



The healthy eating journey of Bridge Road Early Learning Centre



Bridge Road Early Learning Centre (ELC) is a long day care centre in Melbourne that cares for over 60 children. The centre is passionate about healthy eating and instilling healthy behaviours at an early age. They registered with the [Achievement Program¹](#) (AP) back in 2014, and the AP framework has supported them to take a whole service approach to healthy eating as well as other areas of health and wellbeing.

Starting the conversation

Joining the Achievement Program guided the centre, to take opportunities to have conversations with families that choosing healthy foods and drinks is affordable, and that healthy eating is a way of life. Also in 2014, Bridge Road ELC registered to participate in the Smiles 4 Miles program.

Bridge Road ELC understands that good oral health in the community is important. Conversations with families had highlighted the misunderstanding around dental visits. Families thought that children only needed to visit the dentist when they started school. However, oral health checks are strongly encouraged before the age of 2.

Taking action

Participating in [Smile 4 Miles²](#) enables the service to create an environment that supports good oral health through healthy eating, healthy drinking, good oral hygiene practices and promoting regular dental visits. Through Smiles 4 Miles, the centre has developed a good relationship with their local public dental service, North Richmond Community Health, which has conducted dental checks on children attending their service. This is the perfect example of how a service can draw upon organisations in the wider community, which is an important aspect of the AP's whole-service approach.

An important requirement for the Achievement Program and Smiles 4 Miles is for services to provide healthy foods and drinks for their children. Bridge Road ELC used the [Healthy Eating Advisory Service³](#) to assess and plan a healthy menu using their free online tool, [FoodChecker](#). This allowed them to meet the Victorian [Menu Planning Guidelines for long day care](#). They also have had a number of their team complete the online training.



¹ <http://www.achievementprogram.health.vic.gov.au/>

² <https://www.dhsv.org.au/oral-health-programs/smiles4miles>

³ <http://heas.health.vic.gov.au/early-childhood-services/getting-started>



Healthy Eating Advisory Service

Achievement Program

The healthy changes the centre made to their menu included:

- having fruit available everyday
- including more high fibre grains
- better use of in season fruit and vegetables
- the use of herbs to flavour foods instead of salt
- using a fresh fruit cake instead of a baked cake for celebrations (check out the amazing Watermelon cake in the photo!).



Seeing the benefits

After making changes, children at Bridge ELC are able to identify healthy every day foods and sometimes foods.

The centre has an 'Active Family Committee' and a separate 'Active Children's Committee'. Meals were produced from the updated menu, and children and families were invited to taste and provide feedback. It was important to the centre that the children had a say. If there was an overwhelming response, for example, children didn't like a particular menu item, the centre would work towards improvements. Staff were also happy with the changes to the menu.

Through all their hard work, Bridge Road ELC met the Achievement Program Benchmark for Healthy Eating and Oral Health, and became a Smiles 4 Miles awarded service.

By Bridge Rd ELC using support available through these free services the centre could provide the highest quality healthy eating and oral health initiatives, resources and information to its children and families. And as a result enhance the growth, development and learning outcomes of the children in their care.

Finally, here is Nicoletta's (centre director) advice that will help your centre to experience the same success.

"If you commit to promoting healthy eating in your centre, be confident in what you are doing. Be open to having conversations with children, staff and families about your ideas and philosophy".

To learn more visit:

- [Healthy Eating Advisory Service](#)
- [Achievement Program](#)
- [Dental Health Service Victoria and the Smiles 4 Miles program](#)