

“It feels really good to be a part of providing a healthier work environment.”

St John of God Ballarat Hospital is well on its way towards implementing the Healthy Choices guidelines in its café, staff cafeteria and vending machines.

The project has been led by dietitian Tamara Barrett who saw a need to improve the food the hospital provides to staff, in the same way the hospital was working on improving the food they provide to patients. In October 2016, St John of God Healthcare asked Ballarat to be the pilot site for their state-wide implementation of the [Healthy choices: policy guidelines for hospitals and health services](#) and they jumped at the chance.

“If we’re not giving staff healthy foods, we’re not part of the solution.”

Tamara and fellow dietitian Alison Myers attended Healthy Eating Advisory Service’s (HEAS) Mentorship training in November 2016, which provided them with helpful strategies and the opportunity to engage with those doing similar work, and also hear about some of their issues. They used the Healthy Choices guidelines as a framework, and HEAS provided ongoing support.

With their CEO already on board, they presented their proposal to senior management, before undertaking an audit of their cafes, with help from university students. Finally, they presented their audit results and the changes needed to the management group to ensure their support for the implementation of the guidelines.

Tamara and Alison also worked closely with the executive chef, who was very supportive, and with both cafes being in-house service they mainly dealt with internal suppliers, which made it easier to make changes. Their work has been promoted on the St John of God intranet group, and Tamara believes this will encourage other sites to follow their lead.

Tamara’s top tips for success

- Get the chef on board – theirs was very supportive.
- Start with easy wins, such as the drinks fridges.
- Work with staff ordering stock, so once they run out of a product they can start ordering in the healthier options – this ensures an easier transition.
- Let the staff know – present the work in a positive way, promoting it as ‘wanting to improve your choices’.
- Do a staff survey to see what they want – this gets people involved and can see it in a positive way.
- Go for easy **GREEN** foods, such as fresh sandwiches and salads.

¹ *Healthy choices: food and drink classification guide*, Department of Health and Human Services, 2014, www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/preventive-health/nutrition/healthy-choices-for-retail-outlets-vending-machines-catering