

CASE STUDY:

EMPOWERING LOCAL MEN THROUGH NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSES

Promoting food literacy, skills sharing, and mental health for a thriving community.

In collaboration with the Elwood + St Kilda Neighbourhood Learning Centre and with the support of a local dietitian, Star Health delivered a food literacy program from April to May 2023. The program aimed to empower a group of local men by enhancing their food literacy and fostering the sharing of culinary skills, ultimately leading to improved health and wellbeing outcomes. Over the course of six weeks, these men were provided full access to the kitchen and dining space, where they cooked together, shared cooking skills, and learned to make the most of basic cooking equipment while utilising affordable ingredients, including those obtained from local food relief providers.

Local evidence demonstrates that one-person households in Port Phillip face a higher risk of food insecurity and are particularly vulnerable to inflation and high food prices. The program specifically targeted men who are currently unemployed and living in insecure or public housing. Adopting a participatory approach, the participants had the opportunity to collectively choose the recipes they wanted to prepare and establish ways of working together.

The program included cooking sessions facilitated by the dietitian, and two workshops facilitated by a health promotion practitioner. The first workshop focused on the relationship between food and memories, encouraging participants to associate food with positive experiences and emphasising the cultural and social aspects of meals.

One participant shared, ***"Really glad that I enrolled in the program. It has been really valuable in taking things more at a living, workable, and real pace that has given me a true feeling that I've finally got the tools to achieve my goals with all-round healthy ways."*** This participant expressed gratitude for the insights, helpful tips, and knowledge shared throughout the program, highlighting the transformation from an "all or nothing" mindset to one that embraces eating for nourishment and wellbeing.

Additionally, the men collaboratively informed the design of a map of the Port Phillip food environment, contributing to a broader project and baseline assessment by the Health Promotion Team, which will inform future strategies and initiatives related to food.

The program outcomes include the creation of a supportive community that fosters health and wellbeing for all. By recognising local neighbourhood houses as integral parts of the local food environment, people can access and learn about food in a supportive setting. Local neighbourhood houses can also play a key role in fostering awareness of environmental sustainability by encouraging community gardening practices and promoting reducing food waste and appropriate disposal.

Building upon the positive evaluation results, the Health Promotion Team is currently exploring the potential for expanding the initiative into a sustainable, ongoing program at the ESNLC, while also considering the role of building capacity within other local neighbourhood houses to deliver similar models.



Figure 1. Meal prepared by program participants in the last session



Figure 2. Co-design workshop for the development of the Port Phillip Food Environment map

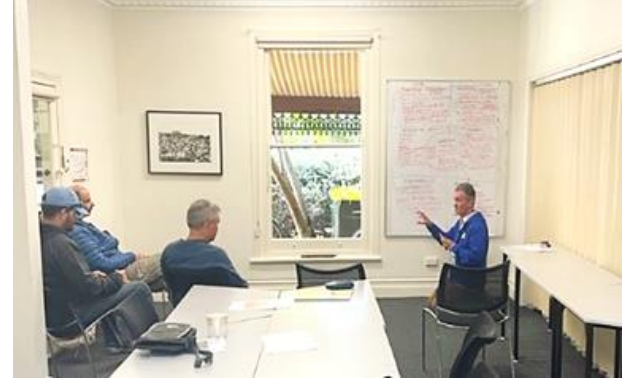


Figure 3. Conducting a focus group for evaluation purposes.