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An evaluation of a community based programme aiming to reduce obesity and improve morale in school-age children

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Background

- Children's well-being has been found to increase when they are involved in responsible programmes aimed at the prevention or treatment of obesity.¹
- Research evidence has concluded that further evaluations of what does and does not work for overweight and obese children are needed.²

Methods: Design:

Repeated measures

Data Collection:

- Attendance
- BMI
- Self-esteem (of young people) measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem questionnaire³ at regular intervals.
- Additional questionnaires recording Type and Frequency of Activity and Attitudes towards Physical Activity⁴ to be completed by young people
- Focus groups with children and young people, parents/carers, referring agencies (school nurses and dieticians)
- Meetings with Kirklees Culture and Leisure Services staff

Conclusions

- There is clear evidence about positive attitudes to physical activity and increases in self-esteem for children and young people involved in Young Pals and encouraging indications that participants have extended the range and frequency of involvement in physical activities. BMI results have been encouraging.
- The scheme is limited in its capacity to involve families who do not acknowledge obesity issues, or who did not wish to accept help.
- Dieticians and School Nurses have welcomed and commended the Young Pals Programme. They emphasised the merits of a whole family approach.
- Qualitative data has emphasised the high regard in which programme staff are held by both children and parents and carers.
- The staff's sensitive and caring approach for all children involved has been widely commended.

References: ¹. Oude Lutikhuis, H., Baur, L., Jansen, H., Shewsbury, V.A., O'Malley, C., Stolk, R.P., Summerbell, C.D. (2009). Interventions for treating obesity in children. *Cochrane Database Systematic Reviews* (Issue 1): CD001872. ². Reilly, J. J. (2007). Childhood Obesity: An Overview. *Children and Society*, 21, 390–396. ³. Rosenberg, M. (1979) *Conceiving the Self*. New York: Basic Books. ⁴. Schutz, R. W., Smoll, F. L., Carre, F. A., and Mosher, R. E. (1985). Inventories and norms for children's attitudes toward physical activity. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 56 (3), 256 - 265

Results

The sample (n= 325) represents a good range of the local population as defined by age, gender and ethnicity

Quantitative – following attendance at Young Pals:

- Self-esteem scores increased for 72% of the sample and attendance at Fusion sessions was positively correlated with increases in self-esteem. Younger participants had, on average, higher self-esteem scores than older participants.
- Attitudes towards physical activity were found to be relatively high (positive) at baseline and therefore limited improvements were to be expected over time. There is some evidence to suggest that Young Pals attracts children and young people with already positive attitudes towards physical activity.
- Participation in a range of pre-defined activities increased over time with the exception of PE, team sports and cycling. The findings also provide evidence of increased flexibility in relation to understanding of what constitutes *physical activity* such that it may now be a less daunting prospect for some children and young people.
- Over half (57%) of the sample recorded decreases in BMI and 35% recorded decreases in weight (in kg).
- Centile score data reveals the high prevalence of obese and morbidly obese children and young people in the Young Pals sample. Improvements (i.e., reductions) in centile score were more likely to be associated with very young (below 7 years) participants.

Qualitative – following attendance at Young Pals:

- Children have understood the aims of the Programme and described improvements in self-confidence and other benefits from attending.
- Children consulted have been knowledgeable about healthy eating. Older children (11-16) recognised the importance of changing diet, and being more imaginative and adventurous about their choice of fruit and vegetables.
- Qualitative data indicates that children's level of embarrassment about weight-related issues, and worries about being bullied at school have reduced.
- Younger children described their involvement in a range of other physical activities; they compared their experience at Young Pals favourably with PE sessions at school.

The Young Pals programme

What is the aim of the Young PALS?

More young people, more active, more often with a view to improving health, well being and quality of life, in particular to reduce overweight and obesity.

Who can attend the Young PALS?

- Any child on the 91st centile or above on the BMI chart, or in your informed opinion is overweight or obese
- Resident in Kirklees and/or registered with one of the GP's in Kirklees and/or attending a Kirklees school
- Age 5-16 years (inclusive)
- Motivated and compliant to taking part in physical activity

What is the Young PALS about?

Physical activity
Healthy lifestyles, healthy eating
Reducing overweight/obesity
Building confidence/self esteem
Education/advice
Motivation/support
Encouraging and supporting parents
Making new friends/meeting new people
Having fun !



MELTDOWN (2004-2007)
Monthly Activity Clinic



MEND
Mind Exercise, Nutrition, Do it!



FUSION
Stepping Stone
Activity



ENERGISE
Mainstream Activity

Evaluation supported by:

