Executive Summary of the Flinders University StEw peer education program Dec 2013

Background to StEw
Improving healthy food choices is an important public health goal in Australia to combat obesity and chronic disease (NPHTF 2009; SA Health 2011). As a population group, University students show risks of unhealthy food choices due to a number of factors including, low income, time constraints, stress, social isolation and cultural adjustment. These risks are greater for International students.

Flinders University has 19,000 students, and nutrition and dietetic students (BND, MND, BHScNutr, approximately 300 students at all year levels) are required to develop competencies in health promotion. They are therefore well placed to be trained as peer educators to deliver healthy eating programs to the broader student population.

The StEw project is a collaboration between Nutrition and Dietetics and HELPP at Flinders University.

Objectives
- Promote healthy eating among Flinders students
- Support social connection through food
- Enable nutrition students to develop health promotion skills
- Facilitate student engagement through food-related activities.

Strategies
- Recruitment of Nutrition students
- Provision of brief training in health promotion practice and peer leadership - needs and strengths assessment, program planning and evaluation; food safety and hygiene, teamwork – 10 hours (2 hrs/wk X 5 weeks)
- StEw peer leaders working in small teams to develop a ‘healthy eating project’ with groups of other Flinders students
- Provision of support via monthly catch up sessions; supervision of program plans; observation of group presentations
- Engagement of final year N&D student Community/Public Health placement to:
  - Mentor StEw peer leaders
  - Evaluate the training and support program
  - Assist with evaluation of peer-led nutrition programs
  - Model nutrition education and group presentation skills to StEw peer leaders

Outcomes
19 students enrolled in StEw with 17 students completing the program (9 students came from the N&D program, of which 7/9 were year2; 8 students from BHSc(Nutr).
The 5 week training sessions were developed and facilitated by Dept Nutrition & Dietetics and HELPP.12/17 peer educators completed an online survey. All respondents rated training and templates as highly relevant. Eight respondents rated readings as relevant. The homework was poorly done and explanations included: too busy with Uni work, insufficient time to discuss with fellow students, and preference for homework to be done in class. 11/12 students felt that the training met their expectations. All respondents reported increasing knowledge on health promotion, program planning and program evaluation. The majority of respondents reported increasing confidence to plan and implement a nutrition program and in program evaluation.

Monthly catch-up sessions were held to review progress of teams but attendance was variable – average 10 peer leaders.

A final year Nutrition & Dietetic student met with all teams and supervised their program plans and education materials; she also assisted with development of Program Evaluations for each team. 11/17 peer leaders responded with very positive feedback.

Outcomes from the sessions students facilitated are still being analysed.

**Conclusion**
Another cohort will be trained in 2013 with support from final year Nutrition and Dietetic students on community placement. HELPP’s role will be to assist with making the initiative available as a food literacy program.