



Success of the inaugural 'Creating an Appetite for Life' Education Program

Over three days in June, the Maggie Beer Foundation hosted a number of passionate cooks from across Australia to teach and inspire them with new methods for delivering healthy and tasty meals to their residents. Thirty cooks and chefs from Victorian aged care homes flew from Melbourne to Adelaide on Sunday 21st June, before making the trip north to the Barossa Valley where they were greeted by a dinner hosted by Maggie Beer at her home. Participants ranged from qualified chefs, cooks with no previous formal training to catering and hospitality managers. A number of participants were recipients of grants from the Maggie Beer Foundation which covered the cost of their position in the program.

Throughout the three days, participants partook in various educational sessions ranging from group discussions and cooking challenges to hearing from various guest speakers. The aim of the program was to educate and inspire the cooks with new methods to reinvigorate a traditionally overlooked section of the food and aged care industries.

On the first morning of the program, Maggie informed the participants of the work of the Maggie Beer Foundation and the journey so far. Everyone had the opportunity to properly introduce themselves, their background and the challenges they faced delivering quality food to residents of their home. The biggest impediment discussed by the participants was the perception of the industry, budgets, recruiting quality staff, wastage and constraints on time, finance and resources. The participants also reported a challenge of exciting others about food in aged care homes.

Some additional challenges discussed include:

- enticing dementia patients to eat
- negativity from nursing staff
- creating a mindset that it is not a facility, it is a home
- creating new ideas for food
- maintaining high-quality of food across stagnated serving times
- communication challenges between staff and residents
- the timing of serving food and the ability to keep it fresh
- budgets
- introduced higher standards of food into aged-care homes
- food presentation issues
- difficulties with dieticians
- eliminating boosters and frozen produce
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When conversing over these challenges, Maggie discussed several suggestions and points:

- decreasing the size of meals
- importance of presentation
- proper management, reporting and avoiding of waste
- the important of aroma and smells
- being aware of food regulations and having the ability to change them
- having a collaborative movement to influence CEOs, to help further change
- intergenerational interaction
- know your food safety standards
- the importance and ease of creating a garden in your home
- trying to buy Australian and local produce where possible
- the importance of brain stimulation for the elderly.



Throughout the presentations on day one, Maggie prepared and distributed aged care specific recipes for the participants to sample and experience. After a day filled with food and discussions, everyone was able to enjoy a hearty dinner accompanied by local wine, while listening to guest speaker James Lindner from Langmeil Winery.

On the next day, participants were addressed by the CEO of HammondCare, Steven Judd, who spoke about the work of HammondCare and gave us an insight into dementia care. HammondCare's executive chef, Peter Morgan-Jones also emphasised the importance of utilising the five senses in aged care cooking, finger food, high energy and high nutrition food. The participants were taught the methods of creating texture modified foods, which are suitable for those with dysphagia (swallowing difficulties). Maggie then joined Stephen and Peter to host a discussion with participants regarding budgets and influencing CEOs to change the status quo in the industry.

Wednesday began with a seminar lead by Ellis Wilkinson from Hotel Management Solutions, which discussed the introduction of aged care specific modules for TAFE courses and the need for further training for chefs and cooks in aged care. Also discussed was the need for extra help in the aged care kitchens, including the utility of apprentices to aid food preparation. Throughout day three, Maggie demonstrated a series of aged care dishes which were enjoyed by all participants over a lunch on Wednesday. Masters students from the Nutrition and Dietetics faculty of Flinders University then held a Q&A for the participants to discuss nutritional topics with the students.

One of the most enjoyed activities of the three days was the Aged Care Mystery Box Challenge. Participants were divided into six groups of five and given two hours to prepare and serve a selection of dishes suitable for a resident in aged care. Teams were then asked to describe how the dish could be adjusted for someone on a texture modified diet. This was certainly not an easy task however the quality of meals produced by the teams was beyond any of our expectations!

Simon Bryant joined Maggie on the third and final day for a "Cook and the Chef" reunion. The pair used pulses to create a series of dishes and the demonstration sought to correct the misconception that there is no room for vegetarian food in aged care. Ingredients such as lentils, chickpeas and beans were shown to be a way of increasing fibre and energy intakes of those in aged care homes.

The program concluded with a wrap-up with participants being awarded with certificates of completion and left to return to their workplaces with a more positive outlook on their ability to deliver high-quality food and nutrition to those in their homes. Another positive by-product of the three-day program was the networking opportunities afforded to the participants to discuss and learn with other aged care cooks. This is something that rarely occurs in the industry and it was clear that people were able to learn and gain insights from those who shared common obstacles throughout the course of their jobs.

Since the completion of the program, Maggie Beer Foundation staff have seen constant communication between the participants who have already taken steps to connect since the program ended, in a bid to further develop and learn from each other. Not only was the program a learning experience for the participants, but also Maggie herself as she was able to hear first-hand the challenges that cooks in this sector of the industry on a day-to-day basis.

We have already seen positive changes in many of the participant's workplaces including the move to use more fresh produce and a greater emphasis being placed on the preparation of meals on site in contrast to ordering finished goods. There has also been greater engagement between residents and staff. In one home, we now see the CEO share a weekly meal with the residents.

One of the most valuable learning outcomes of the program was the recognition afforded to chefs and cooks who are often taken for granted. We have also been informed from several managers that their staff have returned re-inspired and ignited in a way never before seen! This feedback and the overall success of the inaugural 'Creating an Appetite for Life' Education Program has only further heightened our excitement for the second program, which we hope to launch in early 2016. Be sure to check the website and newsletters for further information in the coming months!