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Whizmeal wants to banish unhealthy food from school cafeterias

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Students at Punggol Green Primary School getting healthy meals with help from Whizmeal.

As with all developed countries, Singapore is stricken by the problem of obesity, especially among school children, who have easy access to unhealthy, unhygienic food. As a result, the

obesity rate for Singapore kids stands at **12 percent**.

Whizmeal, a Singapore startup founded by Tan Soon Mei, a former school cafeteria operator, believes it has a solution to improve the nutrition that kids receive out of their daily food intake.

The idea involves them getting back into the heart of school canteens all over Singapore.

On the web, parents can plan and order healthy food for their kids monthly through the Whizmeal site. After payment is made online, canteen operators will prepare the food according to the orders. Payment is made in advance to the stall owners, which are located in the canteen, who then provide the food.

This way, Whizmeal says this payment structure can help them get a more consistent monthly income, since parents are locked in on a monthly basis. The site also allows stall operators to monitor sales performance.

But Whizmeal is more than an online business: it works closely with cafeteria stall owners to implement best kitchen practices and prepare healthy recipes. Effectively, it is revamping the way canteen operations are being run in Singapore.

Speed feed

Since meals are pre-packed and labeled instead of being ordered and paid for on the spot, school children can get their items much more quickly. Students are even taught to return their trays to designated stations, a habit that even adults in Singapore haven't adopted.

“It took us several months to observe and to realize that our concept to promote healthy eating had actually helped to manage food wastage and create a consistent income for stallholders,” said Tang.

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Try watching this video on www.youtube.com, or enable JavaScript if it is disabled in your browser.

The startup has two revenue streams: it collects commission fees from stallholders based on meals ordered from Whizmeal. It also charges parents \$1 a month to use the platform.

A pilot program with Punggol Green Primary School has been running for a year, involving 80 percent of the institution's students and parents.

Whizmeal claims that the majority of parents have reported that their children have become more conscious about what they eat, and are even encouraging siblings to pick up positive eating habits.

The company is now working to see how Whizmeal can be implemented into a school with over 1,000 students.

In the near future, it aims to get twenty schools signed up within five years, which can potentially influence 160 canteen stallowners and over 20,000 students.

In the longer term, it hopes to cut the obesity rate among Singapore school children by half in 2022.

(Editing by Steven Millward)