

"Approximately one-third of children in New Zealand aged 5 to 14 years are either overweight or obese and fewer than half eat the recommended two servings of fruit a day"(1). This issue is a problem because school fundraisers are using unhealthy foods to raise money for school activities at the cost of children's health. There are many factors that contribute to this issue, schools are underfunded, families are not providing healthy lunches, and health lessons are being compromised by selling chocolates, school canteens are selling unhealthy foods to make more profit, the Government have removed the incentives for schools to sell only healthy food and food companies are marketing their products and influencing our children's choices.

1

"One in five New Zealand Children are overweight in New Zealand; it is so widespread that the World Health Organisation regards it as a 'global epidemic' (2). Schools in New Zealand are not properly funded by the Government to pay for school sports trips, extra equipment and activities so schools need to find other ways to get the funding for example sausage sizzles, a school canteen or by asking food companies like Mc Donald's to sponsor sporting teams e.g. soccer player of the day rewards, cultural groups and trips. These methods are going against what is being taught in the classrooms about nutrition and healthy eating. Millions of Cadbury bars are sold nationwide by schools as a fundraiser. In Health classes teachers are telling children to choose foods low in fat and sugar, then sending them home with boxes of chocolates to sell. This is obviously a conflicting message for kids. How are children supposed to respond? Who do they believe? What is right? These mixed messages are confusing.

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More money is made from school canteens than any other fundraising methods. Many children especially teenagers buy their lunch several days a week from the school canteen. They sell unhealthy foods because they are cheap to buy and don't take much preparation. "The most commonly available foods for sale were pies, juice and sausage rolls. Filled rolls were the most expensive item and fruit was the least expensive" (3). Filled rolls are expensive since there are a lot of fresh ingredients and they are time consuming to make. Once again schools are sending the wrong message- that it is ok to buy high fat, sugar foods every day because it tastes good and is cheap to buy and easy to access. School children will obviously choose to buy from the canteen.

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We don't know the families background or why they send their child/ren to school with ten dollars every day. These days it is very hard to make ends meet to supply their family a dinner each night. Parents want the best for their children but it is hard to do when they have many factors that are putting barriers in their way. The parents may not have enough money to be able to buy the high nutritional foods that they know their family needs because of the high cost of vegetables and fruit and the great quality meat "Poverty is not a lifestyle choice" (4). They might be working long hours, shift work or working many jobs and they are not home to make their lunch boxes so they feel that by giving them some money they know they will get fed at school through the canteen or fundraisers. These tired, stressed low socio-eco families just find it easier to give their children lunch money rather than buying food they cannot actually afford in their weekly budget. They may not even realise the harm, many are not educated themselves about what healthy eating is.

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On the 11 of June 2007, Steve Maharey announced the latest phase of the Mission On campaign which requires schools to promote healthy food and nutrition for students and sell only healthy options in schools. The labour- led government invested \$67 million over four years in a range of Mission On initiatives to target obesity and promote healthy confident young people. The changes to the NAGs (National Administration Guidelines) asked schools to review their current practice, and offer certain food and drink either every day, sometimes or occasionally. It was up to the schools on how they addressed the NAGs. This change did not get rid of traditional barbeques, sausage sizzles or selling chocolate for fundraising, it just required schools to look at what they provided and make practical decisions about offering healthy options as well, for example, schools could consider selling pies or sausage rolls occasionally, and sandwiches and fruit every day. Schools had the flexibility to implement the

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guidelines to suit the needs of their students. But then in 2008, with a change of government, the new Education minister Anne Tolley announced the scrapping of a mandate for healthy foods in schools: "As part of the National Government's commitment to reducing compliance for schools, I have decided to remove the clause in National Administration Guideline (5) which states 'where food and beverages are sold on schools' premises, to make only healthy options available' (5). She removed the clause because she felt that there was no freedom of choice for the children. I think this was the wrong decision. Children are too young to make these important decisions for themselves. Schools have a duty to protect their students and guide them to make sensible choices. Also the younger they can be taught, the more chances they will continue these healthy practices in adulthood.

My Home economics class tested out this theory by doing an experiment with the year 7 and 8's to see what foods they would choose if they were in the situation of choosing between healthy and unhealthy foods. The unhealthy food dishes went quicker and had only a few food items left whereas the healthy food dishes had many food items left over. The children may have chosen these foods because of the taste of the high fat, salt and sugar content or the hot food from the day being very chilly or maybe their friends chose it and they followed.

Anne Tolley took out the clause so children had freedom of choice but they are not making the best choices for their health. The New Zealand Medical Journal stated that "Children do not always have the maturity cognitive development to make the healthiest food choices" (6). Children are also easily influenced by their peers so when they see their friends go for the cream bun and not the chicken wrap, they will tend to follow in behind so they don't feel out of place or feel like they are going to get teased if they choose differently. I think canteens are a good idea for fundraising for schools if you're a school that is on a very strict budget and need a source to get funding but the issue with school canteens gets under my skin because they are not walking their talk and are continuing to sell these foods when they are fully aware of the young ones health. Why don't schools put some effort into researching healthier options for their canteens?

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"One in five new Zealand children was overweight and one in 12 was obese, and those children were more likely to remain obese into adulthood, adding to the likelihood of future ill health and high treatment costs" (9). Unhealthy children will grow into unhealthy adults unless changes are made. This means the schools, the Government, the parents, Food companies and the entire Community needs to work together to make change. If change does not happen soon we face a generation of unhealthy people, increased cases of heart disease, high cholesterol, strokes, teeth decay, kidney stones, hypertension, diabetes (hyperglycaemia) and a large range of cancers. We will have to pay for it as hospitals only have a set amount of money funded by the Government therefore they will have to find the extra money to pay for the sick people. More people will suffer low self-esteem, feel socially excluded and there will be a rise in people on the benefit and less productivity in the work place. A Ministry of Health and University of Auckland study estimated that in 1997 more than 3000 deaths in New Zealand were attributable to overweight and obesity. (2) Do you want your children to die an early death or do you want to tackle this issue now, before it is too late?

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(References 1 to 9 were listed.)