

# Enhancing Program Effectiveness

## Australia's School Nutrition Program in the Northern Territory



Having implemented a School Nutrition Program (SNP) in 2007 in Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory, the Australian Government's Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations sought to conduct an evaluation of the program in 2011 to ascertain whether the initiative had met its objectives.

### Setting the table

As part of the Northern Territory Emergency Response, the SNP aimed to address school enrolment and attendance challenges in remote communities by providing students with daily breakfast and/or lunch. The program was expected to not only improve child health and wellbeing, but also enhance parent and community engagement through employment in the program. Having reached the end of its four year mandate, the Department of Education, Employment

and Workplace Relations wanted to conduct an evaluation to understand the impact of their investment and potential benefits of the program.

However, the program administrators faced a number of challenges in conducting the evaluation. For one, the remote location of the participating communities meant that stakeholder feedback was difficult to collect and analyze. Moreover, reliable program data was either unavailable or inconsistent, which severely impacted the collection of quantitative results.

“KPMG in Australia went to great lengths to deliver an independent, robust and insightful assessment of the SNP program which, given the remote location of the constituents was a considerable feat, by building trust within the community and providing a rigorous structure for the evaluation, we now have valuable data with which to assess our investment.” **DEEWR Officer NT.**”

## The right ingredients

As a result, the department looked to KPMG in Australia to develop and execute an evaluation strategy that would provide reliable and actionable results to program administrators.

Leveraging their deep experience in both program evaluation and Aboriginal affairs, the KPMG team quickly set about creating a practical approach that included extensive consultation processes and secondary analysis of program information to paint an independent and clear picture of the impact of the School Nutrition Program.

## A recipe for success

To achieve these objectives, the KPMG team mobilized their team to put ‘boots on the ground’ in twelve of the remote communities in order to conduct in-person consultations with local stakeholders and participants. Findings from these interviews were

then augmented through an electronic survey of all SNP providers and Northern Territory school principals to develop a greater understanding of the effectiveness of the program.

Recognizing the need to place these results within the context of the broader policy objectives, the team also conducted consultations with officials from a number of government agencies including those responsible for health, education, employment, housing and community services, and juxtaposed their findings against relevant national and international school nutrition and community development strategies.

## Food for thought

A key success factor behind the evaluation was the KPMG team’s focus on respecting the culture of the local communities.

Not only did the team ensure their dress and approach reflected cultural

norms, but they also engaged respected Aboriginal leaders who joined the team on site visits to help open doors and ease their introduction into local communities.

## Nourishing outcomes

As a result of their work, the KPMG team was able to deliver a robust evaluation of the program’s governance, administration, sustainability and funding arrangements and found consistent anecdotal evidence that the program had a positive effect on student behavior, engagement and child health.

KPMG’s independent findings will be a key component of the Australian government’s assessment of the program and will likely inform the global debate on the linkages between school food programs and child welfare.

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Designed by Evalueserve. Publication name: Enhancing Program Effectiveness. Publication number: 120684E. Publication date: July 2012