

# Providing nutritious food and healthy activity levels in childcare environments

February 20 2014, by Amanda Horswill

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Sandgate Child Care centre worker Kate Nelson prepares and serves food to the children in her care.

You've filled the fridge with fruit and vegetables, put a timer on the TV and your mantra is: "Go outside and play." But how do you know your family's healthy lifestyle ethos is mirrored at childcare?

A new, free program called LEAPS - Learning, Eating, Active Play and Sleep - led by QUT in partnership with NAQ Nutrition is providing professional development and resources for Queensland early childhood education and care services such as Family Day Care, Kindergartens and Childcare on providing nutritious food and healthy activity levels for the

children in their care.

"There are some early childhood services that do actively promote breastfeeding, provide [nutritious food](#) and who are doing a really good job keeping their kids active enough to satisfy the national guidelines," QUT Associate Professor Danielle Gallegos said.

"However, there are so many pressures surrounding food and physical activity at services - time, money, staff expertise, facilities... There are a thousand variables that make each provider's service delivery different.

"The information around these issues also changes as research progresses.

"The LEAPS program provides information and tips on how to meet the current guidelines on nutrition and [physical activity](#), in practical ways. For example, there are a number of fact sheets available on the LEAPS website including budget buying, healthy snacks, recipes and active play activities in small spaces.

"And the services who do not provide food may find it hard to address problems with what parents pack in their child's lunchbox. It can be very hard for an educator to talk to a parent about these issues and to assist them in making nutritious choices.

"The LEAPS program provides really practical strategies on how to get that conversation started and how to successfully get the message across."

Sandgate Child Care director Colleen Pavey said she and educators at her Brighton Rd, Sandgate, centre completed LEAPS last October, as part of their ongoing [professional development](#) program.

"We had completed courses before in nutrition, however, they were usually talking about older children and we had to adapt it to suit our age group," Ms Pavey said.

"There is a new national quality standard that we must meet as a childcare service, so we are always looking for ways to improve. We do supply food at Sandgate Child Care - breakfast, lunch and morning and afternoon tea and a late snack, and our cook, Kate Nelson, always ensures the food is fresh and nutritious.

"But because this course was specifically tailored to [child care](#), it was amazing in terms of new ideas.

"Something we did immediately was to introduce vegetable pieces into the fruit platters served for morning and afternoon tea. We expected that the children would not be that receptive, but the children have taken to it really well, and they especially love the strips of capsicum and the baby cucumbers. Most children were pretty willing to try something new.

"And I have also started to order low-fat milk, for the children aged older than two."

Provided by Queensland University of Technology

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