wide range of foods if they are introduced to the world of edible gardening, cooking and being with others around a table at an early age.

The reality is that children are constantly targeted by the advertising industry and the manufacturers of convenience food. If they receive no counter or balancing messages at home they are being left without any food education. As all children attend school until they are 15 it is suggested that it is at school that this education should be taking place.

The aim of the Kitchen Garden program is to pleurably engage and educate young Victorians in **growing, harvesting, preparing** and **sharing** delicious and healthy food in the belief that these skills and understandings are essential to the development of life-long joyful and healthy eating habits. The Foundation believes that behaviour is much more likely to change if an alternative is seen as pleasurable, positive and possible.

Each week at Collingwood College, 120 children across Grades 3 to 6 spend forty minutes in an extensive vegetable garden which they have helped design, build and maintain on the school grounds. They learn about plants, about seed saving, about water management, about compost and soil health and they also learn about the seasons, about plant varieties, about ripeness and about the connection between care in the garden and flavour on the plate.

They then spend one and a half hours each week in a modified home-economics kitchen preparing and sharing a variety of meals created from their produce.

The program employs two part-time specialist staff; a qualified gardener and a qualified cook. These two specialists promote pleasure in learning, rather than presenting the program as being primarily about 'health' or describing foods as being 'good for you'.

The link between the garden, the kitchen and the table is integral. The emphasis is on learning about food and about eating it. No part of the program can exist without the other. It is a compulsory part of the school's program for four years of a child's life.

In both the garden and the kitchen the students work co-operatively in small groups and expend considerable physical energy.

Stephanie Alexander established the Foundation in 2004 to seek funding for the replication of the operational model at Collingwood College in primary schools across Victoria. Stephanie is Chair of a six-member board comprising education, philanthropy and business representatives. The Foundation is approved as a charity by the Australian Tax Office and its programs are supported by a range of grants from Foundations and private donations.

Nunawading Primary School is a small suburban multicultural school located in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne and has an enrollment of 130 children. Over the last year they have been working to establish a small vegetable and herb garden and this will be expanded to cover a wide range of vegetables, herbs and fruit to support the kitchen garden program.

After a call for Expressions of Interest in late 2005, more than fifty submissions were received from primary schools across Victoria. Nunawading Primary School was chosen for its enthusiasm, the commitment of the teachers and community, the readiness for the program and an identified garden and kitchen area.

A Community Meeting will be held on April 10, 7pm, at Nunawading Primary School, where Stephanie Alexander will launch the Kitchen Garden Program



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