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Recipe for success

A special cookbook has been created as a way to bring young girls and female role models together, **Karen Hardy** writes

Jessica Brown is the chief executive and founder of the Life Changing Experiences Foundation, a foundation dedicated to helping young people at risk of abuse and neglect.

Its primary initiative is the SISTER2sister Program which takes in up to 50 at-risk teenage girls per year per program and matches them with Big Sister mentors who provide positive female role models to inspire and motivate them through a goal setting and achievement program.

When Brown was looking for ideas to fundraise she wanted something that would celebrate women and the relationship they have with other women. She wanted something, too, that could draw on all the women from the program, from the girls themselves to the mentors, even foundation board.

And so the cookbook *Cooked With Love – Recipes My Mother Taught Me* was born. Just as advice and love are passed on from mothers, so too are recipes, and Brown thought it would be a fun way to get this message across.

“Recipes are handed down from our mothers with love and each has its own special story,” says Brown.

“This cookbook is a fabulous way to celebrate our mum’s cooking and thank them. It was a way for all our contributors to give something special to their

mum and celebrate their relationships with them. A lot of the best memories revolve around food.”

Women who have contributed recipes handed down to them by their mothers include Kathryn Eisman, Bessie Bardot, Jacinta Tynan, Cindy Pan, Amanda Cole, Bianca Dye and Melinda Hutchings. Brown herself chose her mother’s vanilla slice recipe.

“Mum was an awesome baker and I had many favourites, but one that definitely stood out was mum’s vanilla slice which I recollect her making when I was about nine years old,” Brown says.

“It was something about that gooey custard, which she made from scratch, and the sweet passionfruit icing that we used to lick off the top.

“I still have mum’s recipe written on a now scrappy piece of paper in her handwriting.”

Brown admits that the book is not the kind of book “you might go to like you might a Jamie Oliver cookbook” but says the recipes really play second fiddle to the stories of the women involved.

“It’s all about women nurturing women, women passing down their legacy, the whole nurturing aspect. The program inspires and teaches the girls to be the best they can be, to overcome their obstacles, and there’s some great stories in the

cookbook to explain how it all works.”

Girls get nominated for the program by school counsellors or government agencies or women’s refuges they are living in. They get matched with a stable woman, usually from the business or corporate sector, who provides a great positive role model to guide and support them over the 12-month program.

“It’s lovely for the girls to know they’ve got somebody who’s there just for them,” Brown says. “A lot of them don’t have that constant in their life, quite often they’re playing the role of mum and looking after siblings at an early age themselves.

“They’re tough chicks and to watch them say, ‘I finally get it’. That whole shift from I can’t do anything to I can do anything I put my mind too, it just changes their life.”

Who would have thought baking a simple vanilla slice could do so much.

Nivea sponsors the SISTER-2sister program and is arranging for all proceeds of the book to go directly towards the program.

>> *Cooked With Love – Recipes My Mother Taught Me* is available at www.lifechangingexperiences.org and costs \$25.



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chief executive Jessica Brown.

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Mum's vanilla slice, passionfruit icing

Makes 6

**2 sheets (25cm x 25cm)
ready rolled frozen puff
pastry, thawed
melted butter, to grease
750ml milk
375ml thickened cream
8 egg yolks
220g caster sugar
50g plain flour
35g cornflour
50g butter, chopped
10ml vanilla essence
230g pure icing sugar,
sifted
2 tbsps canned passionfruit
in syrup**

Preheat oven to 220C. Line two baking trays with non-stick baking paper. Place one pastry sheet on to each lined tray. Bake in preheated oven, swapping trays halfway through cooking, for 20 minutes or until pastry puffs and browns. Remove from the oven. Cover pastry with a clean tea towel and use your hands to gently push the pastry down to flatten. Set aside for 15 minutes to cool.

Brush 23cm square slab pan with butter to lightly grease. Line

base and sides with foil. Place one pastry sheet, flat-side down, in base of prepared pan.

Meanwhile, heat milk and cream in a heavy-based saucepan over medium heat until mixture just comes to the boil. Combine egg yolks, sugar, flour and cornflour in a heatproof bowl. Whisk until thick and pale. Gradually stir hot milk mixture into egg mixture. Place in a clean saucepan over low heat, stirring with a wooden spoon, for five minutes or until custard comes to the boil and thickens. Remove from heat. Stir in butter and vanilla essence until combined. Pour over pastry and place remaining pastry flat-side (unpressed side) up on top. Place in fridge for one hour or until custard sets.

Place icing sugar and passionfruit in large bowl and stir until smooth and glossy. Turn slice out onto a large chopping board and remove the foil. Spread icing over the top of the slice with the back of a spoon. Set aside for 20 minutes or until icing is set. Use a serrated knife to cut the vanilla slice into 16 pieces.

