

Project Title: Grant Opportunity for School Health (GOSH)

Background

The NSW Schools Physical Activity and Nutrition Survey (SPANS 2004) (1) found that only 50% of boys and 60% of girls were adequately fit. A high proportion of children watched TV for more than the two hours recommended per day and only about 30% of children walk to school every day. Given these figures, break times at school (recess and lunchtime) offer an important opportunity for children to be physically active. Since school development and pleasurable exposure to physical activity (PA) are the platform upon which lifelong PA patterns are dependent (2, 3), it is crucial that these are developed early in life.

Childhood is a critical time for developing healthy behaviour patterns. Physical Activity (PA) is one behaviour demonstrated to have a significant impact on health throughout life. Research shows a clear link between physical inactivity and increased risk of conditions such as coronary heart disease, stroke, hypertension and non-insulin dependent diabetes as well as overweight and obesity. It has been shown that PA levels in individuals are consistent throughout childhood (3). PA is not only health behaviour with benefits for later adulthood but also contributes to bone development, preventing obesity and improving psychological health and immune status while still a child (4).

The other dimension of PA is the intrinsic satisfaction of engagement in PA, individually and in groups, contributing to social enjoyment and participation, and to achievement of Health: "Good health is a major resource for social, economic and personal development and an important dimension of quality of life." (5). Failure to experience pleasurable PA and acquire motor skills will result in an inability and reluctance to participate.

Previous work by the health promotion team at NCAHS has identified a number of issues, which effect levels of physical activity. These include: the appropriateness of school clothing, playground utilisation and layout prompting, space allocation (eg girls, age groups), non-competitive equipment availability and other environmental features (eg bike paths and racks).

This two-year project will develop, pilot and evaluate a comprehensive and sustainable programme to increase the physical activity levels of children in primary schools. The project will be overseen by the North Coast Area Health Service (NCAHS) the Department of Education and Training (DET), the School of Education at Southern Cross University (SCU), and wider school communities. The major product will be a set of strategies and data, which identify changes, which would have occurred as a result of the intervention. These strategies can be readily implemented in other NSW schools utilising existing curriculum and resources. This project draws on the NCAHS team's experience, where projects using similar intervention strategies in primary schools were able to increase fundamental movement skills (6).

This project will utilise the Ottawa Charter strategies for successful health promotion. In this project, thirty primary schools will receive funding to implement the following strategy:

A group or class of year six students will be asked to conduct a physical activity mapping process where the barriers to being physically active at school are explored and some possible solutions to increase physical activity are proposed by the students. Students will be encouraged to use a variety of techniques in their application including surveying other students, preparing photo story using digital photographs, researching evidence for increasing physical activity in schools and documenting school rules and safety issues. Students will also be asked to create a budget for strategies for the school (to the value of \$1000.00) that will help to increase physical activity levels of students. The Project Diary, provided to help students in this task, will provide examples and suggestion to make the task as easy as possible. As part of the application process, students will be asked to present their application at a staff meeting and a Parent and Citizens (or Parents' Forum) meeting.

This process will ensure the whole school community has a chance to hear about how the school can increase physical activity levels of students from the student's perspective. Students will be guided in their application by case studies of other schools who have made environmental and rule changes to increase physical activity levels of children. Students will also be prompted to consider some of the known barriers to active play such as playground rules and usage, allocation and rostering, bicycle racks, suitable school clothing, and access to equipment.

All primary schools on the North Coast of NSW will be offered an opportunity to take part in the project in 2007. The impact of the program on physical activity will be evaluated by determining uptake and sustainability of the program. Process evaluation will include a review strategy implementation using digital photographs and stories from students, and feedback from the school community.

Aims and objectives

Goal

To increase physical activity levels of all students in participating schools by developing a model aimed at empowering primary school students to identify barriers to physical activity during break times at school and to plan strategies to overcome these barriers. .

Objectives

- To empower year six students to identify barriers to physical activity which exist at their school
- To assist students in designing strategies to overcome these barriers within a budget
- To provide a small amount of funding for these strategies to be tested
- To determine if these strategies have been successful in increasing physical activity levels of all students at break times at school.
- To disseminate findings so that other schools can review their policies practices and environments to maximize students physical activity levels at school during break times.

Project Management including Governance:

The principal researchers, Margo Johnston and Jillian Adams, will manage the overall project. Avigdor Zask will manage the research and evaluation component. The Director of Health Promotion, Uta Dietrich, will be responsible for the financial management, and governance will be provided by a steering committee. The committee will comprise representatives from NCAHS Health Promotion and Research And Evaluation teams, Department of Education and Training and Southern Cross University School of Education.

References Cited for this Project

1. Booth M et al. NSW Schools Physical Activity and Nutrition Survey (SPANS) 2004: Summary Report. Sydney: NSW Department of Health; 2006.
2. Riddoch CJ et al. The health-related physical activity of children. *Sport Med* 1995;19(2):86-102.
3. Pate RR et al. Tracking of physical activity in young children. *Med Sci Sports Exerc* 1996;28(1):92-6.
4. Sallis JF et al. Physical activity guidelines for adolescents: Consensus statement. *Pediatr Exerc Sci* 1994;6:302-14.
5. World Health Organization et al. Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion. Ottawa: World Health Organization; 1986.

6. van Beurden E et al. Fundamental movement skills - how do primary school children perform? The 'Move it Groove it' program in rural Australia. *J Sci Med Sport* 2002;5(3):244-52.
7. Zask A et al. Active school playgrounds - myth or reality? Results of the 'Move it Groove it' project. *Prev Med* 2001;33:402-8.
8. NSW Health. Move It Groove It. Physical Activity In Primary Schools Summary Report. North Sydney: NSW Health, Northern Rivers Area Health Service, Southern Cross University, New South Wales Department of Education and Training; 2003. Report No.: ISBN: 0 7347 3395 X.

Additional note that came on the email

I work as the healthy weight coordinator for an area health service in NSW. We are proposing changing one of our successful programs which supplies seeding grants to schools for physical activity programs to one that is much more child centered. We are now going to ask senior primary school children to apply for funding for equipment for physical activity after conducting a needs assessment of their school and looking at the barriers to physical activity at their schools. We are asking children to do this because they know better than any one else in the school and also because we feel it is quite often school rules that impinge on physical activity. We are asking the children to present their findings (barriers and potential solutions as well as their "wish list") to staff and the P and C at the school before they submit their grant application to us. We hope that this will give staff and the whole school community a better insight into what children want in terms of opportunities to be active. We have a small amount of money from The Cancer council (\$4000) and will be putting aside a major part of our goods and services (\$12,000) to provide \$1000 grant to schools who participate but we feel we would have a lot more schools take up the challenge if we could offer more schools the \$1000.

We are asking to see if your organisation would like to collaborate with us in this project or if we can apply for funding thanks for considering this.

I enclose an overview of the project.