

Health and Wellbeing Collaborative Sessions: getting the message across to international students in a fun and informative way

Isabelle Droulers and Jennifer Hsu

Deakin University, Melbourne Burwood Campus, 221 Burwood Highway, Burwood VIC 3125.

Isabelle.droulers@deakin.edu.au jennifer.hsu@deakin.edu.au

For the last decade the same themes emerged as areas of concern that were manifesting among international students such as restrictive diet, mental health issues, sexual health and others which needed to be addressed in a positive and collaborative manner.

Amongst the various areas that needed to be addressed one stood out clearly for the International Student Support team that could be tackled in a positive and fun way for students (and hopefully staff). This was to provide cooking classes for newly arrived international students who had maybe never cooked for themselves. We knew anecdotally that students were not eating properly due to comments passed onto us by medical staff at Deakin University. In addition some students informed us they were surviving on fast food and takeaways and too frequently on 2 minute noodles.

This information was enough to galvanise us into action. As our team is made up of International Student Advisers with diverse skills but not expert enough we decided to make connections and collaborate with experts within the University as well as collaborate with BUPA, our health insurance provider. We approached them with a plan to run a pilot program to teach international students basic cooking skills.

It was important that these cooking classes attracted beginners who were keen to learn and at the end of five weeks they had the skills, knowledge and confidence to cook tasty and healthy meals for themselves. A pilot program was set up in trimester 3 starting November 2013. This proved to be so successful the program is now offered every trimester. Each trimester a maximum of 20 students participate in 5 classes. Each class lasts approximately 2 hours and after 10 hours students have gained a variety of skills and produce well-cooked tasty and healthy meals.

The program is now starting in its third year and is thriving and continuing thanks to the students, staff and ongoing support provided by the staff at Deakin University and by the financial and ongoing support provided by BUPA.