



AGM? OMG!

Never run an AGM before? Don't panic!

It's that time of year for most of our P&Cs – time for the Annual General Meeting (AGM).

The AGM is an important event, but needn't be daunting or overly formal. In fact, it is important to keep it friendly, as it is often the first P&C meeting that parents attend, so make sure you allow time for everyone to introduce themselves. It is also a great time to let parents know what the P&C is about so that they will want to continue to be involved. Recapping the P&C's achievements over the past 12 months can be a great way to showcase the value you add to the school.

The most important things to cover at your AGM are outlined below. Our website (www.actparents.org.au) has a more complete AGM checklist, a 'to do' list for P&Cs throughout the year, and templates to help you.

Before the AGM

- The treasurer will need to prepare the books for audit and liaise with the auditor – check the Information Sheets page of our website for a detailed treasurer's guide and list of auditors.
- Talk to outgoing committee members to see who is willing to continue and approach other potential candidates in order to be able to form a new committee. It helps to outline the advantages of being involved on the P&C – we have Information Sheets on the benefits and

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Make your AGM friendly and a chance for parents to meet other parents.

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From the President



John Haydon

Last year the ACT became the first Australian State or Territory to have more private than public high school students. It is a great shame that with one of the best public schooling systems in Australia more parents are opting to pay private school fees in the hope, presumably, of a better education for their teenagers. Regrettably they are deluded: all the studies show that, once you allow for the effect of socio-economic status, paying private school fees has no impact on education outcomes. In fact, studies show that public school students do better at university than their private school peers, perhaps a by-product of the supposed 'better discipline' at private schools, leaving students floundering once they have to apply some self-discipline. As the ABC's Waleed Ali said, sending children to private school is like buying a new BMW every year and running it into a wall.

So why do people do it? This is very complex: perhaps because their friends do, to assuage guilt for spending more time at work than with their children, or just from the misguided view that their children will be better off in a more 'selective' school.

Finland, with possibly the world's best schooling system, has only public schools, and a country very much like Australia, Canada, does not fund private schools and so has very few. In fact, very few OECD governments fund private schools. Government funding of private schools in Australia is fairly recent, starting in 1972 with the Whitlam Labor Government. Since then, the juggernaut has gained momentum with startling growth in relatively low fee (relative, that is, to elite private schools) protestant schools run by sometimes out-of-the-mainstream Christian groups. The fees they charge are supported by the surprising fact that 70% of Federal Government school funding goes to private schools, a situation that is roughly reversed for State and Territory funding.

Using taxpayer money to support fancy facilities

that have no effect on educational outcomes is a very inefficient way for a nation to organise its schooling system. Green playing fields and architecturally awarded buildings might enable private schools to attract more fee-paying parents but might also explain why, as educational spending increases, Australia's educational outcomes go backward.

This is why Council is convinced that Gonski needs-based funding is so essential for the country's future. We heartily welcome the news that Federal Labor will, if they win the next federal election, fund the last two years of Gonski spending – when the big money was due to be delivered. We urge the Coalition Government to match this.

Council's job of lobbying for support of public schools is certainly not an easy one. Politicians in the two major parties see private schools as equally their constituency. I recall a conversation with one Canberra Labor politician who was unsympathetic to the needs of the public schools in a particular electorate on the grounds that they were better resourced than some private schools. No politician is going to want to alienate the sizeable proportion of the electorate opting to use private schools. So are we up to the task?

With this in mind, it is with great interest that Council greets a new ACT Education Minister – Greens MLA Shane Rattenbury. Council Executives meet with the Minister once a term and we look forward to talking about the many issues facing public schools and ACT parents.

One issue we will pursue is the implementation of all the recommendations of the Expert Panel on Students with Complex Needs and Challenging Behaviour. Council called for this expert review after an inappropriate structure was found in a school last year and its 50 recommendations were immediately agreed to by the ACT Government. Our first target is the recommendation for more school psychologists. Find out more, including how you can add your voice to the call, on our website. •

AGM? OMG!

continued from front page

- tips for growing your P&C on our website.
- Jot down points for the president's report. There is a template on our website to help you think about what to include.
- Find someone to act as returning officer, that is, someone to run the election of the new committee. Many P&Cs ask the school principal to do this.

At the AGM

- Report on the past year. The president's report can be a formal, written report which you circulate and refer to, or simply a short monologue about the wonderful things the P&C did.
- Pass the minutes of last year's AGM.
- Present the year's financial accounts and pass them as accepted by the meeting. (Accounts must have been signed off by an auditor at least two weeks prior to the meeting.)
- Form a new committee (nominations and election).

Once the AGM is over, there are some things to follow up.

After the AGM

- Ensure a good handover to the new committee (see Information Sheets and templates on our website)
- Submit the Annual Return (AR form) to the Office of Regulatory Services. This is a formal government requirement for all P&Cs.
- Let us know your new committee so we can help and contact you. Do so using our Office Bearers' form, now online via our website.
- Start running the P&C! Arrange your first general meeting, share contact details with each other, and introduce the committee to the school community.
- Attend our free workshops (see below) or check out our huge range of online resources and Information Sheets (if you'd prefer these resources as a printed booklet or on USB drive, please contact us). •

Help for P&Cs: free workshops

Council's free workshops will help you with your P&C role and get your association running well.

Effective P&C workshop
Thursday March 31 at 6:30pm
Repeated Saturday April 2 at 2pm

Covering ways to improve how your association works, recruiting volunteers, fundraising and the P&C as an employer, this workshop is for new P&C members and continuing officers alike. We will look at the role of P&Cs and Council, how to improve your meetings and much more. Plenty of time is allowed for your questions.

The workshop is divided into five 30-minute modules, each focusing on a different aspect. You can attend for individual modules if you wish. Details are in the *Training* section of our website.

P&C Treasurers' and Insurance workshop
Thursday April 7 at 7pm

Experienced treasurers and Council's accountant will provide information and answer questions on financial records, annual reports, audits, staff employment, handling monies, taxation, reporting by sub-committees and more.

The workshop also examines the insurance package available for P&C associations through Council and how to complete the paperwork. Topics include valuing property, risk assessment and management, policy coverage, liability limits, excesses, completing declaration forms, online submissions and paying invoices.

For more information on our workshops, see the *Training* section of our website. To attend, please email contact@actparents.org.au. •

Schools for *all*

The release of the report of the Expert Panel on Students with Complex Needs and Challenging Behaviour last year highlighted how much work is still needed to make sure our schools are great places for all students. One parent's story shows the role we all have to play.

My daughter would be starting kindergarten soon. I was standing at a 'meet and greet' session for new kindy parents when another mother told me that her son was pre-verbal. I'm ashamed to admit it, but my heart sank. At that moment, all this news meant to me was that there would be less of that classroom's most precious resource - the teacher's attention - for my child. Isn't a mother's first move to think of her own child? As, undoubtedly, this other mother was doing in choosing this classroom for Oliver#. I mused on what the advantages might be for him and made an effort to accept it.

I have since discovered that I was wrong. My reaction, however common, was based in ignorance.

It turns out that there is good evidence that Oliver's presence is likely to have a positive, rather than negative, influence on my daughter. Research shows that including kids with complex needs in mainstream classes has no negative impact on the academic progress of their classmates. In addition, if the school and classroom is truly inclusive, all students are provided new academic learning opportunities and experiences, and communication and language development is enhanced.

The social and personal impacts are also consistently positive and widespread. All members of the class develop greater acceptance and understanding of human diversity, are more flexible and adaptable, have better interpersonal skills and higher self-esteem.

When I put aside my preoccupation with my own child I discovered that the results from over forty years of research are overwhelming: that, while every child is different and the choice is individual, most children with additional needs

do better academically and socially in truly inclusive settings, in mainstream classes, full time.

As I read, I began to understand that I hadn't just been wrong, I'd been looking at the whole thing upside down.

I grew up in Canberra in the 70s and 80s and, though some kids found school easier than others, everyone in my primary school and high school could read and write and talk and walk. So I missed out. I grew up with 'difference' being, well, different - something catered for in 'other' places.

This segregated experience implied that kids with 'different' needs fell into a different realm, unable to be part of mainstream society. No wonder my thinking on this was upside down. In my mind there was something 'wrong' with this other child and I would prefer him to be in what I then perceived to be a more 'suitable placement', not in my daughter's class. Put on the page it sounds terrible but, sadly, this 'deficit' model - where an impairment is seen as inherently negative and should be ameliorated or cured wherever possible - underlies the way difference tends to be viewed.

By contrast, a social model understanding of disability recognises that a person who experiences disability is whole and unbroken, but is disabled by the unaccommodating 'deficit' views, practices and structures of 'society'. I had to read this several times. Then I realised that when I read 'society', I meant 'me'. You see, the problem wasn't Oliver. It was me.

I was asking the wrong question, wondering if Oliver would get in the way of my daughter's learning, rather than whether my attitude was already getting in the way of his. Research shows that families frequently experience stigmatisation and a host of additional barriers when they seek to have their children included and the UN's report on the State of the World's Children identified attitudes (like mine!) as a major barrier to inclusion.

Our world is made up of all sorts of people with all sort of talents, challenges, weaknesses and skills. Why would I expect my daughter's class to be any different?

She wasn't just at school to learn to read and subtract, but to learn about the world around her – a technicolour world of diversity - its history, geography and peoples. I want her to learn to be a good citizen, to respect and care for others and not to just tolerate differences but to see value and friendships in each individual, regardless of their abilities.

And, it seems to be working. If I happen to ask her about some point of difference or 'unusual' behaviour, she simply shrugs and says "that's just what Oliver likes" in much the same way she might discuss a classmate's preference for ham rather than cheese sandwiches. In addition, she loves the new ten minute 'mindfulness' activities at the beginning of each day which help her and

Oliver, and all of their classmates, settle and focus.

Not only does Oliver have an unshakable right to be there and to be included, because he is as whole and as important as my child, but his inclusion is a wonderful thing. And it may mean that 'deficit' thinking doesn't underlie my daughter's reaction when, years from now, she herself has a child in kindergarten. •

** Editor's note: "Schools For All Children and Young People" is the title of the report of the Expert Panel on Students with Complex Needs and Challenging Behaviour. Find the report via www.det.act.gov.au. In the next issue of ParentACTion we will look at what the report says about creating truly inclusive settings, how our schools fall short of providing this for all students, and Council's response to the findings.*

names have been changed



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P&Cs: too few helpers, but still worth it

Struggling with too few volunteers but appreciating knowing more about what happens at school: these were the biggest ups and downs for our P&Cs last year, according to our member survey.

Late last year Council surveyed P&C members to find out more about the challenges and rewards of volunteering on the P&C in the ACT. It was your chance to tell us about your year on the P&C. Our thanks to those who responded.

Our findings were hardly surprising, but they do give some insight into what is needed to help P&Cs and the rewards which might encourage new members.

The biggest and most obvious need is for more volunteers, with many listing a shortage of volunteers as their greatest challenge. Most P&Cs (70%) found it difficult to fill all the positions on their committees and needed additional meetings and coercion to fill positions, or else limped through the year without key positions filled. This gets worse in colleges where more than half failed to fill their committee positions. And most volunteers are not new recruits – only around 20% of P&C office bearers were first-timers.

To help, Council is looking at a range of strategies to encourage new recruits. We are in discussions with the Education Directorate about system-wide strategies to encourage P&C volunteers and are pursuing a number of other ideas, from providing recognised training to advertising campaigns.

It is worth remembering, too, that Council has a number of resources on our website to help P&Cs promote themselves to their school communities, including Directorate-approved letters for parent enrolment packs and a P&C brochure template (take a look at www.actparents.org.au). If you have any other ideas for resources which Council could create that would benefit your P&C, please let us know.

On the plus side, our survey found that, despite the lack of helpers, most P&C members felt that

their volunteered time was valued and that being involved on the P&C was worthwhile. They felt most valued by school executive staff (90% feeling either ‘highly’ or ‘moderately’ valued), followed by the school’s teachers. Sadly, though, volunteers felt much less valued by other parents (55% saying they felt only ‘slightly valued’ or ‘not valued’) and the ‘school system’.

The survey also discovered that for most people, the best thing about being involved in the P&C was being informed about what happens at school and connecting to staff (especially the principal) and the community. The satisfaction of doing something to help their child’s school was also cited as a great thing about being on the P&C. These are not surprising, but how often do we really push these benefits when trying to recruit to the P&C? Do all parents at your school know that your P&C meetings include information about the school (eg the principal’s report) and the chance to connect with the principal? This is something well worth stressing in conversations and newsletter items.

We were also pleased to discover that our members found the services Council offers useful. Most people who used our online resources rated them useful (have you checked out our website recently?). Most of our responses to direct telephone/email enquiries were rated ‘very useful’ (feel free to email or call us with your P&C issues) and those who attended meetings found them very useful (everyone is welcome and the next one is March 22!).

We also identified a few areas we’d like to improve our services, such as providing more useful information for treasurers in particular, and making this magazine even more useful for our P&C members! We are pursuing a range of ideas to help treasurers, but would also value your comments and suggestions. And if you have any ideas on what you’d like to see in ParentAction, please let us know – it is *your* magazine!

Send feedback to: jkennard@actparents.org.au. •

Rostering volunteers

Online tools can help you fill your rosters.

Filling rosters of volunteers for large events such as fairs and BBQs can be frustrating, demoralising and time consuming, and there are many parents you just can't reach. A range of online volunteer sign-up services have now sprung up to help.

Sites such as www.volunteersignup.org and www.volunteerspot.com allow organisers to create a roster online, specifying shift times and the number of volunteers needed. A sharable link can then be distributed to parents, via newsletters, email, social media or whatever means you can best reach your helpers. Parents then simply follow the link, view available shifts and choose which one to volunteer for. They receive an email confirmation of their shift which they can easily add to their electronic calendar.

The event organiser is automatically kept up to

date with how many shifts are filled so you can easily keep track of where or when volunteers are still needed, rather than juggling multiple copies of a paper roster and struggling to keep on top of changes. You can also add information such as where to meet and what to bring so your volunteers are well prepared.

The sites automatically send your volunteers a reminder closer to the day or, if the event is cancelled, all volunteers can be emailed from the system, rather than spending hours trying to chase parents.

The sites are free for their most basic service (which will be sufficient for most events) and easy to use, with instructional videos to help you get the most out of them. Some require all volunteers to create an account with the site, which may put off some people, while others only need volunteers to enter an email address. ●

Fete 'In a Box'

Organising a fete? You'll want to open this box!

Mandy Weidmann (author of the Fundraising Directory) has just launched an amazing resource to help fete organisers, the 'Fete in a Box'.

The online 'box' contains guides, templates, links and downloads which have been amassed from the generous contributions of fundraising volunteers around Australia.

It contains over a hundred resources, including:

- a guide to step you through planning the event
- guides for individual stalls (from running the chocolate wheel to organising the BBQ)
- templates for risk management assessment, letters requesting parent help, sponsorship proposals and much more

- spreadsheets for organising floats, recording profits, budgeting and so on
- specific guides for treasurers, secretaries and public officers
- links to relevant government regulations
- brochures from local suppliers
- even recipes perfect for cake stalls!

It will certainly make running your fete as easy as possible and, unbelievably, it's free! Simply go to www.fetesandfestivals.com.au/fete-in-a-box.

Mandy will be at Council's March meeting (see the dates to remember on the back page) to share her insights on events, fundraising and volunteers. Be sure to join us. ●



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Loose Parts Play

Jackie Neill, teacher at Lyons Early Childhood School tells of the fun, creative and engaging learning opportunities created by 'Loose Parts Play', and how parents can try it at home.

Welcome to Loose Parts Play!

In this article I hope to share enough information to inspire you as a parent, carer, grandparent or teacher to create opportunities for this form of play in your home or school setting.

The theory of Loose Parts Play involves providing opportunities for children of all ages to engage with everyday materials that can be moved, carried, combined, repurposed and redesigned, taken apart and put together in endless ways. A car steering wheel, old letterbox, bike wheel, handle, or pedals, cloths, cubby making blankets, pots and pans, old phones, pebbles and shells, plumbing pipe sections, planks, crates, tiles, seedpods and sticks – make any number of these items accessible to children and you have created the opportunity for Loose Parts Play.

This type of play encourages creative thinking, open ended learning, and personal and social growth. It allows children to make their own choices, develop their own ideas, solve problems and explore their world and how they relate to themselves and others.

At home, Loose Parts Play can be set up on a small or large scale. Your very own garage, a Salvos store and Tiny's Green Shed at the Recycle depot can be great sources of materials. Then, decide how to store the items and rotate the loose parts by adding new items and taking away objects that have been well loved. At school, Loose Parts Play can be set up and made available as part of recess and lunchtime to enhance play outside by providing a richer environment than a landscape of fixed equipment and concrete.

At our Early Childhood School, we set up a Loose Parts shed using a 'retired' shipping container and spruced it up thanks to the fantastic talent



The Lyons Loose Parts shed and several creations.

and child-friendly collaboration of local visual artists Geoff Filmer and Dan Byrd.

Our shed is not open during free play (25 minutes of outside play after morning tea and lunch), as we already make available a variety of balls, bikes and sand play items at those times. Instead, the Loose Parts Shed is opened during weekly outdoor learning sessions run by the release teacher. This model allows for explicit teaching of safety and risk, skills in rope work structures, and a focus on the Dispositions for Learning (also known as Capabilities in the Australian Curriculum) of curiosity, creativity, collaboration, commitment, communication, craftsmanship and confidence.

These dispositions are a core part of our school curriculum and are taught explicitly during both indoor and outdoor learning throughout each day. In 2016, class teachers will be bringing their own group out to a Loose Parts Play session as part of their weekly schedule, with the aim of further embedding this type of play into the range of learning environments provided for children at our school.

I hope that this helps light or fuel a spark of interest in providing Loose Parts Play opportunities for the children in your care. •

For more information, contact Jackie Neill: Jackie.Neill@ed.act.edu.au

At our P&C...

Last year Ainslie Primary released a glossy, professional cookbook as a major fundraiser. P&C President Nova Inkpen details its creation and success.

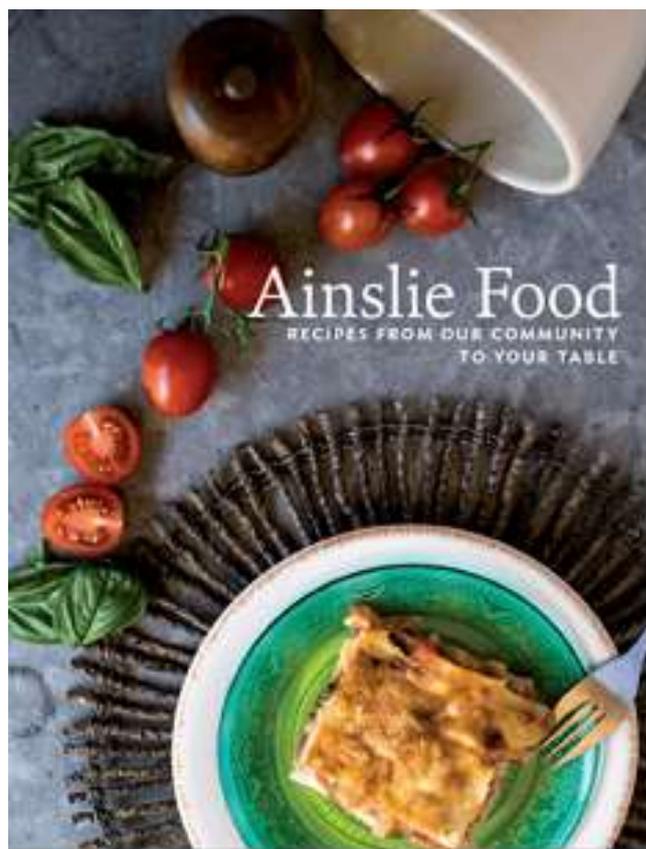
In 2013 our School Principal, Kate Chapman, brought a beautiful cookbook to the school that had been developed by Avalon Public School in Sydney. Our Ainslie P&C were instantly drawn to the project and felt confident we could produce a similar high quality product that would not only represent our strong school community and its love of food but also be a great fund raiser!

So over two years a passionate and talented group of Ainslie parents lovingly put together Ainslie Food. They came together to brainstorm, organise, gather, cook, photograph and edit over 125 recipes. This group shared their food stories and laughed a lot!

The cookbook team, a core group of 3 and extended group of 10, decided that as most of us were working full time that we needed to take our time with this important project. It was worth taking the extra time as our finished product has been extremely well received by our school and broader community.

Recipes were submitted by parents, teachers, students, members of our broader community and local businesses including Ainslie IGA, Shop Girl Flower Girl, Italian and Sons, Thirst Winebar and Eatery, and Sage Dining Rooms. With such a broad group of contributors we were able to ensure that the style of food is wonderfully diverse and appealing to wide group of people. We were also able to ensure that we included a combination of simple and more challenging recipes that can be prepared at home. The businesses who contributed their recipes were also sponsors of the cookbook and made a contribution to the printing costs. This was a great way to reduce the main expense of the cookbook – printing!

With the recipes identified the next critical element to the book's success was the photography. Through our well connected school



community we were able to involve a very talented food photographer – Nathan Lanham www.nathanlanham.com/ His photography literally makes your mouth water! The combination of his photography, our talented home grown cooks and wonderful props made the photo sessions an amazing experience. Nathan didn't do anything to the food so we were able to taste everything that went into the book!

We were also able to combine Nathan's food photographs with great images from our school events including our annual fete and walking garden tour called Down the Garden Path. Also in our school community was a journalist who edited our recipes for us and a graphic designer who cleverly put the cookbook together. With input from the main cookbook team, which included a restaurant owner and a photographer, we were able to produce a beautiful celebration of our rich and diverse school community.

We launched our cookbook at local restaurant Sage Dining Rooms with the help of the Education Minister and the Canberra Times.

Within two months of the launch we recovered the costs of producing and printing the book and we look forward to continuing to sell copies of Ainslie Food over the next two years including during Ainslie School's 90th birthday year in 2017.

The proceeds from our cookbook will enable us to develop our outdoor grounds as great gathering and learning spaces. We also look forward to further enhancing the learning environment that our passionate and skilful teachers can provide in their classrooms.

With the support of our beautiful school community, people shared the meals they love that bring their families together. If you would like to share that experience and help our school with our major outdoor grounds and classroom projects you too can own a copy of Ainslie Food for \$35. Order online at <http://goo.gl/forms/mcmnCKIc5n>. •

For more information, contact Nova Inkpen: nova@home.com.au

My top three education issues for Australia are...

ACSSO (the Australian Council of State School Organisations; Council's federal counterpart) is gearing up to represent the views of Australian public school parents to our federal politicians ahead of the next federal election.

Help them to accurately present the concerns of parents by having your say.

Head to www.acsso.org.au
choose 'Have your say'
and tell them your
top three education priorities.

About us

ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations
is the peak body for
Parent & Citizen (P&C) Associations in the ACT.

We represent over 60,000 parents and carers
in 86 ACT public schools.

About our magazine

ParentACTion is a free journal published four times a year. It is available online, plus hardcopies are provided to all ACT public school P&Cs and school boards, the ACT Legislative Assembly, senior staff at the Directorate of Education and Training, public education organisations, the media and interstate parent associations.

Contributions, advertising and feedback are always being sought. Contributions can be emailed directly to the Editor, Janelle Kennard, at jkennard@actparents.org.au.

Views expressed in this journal are not necessarily those of the ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations.

Our Executive

President:	John Haydon
Vice Presidents:	Amanda Bichard, Vivienne Pearce
Secretary:	Cecilia Shlegel
Treasurer:	Matthew Williams
Committee:	Andrew Bidwell, Debra Burnett, Sharon Ding, Melissa Hankinson, Kirsty McGovern-Hooley.

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Grant Battersby, Pam Cahir, Trevor Cobbold, Graeme Evans, Joan Kellett, Ian Morgan, Richard Scherer.

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Office hours

9.30am - 2.30pm Monday to Friday.
Closed public holidays and school holidays.

Dates to remember

March 22 Council Hot Topic/General Meeting
7.00pm - 9.30pm
Centre for Teaching and Learning
51 Fremantle Drive, Stirling

March 31 Effective P&C Workshop
6.30pm - 9.00pm
Centre for Teaching and Learning
51 Fremantle Drive, Stirling

April 2 Effective P&C Workshop (repeat)
2.00pm - 4.30pm
Maitland House
100 Maitland Street, Hackett

April 7 Treasurers' & Insurance Workshop
7.00pm - 9.30pm
Centre for Teaching and Learning
51 Fremantle Drive, Stirling

April 9-24 Term break - Council office closed

May 24 Council General Meeting
7.00pm - 9.30pm
Centre for Teaching and Learning
51 Fremantle Drive, Stirling

Promoting healthy canteen food

For students deciding which foods to buy, the way the canteen promotes and presents them is paramount. A new project from the Healthy Kids Association (HKA) is set to help school canteens market their healthiest options – for healthy kids and profits.

Research shows that if healthy foods and drinks are promoted and placed strategically at the point of sale, school aged children will purchase more of them. But most school canteens are limited in the ways they can display foods at their point of sale and have limited, if any, resources for promoting home-cooked items.

The foods canteen currently promote are heavily influenced by materials made available free from suppliers. Visible branding of less-healthy foods is prominent as a result. To increase the promotion and marketing of healthier items, materials are needed that are equally attractive and readily available.

This is exactly what a new project run by HKA will create. The program will gather a catalogue of tried and tested recipes and then create professional graphics and photography to promote them. The program will include both snack foods and main lunch items.

The result will be a suite of recipes suitable for school canteens, along with visual aids to use



The project will help canteens improve the way they promote and display healthy foods to increase sales.

around the canteens, in newsletters, on menus and in posters throughout the school.

To complement these new recipe-poster combos, HKA will also be running marketing and promotion workshops for canteen staff. Staff will be shown how to use the new materials and to present the food to increase the sales of these healthy items. HKA staff will also be visiting schools to give direct assistance on marketing and using the materials.

More information will be available through the year from Council and via HKA's 'Healthy Kids' magazine which is sent to all P&C-run public school canteens. ●