

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE DECEMBER '08 EVALUATION PROGRESS REPORT**

This report marks the completion of the collection of qualitative data for the evaluation of the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program. Focus groups were conducted with children, teachers, parents and volunteers both to capture different perspectives on the program and in recognition that the program has impacts at many levels. At the time the focus groups were held, the kitchen garden program had been established in participating schools for between one and two years. Discussions with these stakeholder groups focused on their expectations and experiences of the program, impacts on individuals and the community, their perception of the most important program outcomes, as well as questions designed to quantify the 'value' they assigned to the program. Preliminary analysis is included [in the report] and will be supplemented once final results are available from the questionnaires conducted at both program and comparison schools. Interviews with school principals and specialist kitchen and garden teachers have also been conducted at all participating schools and will be analysed for inclusion in the final report in 2009.

The focus groups have yielded a full set of data on why the program is valuable, in terms of the key attributes of importance to different stakeholder groups. These findings can be used to design a future full economic valuation study if it is felt that there is a need to establish the "worth" of the program to the community in quantitative terms. However, the discussions have also provided preliminary data on what these values might be: children, parents and volunteers state a willingness to donate time (in addition to existing commitments) to fundraising and general program maintenance; parents are willing to pay increased voluntary school levies in exchange for the addition (or maintenance) of SAKGP at their school.

The report also contains a summary of the third and final set of observations of kitchen and garden classes in four schools, selected for their range of sociodemographic characteristics and mixture of rural, regional and metropolitan locations. Observations focused on differences and developments over time and on the skills the children had acquired in the year since the first set of observations.

While reactions to the program by different groups were generally consistent both within and between schools, there were also numerous examples given of unique features, which have been included [in the report]. One of the most consistent responses to the kitchen garden program was a high level of enthusiasm for its benefits amongst all participants. The program was perceived as highly enjoyable and as readily fulfilling its objectives to provide children with a pleasurable experience, growing, harvesting, preparing and sharing fresh, seasonal and delicious food. Almost all children at all participating schools were described as enjoying a wider range of foods, the program was incorporating positive attitudes to environmental sustainability and children were seen to be benefiting from the experience of working in groups.

It is suspected that apart from the desired outcomes of healthier diet and broader palates and knowledge, the full outcomes from the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program will only be completely savoured in the coming years. Impacts on long-term engagement of children and volunteers with education, community connections and family harmony as well as health may all have far reaching effects that are suggested but cannot be directly measured here. In the meantime, observations have shown that the children grow, cook and eat with impressive competence.