

Staying Alive - project overview

Natalie Russell is a Health Improvement Specialist - Healthy Schools with Islington PCT and here she describes the range of healthy eating and physical activity initiatives across the North of Islington, which will be subject to rigorous evaluation processes, with a view to acting as a pilot for other areas.

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'Staying Alive' is a partnership project involving Islington PCT, Islington Council and the local voluntary sector funded through Neighbourhood Renewal Funds. It comprises a range of healthy eating and physical activity initiatives across the North of Islington, which will be subject to rigorous evaluation processes, with a view to acting as a pilot for other areas.

Overall aim

The overall aim of this project is to develop a methodology that supports increased consumption of healthy food, and uptake of physical activity in defined groups of Islington residents. One element of the project is a focus on the school environment.

Objectives

The objectives of the Staying Alive project specific to the School Strand include:

- ♦ To understand what motivates Islington children to do more exercise
- ♦ To increase knowledge amongst children of what constitutes a healthy diet
- ♦ To teach children to prepare healthy meals
- ♦ To link with pre-existing programmes around diet and exercise
- ♦ To develop local partnerships in order to sustain improvement
- ♦ To increase the capacity for children within the intervention schools to make healthier food choice
- ♦ To develop a practical solution to increasing the amount of physical activity undertaken by school children

Method

To improve the health of Islington pupils, a collaborative approach has been embraced by the Staying Alive Project. Government organisations (London Borough of Islington, Islington Primary Care Trust, CEA@Islington) have developed a close working relationship with school catering company Scolarest, local leisure centre group Aquaterra plus an number of other key stakeholders.

Through this partnership approach, Staying Alive is supporting 7 primary schools and 1 secondary school through funding from the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund.

North Islington

The study has focused on North Islington, particularly the Archway locality, an area that has received less attention than other parts of the borough. The Project involves raising awareness of healthy eating, offering more physical activity options for children to be involved in and increasing healthy eating initiatives within the project schools.

Healthy eating and physical activities

The healthy eating activities include training teachers in the provision of cooking lessons in the classroom environment, development of 'whole-school food policies,' provision of water bottles for children to use at their desks, training school council members as 'healthy eating' buddies and training for the catering staff. The physical

activity options are provided through schools and extra-curricular activities, for instance: lunch-time, after-school activities and a holiday activity programme. Some children will also receive a free 'IZZ' Aqua Card so that they may go swimming for free, and get discounts on things such as rock-climbing, badminton and ice-skating. The children are being fitness tested to see how they improve.

Results

The project is currently still in implementation stage, with a final report being written in June 2006. Early indications are that the BMI/ multistage fitness testing research (MSFT) element of this strand is producing results from the participating schools which indicate that overweight, obesity and low levels of physical fitness are widespread among school age children in these eight schools. Overall, the results from 2 rounds of BMI and MSFT indicate a higher than average problem within the participating schools, with approx. 50% of children tested being overweight or obese. We have also found that almost 40% of children have been shown to have poor aerobic fitness levels.

The development of Whole School Food Policies has proven to be most successful when offering a combination of support through cluster group training and individual school-based support. Additionally, schools are commencing to develop 'physical activity' policies along-side their whole-school food policies, and considering how these two policies could be combined to produce one meaningful 'healthy living' policy.

In the 'Young People in 2004' report, published by the Schools Health Education Unit, the health-related behaviour of over 40,000 10-15 year olds revealed that...

- ▷ 83% of 10-11 year olds don't think they will smoke when they are older
- ▷ However, 65% of 14-15 year old females and 53% of males say they have smoked

SMOKING

Smoking in the movies decreased from 1950 to 1990 and then increased rapidly. In 2002, smoking in movies was as common as it was in 1950. It has been shown that seeing smoking in the movies promotes adolescent smoking. Beginning in 2002, the total amount of smoking in movies was greater in USA youth-rated (G/PG/PG-13) films than adultrated (R) films,

significantly increasing adolescent exposure to movie smoking. Viewing antismoking advertisements before viewing movie smoking seems to blunt the stimulating effects of movie smoking on adolescent smoking.

Charlesworth, A., and Glantz. S.A. 2005. Smoking in the Movies Increases Adolescent Smoking: A Review. *Pediatrics*. 116: 1516-1528
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