



The Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation was established in 2004 with the sole charitable purpose of improving the health and wellbeing of Australian children and young people. As such, the Foundation welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Multicultural Framework Review.

Our Kitchen Garden Program is an evidence-based health promotion and preventative health intervention delivered nationally through kitchen and garden classes in schools and early childhood services. The program positively influences health by improving food literacy and behaviour, building life-long skills and social capacity, engaging all types of learners through experiential learning opportunities outside the traditional classroom, and engaging students, families and communities in their child's educational setting.

With the current state of local and global affairs, this is a critical time to ensure that tolerance and inclusivity are fostered in support of maintaining a strong social fabric.

We applaud the Australian Government Department of Home Affairs for its consideration of "opportunities to define a modern shared Australian identity and strengthen public understanding of multiculturalism as a collective responsibility through education and public awareness raising".

Enhancing a sense of belonging to support the wellbeing of children, families and communities.

One of the five key elements of the Australian Student Wellbeing Framework is Inclusion, described as, "all members of the school community are active participants in building a welcoming school culture that values diversity, and fosters positive, respectful relationships."¹

With over 20 years of operation in well over 1,000 schools and early childhood services, we have seen countless examples of how creating the right opportunities, environment and conditions acts to enable social cohesion and cultural safety.

At Springvale Rise Primary School in Victoria, the program has become a community hub, providing a place for students and parents to come together and celebrate each other's cultures.

"We see the kitchen garden space as a way to embrace our community – addressing inclusion, and really trying to create a safe place for families who are newly arrived to Australia."

"Sharing food is one of the most wondrous ways of connecting. And we're such a culturally diverse community, we're treated to some amazing foods along the way."

- Principal, Debbie Cottier.

Cooking and gardening activities bring educators, families and volunteers, children and their peers together, providing opportunities for all to learn about other people, share values and beliefs and build on culture, strengths, interests and knowledge.

An important predictor of wellbeing is social connectedness. An evaluation of the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program by the University of Melbourne ² found strong evidence of positive impacts on social and learning environments, promoting appreciation of cultural diversity within schools.

Evidence highlights the program benefit of fostering cultural safety and inclusivity, including creating opportunities for CALD families to have their skills and knowledge recognised and valued.

The evaluation notes that the Kitchen Garden Program provides ways for parents from non-English speaking backgrounds to be more involved in their children's education through volunteering where they would be uncomfortable doing so in the classroom because of their lack of English language proficiency.

Teachers value the Kitchen Garden Program as an opportunity to engage this group of parents, and parents value the opportunities created for cultural sharing.

Social connection and cultural safety foster a sense of belonging. Seeing one's own culture reflected and accepted at school and early childhood settings addresses any sense of 'disconnect' and enables children to express their whole self in safety.

The Kitchen Garden Program is proven to support family and community engagement for social cohesion and community pride. Such collaborations create inclusive environments where the input of all families can be shared and valued, reinforcing a sense of belonging and wellbeing for children and families.

Whether through planting of cultural foods, preparation of cultural dishes or celebration of significant dates, all cultures can be celebrated through the Kitchen Garden Program. Such activities create opportunities for sustained shared conversations with and between children to explore equity and diversity and promote each child's sense of identity.

The Kitchen Garden Program creates opportunities for the sharing of community knowledge, experience, culture and ideas. Working together diminishes barriers of hierarchy, enabling free exchange of information. Relationships are strengthened, and the input of families and communities is welcomed and valued. When people come together in a respectful and level environment, learning from each other naturally occurs, and all benefit.

Opportunities to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing and being are incorporated by many existing Kitchen Garden Program schools and services. Whether through planting a bushtucker garden or referring to the seasonal calendars of local First Nations people to inform gardening practices. The program encourages community participation and cohesion, bringing in families who might otherwise be marginalised, and offers them opportunities to be involved in their school or early childhood service.

Growing, harvesting, preparing and sharing of fresh, seasonal foods supports all children to develop a connection to the land and natural world, while strengthening their sense of place and belonging.

There is no doubt that learning and awareness raising about culture is important. What is vital is shared experiences across cultures, getting people together to value what diversity brings to the table.

Sharing cultural foods, traditions and stories breaks down barriers. Understanding and celebrating commonalities and differences forms the basis of developing respectful relationships with others.

“I believe that if our program was part of the educational experience of every child from early learning to adolescence, we would achieve meaningful change in health, education, co-operation and community spirit, cultural tolerance and understanding, and environmental awareness.” - Stephanie Alexander AO

The Kitchen Garden Program for impact

The Kitchen Garden Program is a holistic program with significant cross-portfolio impacts in the areas of education, environment and climate change, food systems and agriculture, and health and wellbeing.

Our evidence-based program supports children and communities to proactively strengthen community resilience, improve education outcomes, strengthen social and community inclusion and address health inequities. ³

Over the past 20 years, the Program has impacted over a million children and young people. Our national community of practice supports educators in over a thousand schools to deliver the Program in all states and territories across Australia.

With Federal Government funding, the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation would be in a position to amplify its impact, supporting more children, young people their families and communities to develop positive health, wellbeing, educational and sustainability habits for life.

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¹ <https://www.education.gov.au/student-resilience-and-wellbeing/australian-student-wellbeing-framework>

² www.kitchengardenfoundation.org.au/sites/default/files/Files/UoM_SAKG_Eval_Report_Final%20AUG%202019.pdf

³ https://www.kitchengardenfoundation.org.au/sites/default/files/Files/SAKGF_Impact-Report_web.pdf