

Community Partnership 2015-16

Toddler Better Health Programme

A community initiative to encourage healthy habits and behaviors in young children and their whānau has been piloted in Nelson and has proven to be a huge success.



Photo credit: Fairfax Media NZ / Nelson Mail

The Toddler Better Health Programme (TBHP) was introduced in Richmond by Tonia Talbot, a dietitian at Nelson Bays Primary Health Organisation (NBPHO) in 2016. Due to escalating rates of childhood obesity in the region, the PHO sought funding to offer a free pilot programme to help pre-school aged children and their whānau to live healthier lives. They were successful in obtaining an Active Healthy Strong Community Partnership grant from the Health Promotion Agency to launch the programme in 2016.

Why the Toddler Better Health Programme?

Originally developed in the United Kingdom, the Toddler Better Health Programme is evidence-based and caters for all families with pre-school

aged children, however its primary purpose and focus is obesity prevention. The main appeal is that it uses a whānau ora or family based approach to encourage healthy habits and behaviours. It encompasses the components of healthy eating, physical activity, and behavior change, to give parents and caregivers the tools they need to help grow healthy children.

What they did

Sessions were 1.5 hours long and held once a week for 10 weeks. Each session included:

- 30 minutes of active play
- 15 minutes of snack time where participants were invited to try a new fruit or vegetable each week
- 45 minutes of supervised creative play for the children while parents attend a workshop. Topics included healthy eating, recommended portion sizes, label reading, food without fuss and encouraging general healthy habits.

Partnering with local experts

Tonia attributes their programme's success to working in partnership with other organisations and the community to help promote, enrich and deliver the programme. "Sport Tasman helped deliver the active play component, and a local gym class donated the use of their equipment."

By utilising links with the public health nurses and health promoters in Nelson, Tonia was also able to recruit and target families who would benefit most from the programme. Developing key relationships with local media to help promote and elevate the programme also worked well. “Inviting the local media to profile the programme created a great deal of local and national interest, which made it easier to recruit for our next TBHP programme.”

Whānau approach was key

“Working with whānau and families over a 10 week period and seeing the ‘lightbulb’ moments for parents when their child would try a new vegetable or fruit in snack time was so rewarding.”

Each week, families were invited to share their stories and challenges from home life. This proved to be successful in building a safe environment for families to share, learn and grow together. Families also reported that the learnings from the programme had a positive knock on effect on their wider whānau.

Results were impressive with 60% of parents observing an increase in the time their children spent being physically active. Parents also noticed a 60% reduction in the time their children were spending on screens. The programme also proved to be successful in encouraging healthier eating habits with 80% of parents reporting that their children were eating more vegetables on a daily basis.

What did participants enjoy the most?

Having somewhere they could come along to each week, where they could play and have fun with their child. Participants enjoyed the parent workshops where they had time to learn while the

children were entertained, and fully supervised. Participants also commented on the enjoyment of being part of a group, with the ability to be able to support and share ideas with other parents.

One participant reported that the programme has had a real flow on effect to their extended family.

“My mother sent the children money instead of chocolate for Easter this year and my sister and brother in law don’t offer fizzy drinks when we come to visit now”.

What would they do differently next time?

Tonia recommends looking at different methods of recruitment to get best results, for example, recruitment through social media sites such as Facebook can be a successful, low-cost approach. “Many young parents are big users of social media, so this could be a great way to target them.”

“I would aim to improve sustainability by strengthening community partnerships in our region to allow us to expand the programme to more vulnerable communities.”

Top tips

- » Planning around promotion and recruitment is key.
- » Use as many channels and networks as possible to promote and strengthen your initiative. Community engagement and sector partnerships really helped.
- » Take a whānau approach, rather than just focusing on the child.