

# Eat Plant Learn

Evaluation Report

July 2014

## Contact us

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# Eat Plant Learn

## A Health Promotion and Sustainability Initiative

### Introduction

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This report provides an overview of the Eat Plant Learn (EPL) program and presents evaluation results including attendance data and results from pre and post program questionnaires, completed by Neami National (NN) staff and consumers. Uptake was as expected, with 78% of service sites with group program funding offering the EPL program from August 2013 until June 2014.

EPL is a program of workshops on healthy and sustainable eating, developed and implemented by NN's Sustainability Team, in collaboration with the Health Promotion Team and a working group of NN staff and consumers.

EPL is based on key Sustainable Living Initiatives identified in NN's Sustainable Living Framework. The program also aligns with NN's 1.01.15 Policy: Commitment to Sustainability: 'Neami National is committed to reducing its environmental footprint and improving its environmental performance over time. Neami National will take a proactive approach to sustainability and will take a leadership role in encouraging all Neami National staff, consumers and other community organisations to reduce their environmental impact'.

NN's Sustainable Living Framework includes a program to offer NN consumers a range of opportunities to engage in sustainable activities relevant to their own recovery goals. Building on links between Sustainability and Health Promotion initiatives, this program aims to embed sustainable practises into service delivery. Along with the Home Energy Saver Scheme, the NN Opportunity Cards and Next Steps, the EPL program forms part of Neami's Sustainable Living Program for consumers.

EPL was developed to support consumers to develop healthy lifestyle skills and opportunities to link with community organisations. It aimed to improve the knowledge, skills and behaviours of NN consumers and staff in relation to sustainability, gardening and healthy eating through the following objectives:

- Increase opportunities in Sustainability and Health Promotion offered to NN consumers through the Sustainable Living Program
- Increase consumer engagement in programs offering health promotion and sustainability
- Improve consumers' knowledge of sustainability and healthy eating

### Eat Plant Learn Overview

Eat Plant Learn is a structured 8-week program integrating Sustainability and Health Promotion initiatives for consumers. The sessions are intended to be fun, engaging, skill sharing opportunities supporting behaviour change through practical experiences.

The EPL program was designed to be offered to around 6 consumers, with each 2-hr session facilitated by two staff. Service sites were encouraged to team up with nearby sites to deliver the program.

Table 1 below, provides an overview of the Eat Plant Learn program

Session 1	Launch, introduction and sign-up session
Session 2	Healthy and sustainable eating information session
Session 3	Gardening: prepare a wicking garden box
Session 4	Hands on cooking and tasting with herbs and salads
Session 5	Gardening: finish wicking garden box and plant seedlings
Session 6	Activities: shopping outing with a focus on healthy, affordable and sustainable produce
Session 7	Herb & salad box delivery and installation. Individual consumer support by CRSWs
Session 8	Healthy and sustainable picnic to share and celebrate the program and link consumers into relevant local community programs

EPL Facilitator Packs were supplied to all NN service sites in July 2013. These consisted of a detailed EPL Preparation Guide and facilitation notes with relevant resources for each session. While the EPL packs and resources were designed to ensure smooth implementation of the program, staff were encouraged to expand and adapt the program to suit the needs of their consumers.

Staff were required to gauge consumer interest and order individual resources for consumers wishing to participate in the program. The Sustainability Officer then supplied all the required written resources to reduce CRSW preparation time. This also allowed the number of consumers intending on participating in the program to be recorded.

## Evaluation Design

Based on estimates from the Health Promotion Officers in each state, it was anticipated that a maximum of 28 service sites could offer EPL as a group program, which equated to a maximum participation of 168 consumers (if 6 consumers attended each session).

EPL was implemented with the goal to be offered at 75% of service sites with group program funding, i.e. 21-28 Service sites or 127-168 consumers. Table 2 summarises the EPL objectives and related goals to allow evaluation.

Table 2

<b>OBJECTIVES</b>	<b>MEASURABLE GOAL</b> What information is required?	<b>EVALUATION</b> How will information be collected?
To increase opportunities in Sustainability and Health Promotion offered to consumers through the Sustainable Living Program	Aim for 75-100% of service sites to participate in program. This excludes sites without group program funding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustainability Officers (SOs) record requests for program resources</li> <li>• Sites to report on participation</li> <li>• SO and HPOs to collect participation data</li> </ul>
To increase consumer engagement in programs offering health and sustainability	Aim for 126-168 consumers to participate in EPL, i.e. 6 consumers for each program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sites to report on attendance</li> <li>• SO and HPOs to collate participation data</li> <li>• Carelink Data analysis</li> </ul>

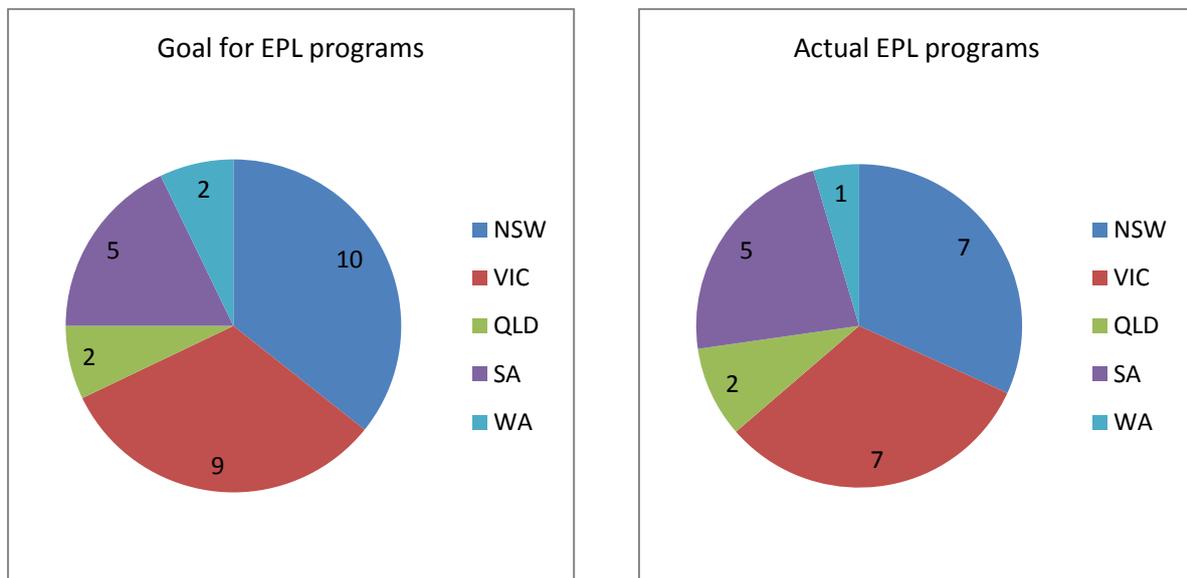
To improve consumer’s knowledge of sustainability and health	Increase in self-reported knowledge between pre and post program questionnaire completed by staff and consumers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Results from a pre-and post-program questionnaire to gauge consumer knowledge in this area.</li> <li>• Completed questionnaires to be sent to SO and HPOs</li> </ul>
Plants to survive beyond the program	80% of plants to still be alive 3 months after the program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3-mth follow up with consumers participating in the gardening component</li> <li>• CRSWs to contact consumers and record results in a spread sheet.</li> <li>• Results collated by SO and HPOs</li> </ul>

## Evaluation Results

### Objective 1 – Increase opportunities in sustainability and HP

Between August 2013 and June 2014, 22 separate EPL programs were offered, which is equivalent to 78% of sites with group program funding. This figure met Objective 1 to ‘To increase opportunities in Sustainability and Health Promotion offered to consumers through the Sustainable Living Program by offering between 21-28 EPL programs’.

Each state participated in EPL. The expected and actual number of EPL programs by state is shown below. Each state performed similarly, offering EPL programs at most, but not all sites with group program funding.



### Objective 2 – Increase consumer participation in HP and sustainability

In line with expectations for 126-168 consumers to participate in EPL, resources were requested for 160 consumers. However, no comprehensive attendance data was received from service sites. Attendance can be estimated based on available Carelink Data from 9 service sites. On average, the number of packs requested by staff, differed slightly to the number of consumers actually attending these 9 sites by -1.1 consumers.

On average, each site had 5.22 unique consumers attending over the course of the program, with an average of 4 consumers attending each session. Based on this figure, with 22 Eat plant Learn programs offered, it could be estimated that 115 unique consumers participated in the program. This is slightly below the goal of 126-168 consumers attending.

In some instances, uptake exceeded original expectations. For example, Carrington and Pagewood offered two EPL Programs, due to consumer demand. One EPL was also offered by Knox City Council with assistance from a consumer from Blackburn. Furthermore, some service sites without group funding, including Port Adelaide, Seacliff and Perth offered some aspects of the program to consumers where it was relevant to their individual recovery plans.

### Objective 3 – Improve consumer knowledge of sustainability and health

Pre and post-program questionnaires were completed and returned by a total of 6 staff and 37 consumers who participated in EPL programs at 8 service sites (see Appendix).

The breakdown of consumer completion of the questionnaire from various NN service sites is as follows: Briar Hill (n=5 consumers, pre and post), Bankstown (n=8, pre and post), Glen Waverly (n=7 pre), Elizabeth (n=6, post), Heidelberg (n=1, pre and post), SA site (n=8 pre and post); Pagewood (n=4, pre and post), Regent (n=5, pre, n=3, post).

Mean scores for each of the self-reported knowledge measures completed by consumers and staff on the pre and post program surveys are reported in Table 3a and 3b respectively.

	<b>Pre</b>	<b>Post</b>
Q1. Knowledge about growing your own food	4.5 (n=37)	6.4 (n=17)
Q2. Pre: Knowledge about eating healthy food	6.3 (n=37)	7.1 (n=21)
Q2. Post: Knowledge about eating healthy and sustainable food		
Q3. Knowledge about eating and shopping sustainably	5.6 (n=37)	7.3 (n=20)

Range: 1= 'I don't know much about this' and 10= 'I know a lot about this'

**Note:** Consumers who indicated that they had not participated in the gardening component of the program were omitted from the post-program results for the first question.

	<b>Pre</b>	<b>Post</b>
Q1. Knowledge about growing your own food	6.8 (n=6)	7.8 (n=4)
Q2. Pre: Knowledge about eating healthy food	8.2 (n=6)	9.3 (n=4)
Q2. Post: Knowledge about eating healthy and sustainable food		
Q3. Knowledge about eating and shopping sustainably	7.3 (n=6)	7.3 (n=4)

Range: 1= 'I don't know much about this' and 10= 'I know a lot about this'

Table 3a demonstrates that there was a small increase in mean scores for consumers' self-reported knowledge on all three questions. However, as question 2 differed slightly between the pre and post program questionnaires, it may render such a comparison invalid. Table 3b shows that a small increase was also recorded in mean scores for self-reported knowledge by staff on questions 1 and 2 but no change was reported for question 3.

On the pre-program questionnaire, 24 consumers reported looking forward to the gardening component, 20 the cooking, 16 to the healthy and sustainable eating activity and 9 to the shopping outing. Staff rated the first three components equally (4), with 2 noting the shopping activity.

The post-program questionnaire asked consumers and staff what they enjoyed most about the program. The most common responses are summarised below:

<p><u>Consumers:</u>  <i>Learning new skills</i>  <i>Getting outside</i>  <i>Gardening: Making the planter boxes; learning how to grow seedlings</i>  <i>Social: Meeting people who want to learn how to live better; staff communication with clients</i>  <i>Cooking: cooking with the plants, with fresh food</i></p>	<p><u>Staff:</u>  <i>Working alongside consumers, with community partners, gaining knowledge; great chance to present info to consumers and staff; opportunity to engage with consumers in a different way, shared meal; hands on activities; fresh produce and variety of dishes;</i></p>
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All consumers and staff who completed the post-program questionnaire reported that they would recommend the program to others. Their reported reasons for recommending it are noted below:

<p><u>Consumers:</u>  <i>New Skills: Gardening, cooking</i>  <i>Knowledge of healthy living</i>  <i>Social: meeting others, part of a group</i>  <i>Interactive, practical</i></p>	<p><u>Staff:</u>  <i>Good practical group combining HP and sustainability well; fun, educational and social group; good chance to learn and share; hands on learning for growing own food and healthy eating</i></p>
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Consumers and staff were also asked about how the Eat Plant Learn program could be improved. Some key themes that emerged in consumer feedback were:

- Need for more involved learning, encouragement and follow-up
- Condensing some sessions
- Many noted that there was no need to change anything

While staff all reported feeling confident about how to care for the seedlings, 2 of 20 consumers reported that they needed more support or information and 2 of 20 consumers indicated that they did not participate in the gardening component of the program.

In addition to the feedback collected from facilitators via the post-program questionnaire, more qualitative feedback was collected via email and in group discussions at the 2014 NN Sustainability Workshops. Key themes that emerged from this process can be summarised as follows:

- There has been really positive feedback from consumers, particularly with regard to the Wicking Box building sessions and the cooking session.
- More direction or structured activities are necessary for the first session
- Replace or redesign the shopping outing
- Staff reported that consumers found the hands-on and practical nature of these sessions rewarding for their enjoyment and feeling of empowerment.
- Staff also reported that consumers developed an attitude of care to each other during the sessions, assisting each other to complete the garden boxes in times of illness etc.

#### Objective 4 – Plants survive beyond the program

Due to time constraints, no data was collected on whether seedlings were still alive after three months following the completion of EPL programs.

## Discussion and Recommendations

Overall, Eat Plant Learn received a very positive response from staff and consumers. Uptake was as expected, with 78% of service sites with group program funding offering the EPL program. Although the program will not be offered in 2014-15, it is recommended that it be offered the following year, when a new pool of consumers can participate in the program for the first time, along with some consumers who may like to attend again.

Feedback indicated that the most successful EPL programs were those where staff adapted the program to meet the specific needs of the consumers participating. Some sites reported that the sessions could be completed more quickly than the two hours allocated. The main instance of this was for the first session, where it was intended that staff facilitate a planning session to gauge the needs of their specific consumer group.

Based on staff and consumer feedback, it is recommended that the initial session and the shopping activity be replaced with an outing to a community garden, nursery or fresh food market and an additional cooking session respectively. Focus groups are planned with staff and consumers who participated in EPL to gather specific feedback into what else EPL sessions could provide and plan for future sustainability activities relevant to consumers' recovery goals.

The method of distributing resources for the program only after consumers had registered their interest was deemed an effective way to conserve resources, while also ensuring staff delivered the program as it was intended. While this method was more time consuming for the Sustainability Officers, it did appear to be necessary, given the time constraints of CRSWs running the program.

To ensure comprehensive attendance data can be collected, it is also recommended that NN's Carelink staff oversee the design of a Carelink reporting structure for Eat Plant Learn that allows service sites to easily record attendance that can be analysed later on.

To rectify the evaluation design flaw that question 2 on the Pre and Post Program Questionnaires were slightly different, rendering the comparison of results invalid, it is recommended that the pre and post program questionnaires be re-written in collaboration with NN's Research and Development team to ensure valid comparative analysis can be conducted and reported on.

It is however encouraging that consumers' self-reported knowledge of healthy and sustainable eating and growing their own food increased in the follow up questionnaire and suggests the merit of offering EPL again in the future. This was supported by the overwhelmingly positive and meaningful feedback received from staff and consumers.

The fact that feedback from staff and consumers indicated what they enjoyed most about the program included Learning new skills; Gardening; Social opportunities; and Cooking is encouraging as it aligns with Consumers' Top Goals of Activities of Daily Living and Social Recreation, as identified and reported in NN's Service Improvement Report 2013. This suggests that opportunities offered by EPL are relevant to consumers' identified recovery goals. More comprehensive collection of evaluation data for future EPL Programs would enable such measures to be assessed in more detail.

Increased follow-up by CRSWs with consumers after the program is recommended and should be included in the facilitator notes. This would provide the support some consumers indicated they needed and also allow data collection about seedling survival beyond the program. It is also recommended that future programs provide support for consumers completing the program for a second time to learn how to continue planting and utilising their original wicking box.

Anecdotal evidence from Victorian staff (CRSWs and Managers) suggested that EPL should have been promoted earlier so it could be incorporated into the initial group planning sessions and be included in the group activity booklet that is sent to consumers. Additionally, it may have been useful for the HPO's and Sustainability Officers to conduct a brief training session for the HPSCs and Green Reps to familiarise themselves with the program and contents, prior to the program launch. This would have provided staff with the opportunity to clarify sections of the program and explore ways in which the content could be tailored in line with potential consumer needs and/or interests.

## More information

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## Appendix



### EAT PLANT LEARN

**Please complete the following questionnaire to give a picture of your past experience and knowledge of gardening and healthy and sustainable eating**

**What parts of Eat Plant Learn are you most interested in? (Please tick)**

- The gardening sessions
- The cooking session
- The activity session on healthy and sustainable eating
- The shopping outing

**Rate your level of knowledge about growing your own food**

1—2—3—4—5—6—7—8—9—10  
**I don't know much about this** **I know a lot about this!**

**Rate your level of knowledge about eating healthy food**

1—2—3—4—5—6—7—8—9—10  
**I don't know much about this** **I know a lot about this!**

**Rate your level of knowledge about eating and shopping sustainably**

1—2—3—4—5—6—7—8—9—10  
**I don't know much about this** **I know a lot about this!**

**Thanks for taking the time to give us your feedback!**

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## EAT PLANT LEARN

**Please complete the following questionnaire to help us evaluate and improve the Eat Plant Learn Program for the future**

What did you enjoy most about the program?

How could we improve the Eat Plant Learn Program? What would you change?

Would you recommend the program to others? Y or N (please circle)  
Why / Why Not?

Do you feel confident about how to care for your seedlings? Y or N

Rate your level of knowledge about growing your own food

**1—2—3—4—5—6—7—8—9—10**  
I don't know much about this I know a lot about this!

Rate your level of knowledge about eating healthy and sustainable food

**1—2—3—4—5—6—7—8—9—10**  
I don't know much about this I know a lot about this!

Rate your level of knowledge about shopping sustainably

**1—2—3—4—5—6—7—8—9—10**  
I don't know much about this I know a lot about this!

**Thanks for taking the time to give us your feedback!**

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