

## Allergic to peanuts, gumnuts & soap-on-a-rope?

# Is there ANYTHING left we can make for school fetes?



Remember the exciting, exhausting school fetes of yesteryear - when you could gorge on chocolate crackles and stick jaw toffees, spin the prize wheel and pick yourself up some soap in a hand embroidered hankie? Today, several trends are making it hard for some groups to hold profitable fetes. These include the rising cost of public liability insurance, increased food safety and handling requirements (introduced partly in response to growing numbers of food allergies) and the fact that working parents - particularly mums - no longer have the time to make the clothes, toys and other craft items that were once the mainstay of fetes. 'Where to now?' one might ask.

The cold hard fact is that fetes, today, are evolving into sophisticated fund-raising ventures. Not just schools but childcare centres, kindergartens, sporting clubs, community groups and charities now count on the money earned through these events to pay for vital resources and maintenance. One large private school in Brisbane with a good reputation for quality crafts and a time slot just before Mother's Day routinely earns \$90,000 from its annual fete and even a 50-place childcare centre can expect to raise \$7000-\$10,000 a year.

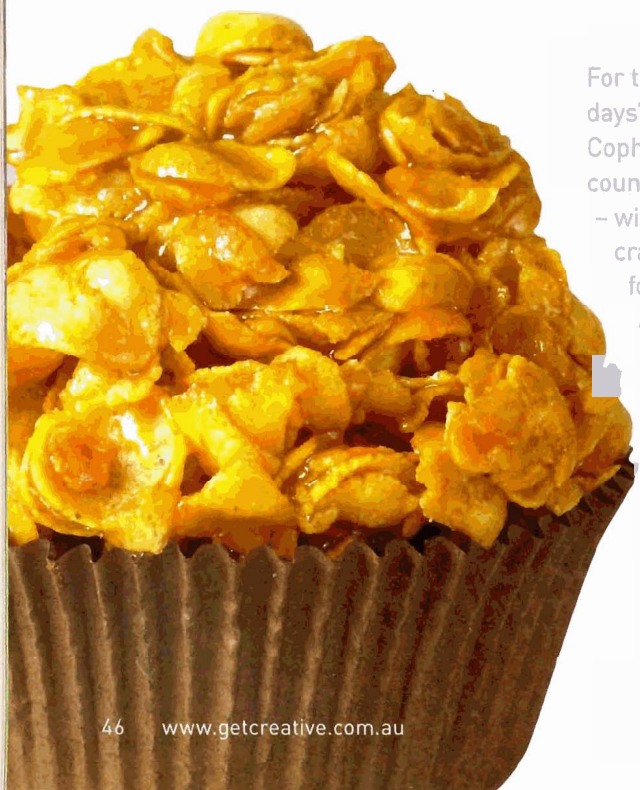
### One large private school in Brisbane routinely earns \$90,000 from its annual fete

For those with a soft spot for the 'old days', however, don't throw out the Copher just yet! Parents around the country - indeed around the world - will be churning out chocolate crackles and policing lucky dips for many years to come. Experts agree fetes are still highly profitable for organisations with the time and resources to plan and run them well. Those who don't are making ends meet with other events such as market days, often held every second year and run by professionals from whom they take a 20-

25 per cent cut of profits.

Helen Creswick is a former website designer from Brisbane who used to decorate balloons at her children's school fete. Her volunteer efforts grew into a small business when neighbouring fetes invited her along. It then morphed into something far bigger when she launched a website giving parents tips and tricks for organising fetes, festivals and other events and allowing fete-related businesses like hers to advertise their services. Helen launched [festivalsandfetes.com.au](http://festivalsandfetes.com.au) nine years ago and now also publishes a free fundraising directory which is sent to every school, kinder and childcare centre in Australia and to many community and sporting groups.

Helen says food remains a profitable cornerstone of fetes despite strict safety provisions. Organisers are making it easy for parents to comply with requirements - like listing all ingredients on food items sold - by sending their kids home with specially prepared cake boxes that contain a list of possible ingredients that can simply be ticked and returned.





Some schools ask parents to avoid recipes with nuts; others seek out specialties like gluten-free and halal food. And parents from culturally diverse backgrounds are expanding the range of food stalls on offer in a way unthinkable a generation ago, creating new fete draw card: the international food court.

Craft stalls, amongst others, are feeling the pinch of time-poor parents. Fete organisers are resorting to the thoroughly modern method of outsourcing key stalls including craft, hot food, tea and coffee and amusements. "Thirty years ago the mothers had the time to come in and form a craft group and make things for the school fete," says Helen. "But so many of them

are working now they can't do that. And if you're going to have a craft stall you have to have a substantial one. Schools are finding that it's easier to go to the craft markets and offer people a percentage to come and put their stalls in." Commonly professionals pocket 80 per cent of profits while schools keep the remaining 20 per cent.

**"Schools are finding that it's easier to go to the craft markets and offer people a percentage to come and put their stalls in" - Helen Creswick**

The pure-profit trash 'n' treasure stall was once a huge money spinner for fetes but can now be more effort than it's worth, according to Lisa Taranto, director of the Raleigh Street Child Care Centre in Thornbury, just outside Melbourne. She's a veteran of five fetes at her previous centre in Fairfield. According to Lisa, electrical goods must now carry a disclaimer saying they're not guaranteed, parents usually donate more trash than treasure and storing goods before the fete can be a headache.

Lisa says cake stalls remain hugely profitable because goods are donated and nominates sausage

sizzles as another no-cost (or low cost) winner. She says crafts are often cheaper to buy than make these days but adds that children's costumes and finger puppets sold with song cards or stories are very popular – especially with mothers buying for daughters.

But she warns that small organisations shouldn't even contemplate holding a fete unless they have at least 70 parents to help out on the day in three manageable shifts. "At the beginning of the year you survey parents and say 'hey we're having a fete on such-and-such a date, would you be willing to work a morning or afternoon?' and hold them to that later in the year when you're organising the roster," she says.

According to Lisa, keeping abreast of rules and regulations is the responsibility of fete organisers but checklists and handouts are helpful for distilling information to volunteers. *gc*



**don't miss this!**

Helen Creswick's step-by-step guide to organising a fete, from choosing a theme to establishing committees, selecting stalls, booking equipment, handling food and publicity and thanking volunteers is a must for anyone contemplating the process: [www.fetesandfestivals.com.au/fetes.htm](http://www.fetesandfestivals.com.au/fetes.htm)

