

Health for Life in primary schools

Summary

The *Health for Life in primary schools* programme supports schools to develop healthy active lifestyles and embeds the work in the school culture in a sustainable way. It has inter-related strands of healthy eating, cooking; growing food; physical activity and family involvement. These have been selected as being the most likely to have greatest impact on healthy lifestyles. The programme is delivered by the Health Education Service (part of Services for Education) and Life Education Centres.

The schools involved develop their own Action Plan in order to achieve the aims of the programme. Each school is assessed by an audit of facilities, skills and curriculum at baseline and follow-up and pupils complete an online questionnaire at baseline and follow-up. Other impact measures are individual to the school and relate to their own Action Plan.

Highlights

Some of the notable highlights have been

a. **Cooking skills, cooking classrooms and cooking competitions**

The schools have really embraced the way they teach cooking. Schools have bought sufficient mixing bowls, chopping boards, wooden spoons, portable cookers and fridges so that cooking can occur. The HES ran training on cooking, food safety, and provided the schools with lesson plans and ideas for including cooking in a cross-curricular way.

Many schools now include cooking in their topic based work e.g. when doing the Victorians or Romans the children cook food linked to the topic, when they do stories about the Gingerbread man they can go and cook their own Gingerbread men.

Some schools have developed a specific cooking classroom so that more cooking can occur. Schools have linked it with Maths, Science, Literacy as well as the fun that children have doing practical cooking. Many schools still run after-school cookery clubs and have reported a large demand in places from their pupils. Schools have run cooking competitions.



b. Growing food – fruit, vegetables (and chickens), Eco-schools

Growing food and setting up or developing school gardens has been a major transformation within the schools.

Schools have built the infra-structure required for gardening e.g. greenhouses, sheds, storage containers, built raised beds, bought large planters/containers, bought topsoil and compost, trowels, forks, watering cans, water butts, and installed outside taps so that gardening can occur.

As part of the sustainability schools are developing into Eco-schools and planning in growing, recycling and reusing.

The effect upon the pupils' behaviour from having regular easy access to gardening has been notable and many schools now use this as part of their overall behaviour plans.

Many schools report on the impact of the work that they have done and, how having a garden and growing foods has altered children's perceptions of healthy eating.



c. Physical activity, scooters, Singing playgrounds and traditional games

Physical activity is an aspect of school practice that was already well-developed. The focus of the schools has been to encourage more children to cycle or use scooters to come to school; increase in play equipment and facilities in the schools e.g. hula hoops, skipping ropes. Schools also developed the skills of the pupils and staff to encourage more games through Playleader training, Singing Playgrounds and traditional playground games.



d. Family involvement

Schools used many strategies to include parents such as assemblies; workshops; family bike rides; schools sending seeds for children to grow at home; schools organising sessions at the school for the parents e.g. family cooking sessions.



Volunteers

Schools have been encouraged to use the Mondelēz International employee volunteer scheme and volunteers have been out to schools to help with different activities.



Awards

The Health for Life in primary schools programme has

- won the national award from FDF in Health and Well-being,
- featured at the International Symposium on Healthy Lifestyles, Granada 2013,
- won the Regional *Big Tick* for Developing Sustainable Communities
- shortlisted as finalist in two national Health & Wellbeing awards.

Conclusion

The programme is extremely successful in delivering healthy lifestyle changes.

Part of the achievement in delivering the changes so successfully has been the structure and organisation with a clear, but flexible programme to follow that can be tailored to suit the individual needs of each school, but is still challenging enough to be able to affect a real demonstrable change.

As part of the change requires the curriculum and infrastructure within the school to adapt this should mean that the programme is sustainable. The skill and experience of the Education Advisers at the Health Education Service has been to key to its success.

In conclusion, the *Health for Life in primary schools* is a very successful programme in changing the knowledge, attitudes and behaviour of the pupils with regard to healthy eating, cooking skills, growing food and physical activity. We know that these aspects will have a great impact on developing healthy lifestyles.



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