

BREAKFAST PROGRAM



a **CFMEU & AEU** initiative





THE **BREAKFAST PROGRAM**

The Victorian construction unions and the Australian Education Union (Victorian Branch) are committed to:

- **helping all children get a good start to the school day by providing them with a nutritious and filling breakfast on the school premises;**
- **supporting schools who already have a breakfast program in place;**
- **giving all kids an equal chance of engaging fully in educational activities; and**
- **filling an identifiable gap left by successive governments through their withdrawal of targeted government funding for specific projects (state school breakfast programs).**

Welcome to the breakfast program

The Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) and the Australian Education Union (AEU) Victorian Branch are aware of the increasing number of families living in poverty and of the impact this has on the ability of some families to provide their children with adequate nutrition. Many children start the school day without breakfast. This limits their ability to make the most of the one opportunity – education – which may help them to break out of the family poverty cycle.

CFMEU and AEU members are committed to working together to help children get the best start by providing a breakfast program which ‘puts some food in kids’ mouths’.

Some schools have already taken this important initiative upon themselves and both unions wish to support schools where current programs are in place. Furthermore, they recognise that the program will not ‘fix’ the problem; rather it strives to improve the lives of children which it is able to assist.

Governments have a responsibility to ensure that all children are able to function in society with their basic needs met, but while governments do not make these fundamental needs a priority, the CFMEU and the AEU will continue to support the breakfast program.

We invite you to share our objectives and trust that you get as much out of this program as we have gained by coordinating it.

Jodi Watt (AEU)

Damian Eley (CFMEU)

How it all began

In May 2001 a few CFMEU union members read the following article in the *Sunday Age* about children in Dandenong going to school without any breakfast.

In the staffroom at Dandenong North Primary School, teacher Carol Wilhelm makes toast in a slow old griller with bread donated by a local businessman, while children wait patiently for their breakfast.

Pieces of Vegemite toast are handed out with kind words and little fuss. But children arriving at school with empty stomachs are posing an increasing problem for schools, according to Michael Butler, President of the Welfare teachers Association of Victoria.

While the need for breakfast programs in schools is more pressing than ever, he says, many schools simply do not have the resources to staff and administer them.

It is not just a matter of raising funds for cereal, bread and milk but, more importantly, in the number of hours involved for staff members in co-ordinating the program and supervising the children.

The lack of resources is a constant frustration for Kevin Mackay, Principal of Dandenong North Primary School, who sees the extent of the need in the school community every day.

"We have kids we know are hungry when they come to school", he says.

"Sometimes it's because they've had to get themselves up and ready for school and don't know how to make a proper breakfast.

"More often it's because the family is in hardship and there is simply no food in the house".

Mr Mackay believes primary schools need welfare co-ordinators who could run breakfast or lunch programs and follow up with the children, in the realisation that a lack of breakfast is, in many cases, a sign of a much deeper and more urgent problem.

A demand for a pilot program of welfare officers in primary schools is one of the key issues in the post budget stand off between the State Government and the Australian Education Union.

When funding is tight, welfare programs often are the first to be cut, losing out to books, computers and the fundamentals of learning, Mr Butler says.

While the school will sometimes refer families in need to charitable organisations, they too are overwhelmed with requests for help and stretched for resources.

John Dalziel, of the Salvation Army, says the number of children arriving at school hungry is symptomatic of the widening gap between rich and poor in Australia.

Over 11.5 per cent of Victorians are currently considered to be living below the poverty line, with children featuring heavily in the statistic.

"Sometimes parents just have to make the tough decision that the family has had a good evening meal and will have to go without breakfast", he says.

Mr Mackay says he wants to do more, to offer more, but he fears that if the teachers publicised such a service without the requisite funding, they would be swamped with a demand they could not meet.

Amanda Dunn *Sunday Age* 28 May, 2001

The initial reaction of the members was disbelief that this was happening in the 21 century – and in Australia.

They wanted to help, so they brainstormed some ideas. First, it was decided to bring the issue to the attention of fellow union members. It was then mentioned and discussed at branch, delegates and executive meetings. Then it was decided to approach the AEU and ask how widespread the situation was in schools and how CFMEU members could help.

A series of meetings were convened between the CFMEU and the AEU where ideas and suggestions were put forward. From these discussions an operations framework was developed and guidelines implemented (see next page). A pilot program was then established linking 12 CFMEU construction sites and 12 schools across Victoria.

Tasks	Responsibility
Introduce worksite steward to school contact.	CFMEU/AEU committee
Donated monies from construction workers to be provided to AEU contact.	CFMEU steward
Purchase and collection of food.	AEU contact person at school or nominee
School bursar to prepare a report each month on income/monies spent plus remaining balance and to provide a copy to the AEU contact person and worksite steward. The worksite to be provided with a photocopy of original receipts kept at the school for auditing purposes. A thank you letter to be sent on school letterhead each time a donation is received (see Appendix 2)	AEU contact person at school or nominee. School bursar
Site workers to be provided with copy of financial report and/or a breakdown of how donated monies were spent.	CFMEU steward
AEU contact person and CFMEU steward to liaise to ensure tasks are carried out.	

The respective program co-facilitators from the CFMEU and the AEU are Damian Eley and Jodi Watt. They represent their organisations in the setting up and co-ordination of the program, in order to ensure guidelines are implemented, and to assist with liaison between worksites and schools. They are also supported by members and officials within the different union structures.

How are schools and construction sites matched?

Initially, schools were asked to express interest in participating through the AEU council and through the AEU's *Principal Class Bulletin*. As the program expands, however, schools are increasingly being informed through the media and the Australian Education Union's newspaper, *AEU News*.

Schools interested in participating are requested to approach the AEU directly for assistance (telephone 9417 2822).

Delegates and safety representatives from CFMEU worksites who believe they can help are asked to contact Damian Eley (telephone 0416 086 111). Damian will discuss logistics, parameters and guidelines to help facilitate a successful breakfast program.

Together, Jodi Watt and Damian Eley will arrange a meeting between participating teachers and CFMEU stewards to exchange information about the school and worksite.

Each program pair is asked to participate in a launch – usually held at the CFMEU worksite. This requires a number of children from the participating school, along with the teachers running the program, to visit the worksite. This way, workers are able to 'put a face to a name' and are encouraged to donate. The local media is invited to the launch – this raises awareness in the community about the issue and the effect the lack of breakfast has on a child's education.



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INFORMATION FOR WORKSITES

How to participate: try a gold coin donation

To raise money for the breakfast program, 'the bucket' is passed around on payday on most construction sites. Workers generally throw in a couple of dollars each.

Two dollars on its own would not, of course, buy a Vegemite sandwich or a pot of beer these days! However, when you accumulate everyone's two-dollar donation, you can purchase a reasonable amount of breakfast food.

Raffling a meat tray or a slab are popular ways with CFMEU members of providing money for your school's breakfast program. Money donated by members is then passed on to the school by the site delegate and a receipt is provided to display on site.

All construction industry unions – join the fight against hunger

Since its introduction there has been a groundswell of enthusiasm and commitment by construction workers in joining the breakfast program. The more union members who donate, the more food we can provide. It's great to see how many workers so far have teamed up in an alliance with the AEU and CFMEU to help rectify one of society's injustices.

We thank everyone involved thus far from the Victorian branches of the **ETU**, **CEPU**, **AMWU** and **FEDFA** for their donations and continued support.

By end of June 2002, members had raised in excess of \$27,000.



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INFORMATION FOR SCHOOLS

How can a school provide breakfast for students?

There are different ways of providing breakfast in schools. A requirement of the program is that breakfast be provided five days a week, even though some children may only access the program a couple of days a week. This ensures that as many children as possible are provided with something good to eat at school even if there is no food at home.

AEU members volunteer to run the program, but this does not always mean they personally serve breakfast each morning! Parents, church groups and special community organisations have all helped with the 'hard yards' in terms of providing breakfast. This varies from school to school, and schools receive varying levels of support from their school communities.

The AEU's sub-branch representatives are encouraged to make links with the local community in the provision of food. For example, reps may approach local bakeries, fruit shops, independent supermarkets and dairies. These outlets may consider offering donations or providing discounts (Pauls Milk has, for example, offered participating schools a discount and milk delivery. In exchange schools may consider offering free advertising in the school newsletter.

Such arrangements assist in keeping costs to a minimum. (See Appendix 1 for a sample proforma letter which you can send to your local supplier.)

The venue for the breakfast is also reliant on current school operations and available space. Some schools have used the school canteen, others have a general-purpose room. (This option is great as it allows children to engage with other students and staff at a social level!)

We also ask that all food provided be nutritious (often, this is the only nutritious meal for the day for some children).



The value of breakfast on learning

While poverty is only one reason children may be arriving at school hungry, the statistics reveal that at least one in eight children are living in poverty in Australia (Moore, 2000, *No Child...Child Poverty in Australia*, Brotherhood of St Laurence). Since it is also true that some towns/suburbs have higher rates of poverty than others – due to factors such as lack of job opportunities – it means that some schools have a greater need for programs such as the breakfast program.

But how does a breakfast program in schools help to improve learning?

According to the Breakfast for Learning review, 'Consensus among researchers points to the importance of breakfast on cognitive function' (Papamandjaris, 2000, *Breakfast and Learning in Children: A Review of the Effects of Breakfast on Scholastic Performance*, Breakfast for Learning). Much of the feedback the CFMEU/AEU has had from teachers over behavioural changes are anecdotal: teachers say that the children are happier and more settled at the beginning of the day, not to mention the fact that they turn up to class on time.

When you add up the social, emotional and physical benefits of a nutritious breakfast the result is a happier, healthier child. This can only be good for learning!

Another positive aspect of the breakfast program is the relationship that develops between the worksite and the school. Some students are interested in pursuing a trade as an occupation, and this program allows them to find out more about how to do that. By being introduced to mainly male workers, it also provides some children with another male role model in their lives.

Many teachers have reported that one of the main benefits of the program is that children develop good social skills. They enjoy the interaction through morning conversation with other students, teachers, parents and others in the school community.

Why don't schools just pay for it?

Unfortunately our state school system does not provide funding to support programs like the breakfast program.

In the past some schools were able to run breakfast programs through the (now abolished) disadvantaged schools program. This funding, which was provided by the Federal Government, ceased under the Howard Government. Coinciding with these cuts the Kennett Government inflicted the worst cuts ever on the Victorian public education system. Eight thousand teachers were lost to the system, there were cuts to school budgets and 380 schools were closed. This was a disaster for our schools and the system, but more importantly, for our children. The AEU continues to fight for the return of these resources and, while some have been restored, there is still a way to go.

Until schools can obtain funding from state or federal governments to support welfare programs, schools continue to rely on the goodwill of the community – including union members.

Participating schools

Each day another school expresses its need to participate in the program. Luckily, each day offers a worksite where workers express a desire to help. Currently there are 18 participating schools with another 10 on the waiting list. The latter will join the program during Term 4, 2002 and Term 1, 2003.

Participating schools:

- Cockatoo Primary School
- Dandenong North Primary School
- Coldstream Primary School
- Dromana Secondary College
- Erinbank Secondary College
- Heidelberg Teaching Unit
- Keilor Downs Secondary College
- Lynall Hall Community School
- Southvale Primary School
- Wilmot Rd Primary School (Shepparton)
- Yarra Junction Primary School
- St Kilda Park Primary School
- Richmond West Primary School
- Brunswick Nth West Primary School
- Monterey Primary School
- Yuille Primary School (Ballarat)
- Whittington Primary School (Geelong)
- Dorset Primary School (Croydon)
- Carrum Downs Primary School (just starting)
- Deer Park Nth Primary School

Participating construction worksites in the following areas:

- Port Melbourne
- Abbotsford
- Laverton
- Frankston
- Docklands
- South Yarra
- Derrimut
- Melbourne CBD
- Richmond
- Ringwood
- Springvale
- Geelong
- Ballarat
- Shepparton

The program's two coordinators work hard to ensure that when a construction worksite disbands, another is aligned with the recipient school. This ensures ongoing funding. As workers move to another site they are able to talk about the program to their respective shop stewards and encourage them to become involved.

What teachers say

In a recent survey conducted at recipient schools, teachers made the following comments about the difference the program is making to children in their schools:

'They're attending school on time, they're easier to settle and more attentive towards the end of the day.'
'Having time to sit with the kids at the start of their day (is great). (It lets us) discuss their life in and out of school and have a laugh. (We) watch them benefit both socially and physically.'
'Several of the loners have (now) found friends that they also see at recess and lunchtime.'
'It has been rewarding to see the children pop down for breakfast and spending quality time with the caring mum who serves them breakfast. We know that these children are now ready to begin a day of learning and they know there is also lunch available if needed.'

What construction workers say

'It's good to know that kids are having breakfast.'
'For \$2.00 you can change a child's day from despair to hope.'
'We like receiving the pictures of the kids and letters of thanks. We display them at our worksite.'
'It feels good to know you're making a difference.'

A word from the coordinators

As the breakfast program's coordinators, we would like to thank the stewards and union representatives on construction worksites, and teachers and principals in schools, for their time, effort and commitment in helping to make this program a success. We also thank union members on site for their outstanding efforts in donating vast sums of money in order to feed hungry kids.

Workers on sites have taken ownership of their schools and are proud to be donating money for food. They are always generous in supporting community programs especially those where vulnerable groups within the community need assistance.

If governments were to provide even a small percentage of the money they make from legal activities such as gambling and alcohol – which may nevertheless have detrimental social effects – and put it towards community programs, what a difference it could make for thousands of children who, for whatever reasons, are missing out on the basics.

Thank you also to the following people for their support: Peter Gardener, Logistics Manager, Fashion Clubwear and Stephen Madden, Pauls Milk.

The breakfast program has been thought of, donated to and facilitated by proud and passionate union members!

We built this state. We educate this state. Together, we are feeding hungry kids.

Further contact details

For further information about the breakfast program:

Damian Eley	CFMEU	Ph: 0416 086 111
Jodi Watt	AEU	Ph: 9417 2822 or Email: jwatt@aeuvic.asn.au
Stephen Madden	Pauls Milk	Ph: 9215 6432 Fax: 9215 6101 Email: maddens@pauls.com.au
Peter Gardener	Fashion Clubwear	Ph: 9836 3388 Fax: 9836 3311 Email: info@fcw.com.au

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APPENDIX 1: SAMPLE PROFORMA LETTER

You may wish to use the following proforma when approaching businesses for assistance in your local community.

Dear (store managers name),

I write to inform you of a new program which our school intends to implement in the near future. It is known as the 'CFMEU/AEU Breakfast Program'* which will assist a great many children in our school. The program is funded by construction workers on building sites with money from their own pockets. As you would appreciate we need to keep the cost of the program at a minimum.

There are many reasons why children come to school hungry but our school community, in conjunction with the two unions involved, have decided to do something about helping our kids.

Since your business is near our school, and because many of our families may use your business, we were hoping that you would be prepared to support our program by way of regular (or once off) donations. We would be happy to extend our thanks for your support through our school newsletter.

Community programs such as this rely on donations – often from the local business community – in order to survive. Understandably, you probably receive a number of requests from charities. However, I can assure you that any assistance you could provide would be warmly appreciated by all involved, especially the children the program is helping.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this matter and in anticipation of your support.

I may be contacted on

Yours sincerely

(Your name and title)
(Your school)

* The CFMEU (Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union) and the AEU (Australian Education Union Victorian Branch) are coordinators of the breakfast program.

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APPENDIX 2: LETTER OF THANKS

The following is a sample thank you letter from St Kilda Primary School. It may help you word your letter of thanks to your supportive CMFEU worksite.

St. Kilda Park Primary School

68 FITZROY STREET ST. KILDA MELBOURNE VIC 3182 PHONE: (03) 9534 5825
E-MAIL: st.kilda.park.ps@edumail.vic.gov.au FAX: (03) 9537 1566



23 April 2002

To the workers at the Port Melbourne Construction Plant,

The teaching and non-teaching staff, and in particular the members of the Australian Education Union at St Kilda Park Primary School, are overwhelmed by your generosity and kindness in supporting the breakfast program at our school. We thank you for the \$XXXX we received from you on April XX.

We are particularly grateful to you for ensuring that no child will go hungry at the start of the school day. Your donation will supply thousands of meals to children who are in need. We thank you most sincerely for your wonderful donation.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sue Knight".

Sue Knight
Principal

