

Evaluating the impact of The Family Health Initiative

Shirley Hawkes, Diane Boyd & Davina Kelly

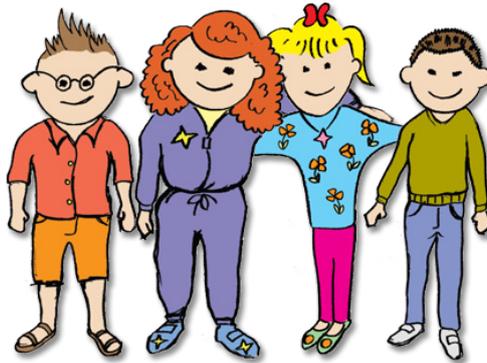
Early Years – the organisation for young children, 6c Wildflower Way, Belfast, BT12 6TA



Introduction

Obesity continues to be one of the most important public health challenges facing Northern Ireland with 22.5% of children in Primary 1 identified as overweight (17.2%) or obese (5.3%).¹

This trend has a detrimental impact on the health and wellbeing of individuals. For children the most serious long-term consequence of obesity is its persistence into adulthood. This highlights early intervention as key to reducing obesity levels. Early Years – the organisation for young children has developed The Family Health Initiative, an evidence based programme aimed at encouraging families to develop healthy lifestyle habits from an early age.



Characters created to promote Healthy Lifestyle messages

Aims

The overall aim was to develop and implement:

- Healthy Lifestyle prevention programme for families with a child under 5 years (8 weeks)
- Making A Difference weight management programme targeting children aged 8-11 years who were overweight or obese (12 weeks).

Background

The programmes intended to empower families to:

- 1) Understand importance of a balanced diet and make healthier food choices.
- 2) Understand importance of exercise and increasing physical activity levels.
- 3) Understand physical and emotional consequences connected to obesity.
- 4) Build skills and confidence of parents to model healthy lifestyle choices for their children

The programme focused on three key areas:

- Healthy eating
- Physical exercise
- Emotional wellbeing

Three bespoke illustrated story books, with accompanying puppets, support the delivery of this programme.



Setting

Programmes were delivered in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust area, Northern Ireland, based in the local community. Partnership working was key to the success, where a local steering group was developed to provide support and guidance to the programme.

Methods

Healthy Lifestyle prevention programme: 124 families enrolled, 81 families completed the programme (65%). Making a Difference: 45 families enrolled, 33 families completed the programme (78%).

Changes were monitored using the following: (pre, mid-point, post and follow-ups)

- Family lifestyle questionnaires
- Day in the Life questionnaire
- Height/Weight, BMI, Waist Circumference
- Fitness Test
- Weekly goal setting
- Qualitative data e.g.; Case Studies, Graffiti-wall, facilitator diaries.

Results

BMI z-score by centre for week 1, 12 and 48

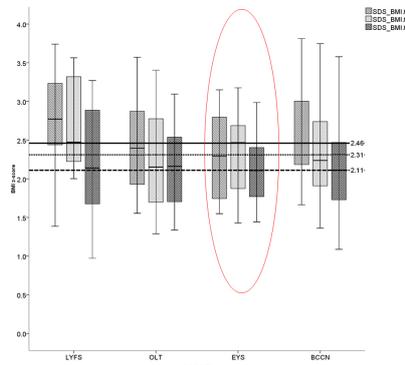


Figure 1: Making a Difference- children's BMI z-score results (pre, post and follow-up) Solid line = median BMI z-score week 1 Dotted line= BMI z-score Week 12 Dashed line= BMI z-score Week 48

In Figure 1 a positive value indicates an increase in BMI z-score between Week 1 (2.29) and Week 12 (2.47). However, BMI z-score at Week 48 indicates a significant positive value decrease (2.11) showing a successful result over the core completion.²

What I think about myself	Median	Percentiles	(N)
Week 1	30	(25, 33.5)	37
Week 12	32.5	(25, 38)	26
Week 48	36	(31.3, 39.8)	8

(Figure 2) indicates that perception of body image was low and improved at all time points.

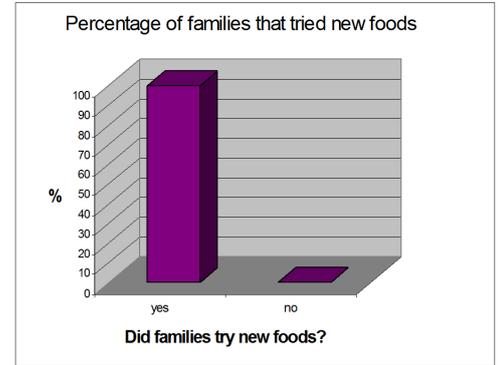


Figure 3: Percentage of families that tried new foods in Healthy Lifestyle prevention programme and Making a Difference management programme

Positive change in participants' diets has been shown through all families successfully trying new healthy foods (Figure 3)

Figure 4: Family goal setting achievement rates

	Achieved	Not Achieved
Healthy Lifestyle prevention programme	90.3 %	9.7 %
Making a Difference management programme	93 %	7 %

A goal setting chart was used to encourage families to set realistic weekly targets. This allowed families to focus on something for the next week and was used as a motivational tool.³

Conclusions

Results suggest lifestyle habits can be positively changed through this multi-component, family-focused, community based, partnership approach. It is effective in engaging and retaining families to make positive lifestyle changes, covering all areas in nutrition, physical activity and emotional well-being.

The Family Health Initiative recognises the need for early intervention to tackle obesity in children; providing a holistic approach to the matter of childhood obesity.

References

1. Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (2012): A Fitter Future for All: Framework for preventing and addressing overweight and obesity in Northern Ireland 2012-2022.
2. Dr.T.McCaffrey and Dr.H.McCarthy (2013): Final Report for Q3-Q5 for UP4IT! Management Programmes. University of Ulster, Coleraine.
3. Dr.K.Collins (2013): The Family Health Initiative- Early Years – the organisation for young children.

Acknowledgements

This project was funded March 2011-March 2013 by the European Union's European Regional Development Fund through the INTERREG IVA Cross Border Programme managed by the Special EU programmes Body. Additional funding has been agreed until September 2013 by the Public Health Agency.

For more information visit www.early-years.org/health

