

# School Breakfast Program

## Castlemaine Secondary College

### Background

Improving the Food Systems across the Loddon Mallee region to ensure it is a healthy and equitable one, is a priority for the Loddon Mallee Public Health Unit (LMPHU).

With cost of living on the rise and the increasing numbers of people experiencing food insecurity, people everywhere are struggling to put food on the table, meaning meals are skipped more and more frequently. By providing a healthy, nutritious and free breakfast at school, physical health, ability to actively participate in education and mental wellbeing are being positively impacted.

On 8 May 2024, the Victorian Government announced that from July 2025, all Victorian State schools would be eligible for free food to support all students to have breakfast. FoodBank Victoria supports hundreds of schools in this way, and the LMPHU is looking to support our local schools to increase access and availability of free breakfasts for all in the lead-up to the program being implemented.

### Collaboration

The LMPHU and Castlemaine Secondary College (CSC) came together at the school, which is on Dja Dja Wurrung Country, to create a working group to expand on an already existing one day per week free school breakfast program. Through collaboration with CSC, Rotary Castlemaine, Dhelkaya Health and Church of Christ, LMPHU supported the implementation of a five day per week breakfast program.



“Breakfast is the most important meal of the day.”

### Objectives

As a working group, the number one objective was to provide a healthy and nutritious breakfast for any and all students every day of the week. By providing breakfast, the goal was to not only achieve a greater sense of community within the school but to also improve the health and wellbeing of all students.

### Approach

#### 1. Source food and supplies

Utilising a small amount of funding through a separate school fundraising initiative, we registered with Bendigo Foodshare to order weekly supplies of staples including bread, milk, fruit and yoghurt. Donations through Rotary have provided napkins, cups and other essentials. CSC through the Home Economics Department shared their toasted sandwiches makers and other kitchen hardware.

#### 2. People Power

A flyer requesting people to register their interest in volunteering to help prepare and serve breakfast was circulated throughout the local community. From there, a roster and online training and relevant official documents such as Working With Children’s Checks were circulated.

### At a Glance

#### Challenges

- Reliable and regular supply of food
- Volunteers
- A space to call breakfast “home”

#### Benefits

- Between 50 and 100 students per day are now eating breakfast
- 75% of students surveyed say they felt more part of the school community
- Healthy, nutritious food is available for free four days a week



### 3. Get feeding

Announcements over the school PA system, a sandwich board and some funky tunes were utilised to inform students that breakfast was being served.

### Possible outcomes

- Increase health and wellbeing by providing a healthy, nutritious meal to start the day
- Reduce the impact of food insecurity effects on families within our LGA
- Promote a greater sense of community within the school
- Decrease the incidents of non-attendance and challenging behaviour
- Increased benefits in cognition and academic performance
- Regularly eating breakfast can reduce risks of long-term chronic illness

“Breakfast provides the body and the brain the fuel to start the day.”

### Lessons learned

- The need for a whole of school approach to implementing a breakfast program is paramount to achieving success. Ongoing funding for the provision of recyclable, disposable cups, paper napkins and other items for serving of sandwiches and smoothies was something that wasn't considered during initial setup. Having a small yearly budget for these items prior to the commencement of the breakfast program would have been beneficial.
- Whilst the supply of food from a food relief hub such as Bendigo Foodshare has been the backbone of the program, in order to provide more choice and nutrition in the form of breakfast smoothies, some items not regularly available such as fresh fruit and oats also need to be sourced from elsewhere. Whether through donations, fundraising or budget availability, the realisation of those items being a “luxury” was one for the learnings basket.
- Without having an already existing space for storage of refrigerated items, kitchen utensils and a place to serve food, implementing a breakfast program would be a significant challenge.
- Having a dedicated school staff “champion” to provide volunteers the access to school site, providing a conduit between school Principal the working group and volunteers is essential. Without an in-school “champion” the barriers to implementation would be vast.
- Volunteers are in hot demand and often under-appreciated. Having a larger than needed team of volunteers has meant we can cover days when someone is unavailable, whether planned or unplanned has meant that students still have essential breakfast they need.

### Next steps

At the LMPHU, our goal is to share learnings from this collaboration to assist schools across the region preparing to utilise government funding from July 2025. Whether implementing or expanding a school breakfast program, schools can provide free breakfast for all. And in doing so, improving physical health and mental wellbeing, positively influence academic and behavioural outcomes and reduce food insecurity levels across the Loddon Mallee through collaboration and community.

