

**INQUIRY INTO INQUIRY INTO CHILDHOOD
OVERWEIGHT AND OBESITY**

Organisation: Food Works Australia Pty Ltd

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Rob Rees MBE DL

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The Director
Standing Committee on Social Issues
Committee.SocialIssues@parliament.nsw.gov.au
Legislative Council, Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000.

To the Honourable Members of the Committee,

Re: Strategies for the reduction of current child obesity levels in NSW

I'd like to thank you for inviting me to provide evidence and examples of strategies to aid in the reduction of obesity levels currently present amongst children in New South Wales. I hope to offer solutions as opposed to solely highlighting consistent problems or concerns. It is from a reflective point of view of my experiences and in my role as CEO of Rob Rees Food Works Australia Pty Ltd., in which I provide this evidence. I have recently moved from the UK to Australia with 15 year's experience of food and policy interventions and strategy – firstly as a former Board Member of the UK Food Standards Agency in 2002 and following on to Board Member and Chairman of the UK School Food Trust (now Children's Food Trust).

The School Food Trust (SFT) was the organisation established to be at an arm's length from the UK Government following the Jamie Oliver intervention on school meals that occurred eleven years ago. The School Food Trust however reported directly into UK Government on its findings and outcomes.

This organisation (enabled by the UK Government) took the momentum of the time to develop nutritional (based on scientific requirements as a result of the UK Nutrition and Diet Survey) and food based standards to school meal services in England. The SFT then began to mobilize the school workforce into developing whole school approaches to food to improve standards to make better and easier choices. To succeed this required a strong asset based community development (ABCD) process. Whilst this is a lengthy process it is essential in that it embraces the strengths of a school community as a tool to overcoming challenges. ABCD is not a model that can be scaled up. However it does contain process points of developing, implementing, reviewing and reflecting that most certainly can be modelled if it is alongside a strong and consistent framework of what quality and good practice looks like. The food based standards were in legislation. They faced challenges from

caterers and industry at the time but with open and sensible dialogue the changes were implemented. UK learning showed the food based standards were easier to enforce and manage than the nutrient standards.

As new food quality and standards arrived there was a need to inspire and educate young people in how to make better food choices. We developed the 'Lets Get Cooking' Programme - an England wide project originally with 5,500 cooking clubs that saw the coaching of two million people outside of curriculum time. This provided the first meaningful evidence around the impact of cooking on habits to healthy eating. I have attached the evidence from this project for your review. The 'Lets Get Cooking' programme was non-Government but Lottery funded and is an ongoing project across the UK currently without Government funding. 'Let's Get Cooking' is a "train-the-trainer" type model with solid central and consistent resources available to use in localised settings. The SFT itself is no longer a quango of Government but a separate thriving not-for-profit organisation, a big influencer of the UK School Food Plan and a wider remit on improving children's food across the UK. The SFT recently carried out (looking at volunteered and scanned household data) likely the biggest packed lunch survey to have ever occurred which can be viewed via the following link:

<http://www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk/blog/packedlunch2016/>

I have attached some useful information: The evaluation of the 'Lets Get Cooking' Programme and the findings of the improvement in behaviour of implementing and enforcing school food standards in primary and secondary schools parallel to having whole school approaches to food. Also attached are the two cross party Government reports on Food Poverty carried out over the last 2 ½ years.

The growing double burden of malnutrition and obesity go hand in hand with nearly 190,000 children in NSW going hungry each day and one of the steepest gradients of inequality across Australia. Upon reflection it's important to understand the need to understand a variety of learning styles. Success in behavior change will not come from doing to people but if clear purpose and understandable consistent messages and policy frameworks are available change can happen. 'Lets Get Cooking' was on a scale that meant it reached a tipping point and the norm to a point. It is clear to me that unlocking and developing community based leadership is essential. Imagine it like a successful company with stunning employer engagement (local people) and purpose (eat better, you do better) – a good leader is an enabler (government or arm's length body). You need to trust the process and let people find ways to do the right thing.

The following link is a report into Social Prescribing (non-medical interventions):

<http://www.scholarpublishing.org/index.php/ASSRJ/article/view/808>

Social prescribing should be considered as a possible process and policy that can help tackle obesity but also the concerns of wider mental health and well being. As you will be aware the generational influence and other key health issues tend to

affect the same people.

I hope that I have provided some food for thought and would very much value time in talking with you further or some of your executive officers about seeking out positive solutions that with considered risks and radical review can help NSW improve the health and well-being of its children.

Yours Sincerely

Rob Rees MBE DL