

Health Promotion, Is it having an impact?

By Kate Smith

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Health Promotion: Is it having an impact? By Kate Smith

Contents

Abstract	5.
Research Question	6.
Background	7.
Literature Review	9.
Methodology	17.
Findings	20.
Analysis	25.
Conclusion	28.
References	29.
Bibliography	32.
Appendices	33.

Health Promotion: Is it having an impact? By Kate Smith

Abstract

This small scale research project looks at the Health Promotion initiatives being implemented by the Scottish Government. The research project aims to discover if the initiatives implemented within Early Years Establishments are having an impact on the children attending. The researcher has collected data through analysing the government produced documents and carried out semi structured interviews with staff and parents. The report indicates that the initiatives are having a positive impact on the children who attend the Early Years Establishment, empowering the children to make positive life style choices which will hopefully form positive habits and remain with these children as they go from childhood to adulthood.

Health Promotion: Is it having an impact? By Kate Smith

Research Question

How effective are the Health Promotion initiatives within the Early Years Establishment?

Objectives

Objective 1: Examine some of the Health Promotion initiatives introduced in the Scottish Government documents.

Objective 2: To investigate how effective, the Health Promotion initiatives are implemented in the Early Years Establishment.

Objective 3: What influences are the Health Promotion initiatives having on the behaviour and attitudes of both the staff and the children within the Early Years Establishment?

Health Promotion: Is it having an impact? By Kate Smith

Background

This small scale qualitative research project has been carried out in a private nursery school where children between the ages of 3 years and 5 years attend. The nursery school is in an affluent area on the coast serving the Ayrshire community. Throughout this research project the nursery school will be referred to as the Early Years Establishment. As a practitioner within the early year's establishment, I have a particular interest in Health Promotion and have taken the lead role with the Health Promotion initiatives, working with the other practitioners and children to implement them.

Health Promotion is highlighted everywhere in today's society, especially in the media. However Health Promotion is not a new phenomenon. The World Health Organisation in 1986 produced the Ottawa Charter, Ewles and Simnett (2003). The charter empowers Governments and their people to make positive healthy life style choices for all, by the year 2000 and beyond. Early years practitioners try to empower children in their care to make healthier life style choices. By implementing the Scottish Government Health Promotion initiatives through the documents, *"Being Well – Doing Well a framework for health promoting schools in Scotland"*, Scottish Executive (2004) and *"Nutritional guidance for early years food choices for children aged 1-5 years in early education and childcare settings."* Scottish Executive (2006)

This small scale research project has been carried out, within a time limited period. It involved collecting data from other practitioners within the establishment and a selected number of consenting parents.

Literature Review

How effective are the Health Promoting initiatives within the Early Years Establishment?

The Scottish government is very aware of the health problems of the Scottish people, Scottish Office (2006) with its poor records of heart disease, obesity and strokes. As a result the Scottish government is trying to reduce these rates in adulthood, with the implementation of Health Promotion initiatives throughout the Scottish Educational Establishments, with a particular focus on the early years: *"future health of children is greatly influenced by their early years."* The Scottish Office (1999)

Health promotion is not just a Scottish initiative. Health promotion comes from the World Health Organisation. In 1986 they produced a charter which is known as the Ottawa charter and is an international initiative, WHO (1986). The charter works to promote health all over the world. The charter works on principles of empowerment, partnership and supporting to reduce inequalities in communities, supporting environments and improving public health on a global scale. WHO (1986)

This paper intends to review some of the Scottish Government's initiatives; investigating whether the initiatives are having an impact on our behaviour and attitudes towards a healthier lifestyle. The research used for this paper was found by reviewing Government documents, research journals, publications and articles from quality newspapers. The focus was on keywords such as, health promotion, early years, physical exercise and a healthy diet.

The Scottish government produced the document *"Being well- Doing well a framework for health promoting schools in Scotland."* Scottish Executive, (2004) In this document the government sets out targets for all schools to reach in becoming health promoting. The document states that good health leads to good educational achievement. The document also states that better health in childhood results in better adult health.

Health Promotion: Is it having an impact? By Kate Smith

Health promoting activities can impact on behaviours and attitudes towards a positive healthy lifestyle and have a lasting effect; *"child health and well-being that will result in better health and will last into adult life"* Scottish Executive, (2004, P3).

The document takes a holistic view of the health of the individual. Promoting the physical, social, spiritual, mental and emotional health and wellbeing of all the pupils and staff. The key characteristics the document focuses on are;

" leadership and management, ethos, partnership working, curriculum, learning and teaching, personal, social and health education programmes, and environment, resources and facilities." Scottish Executive (2004, P10)

In the article *"Locating quality physical education in early years pedagogy"*, Marsden E and Weston C (2007), discuss the quality of physical education within the school systems. Scottish Executive recommend two hours of physical activity each week, which they suggest would lead to less obesity and better health in children. This article highlights that getting and keeping children physically active will improve the health of the nation. Children being physically fit will aid their intellectual development states Marsden and Weston (2007). They also discuss the view that the nations pride is at stake with the Olympic games in London, 2012 fast approaching. The researcher could suspect that all this is an attempt to improve hopes for some national champions standing on the gold medal podium.

The researcher questions whether Marsden and Weston's view is rather simplistic and considers that physical fitness is not all that is behind the nations poor health issues. Poor diet combined with lack of physical activity is what, Palmer believes: *"the food we've let them eat over the last decade or so- ever rich in sugar, salt, additives and the wrong sort of fat- now contains very little actual nourishment. Instead of building healthy bodies, its simply making children fatter and unhealthier by the year."* Palmer (2006, P21). The research supports this view and suggests

Health Promotion: Is it having an impact? By Kate Smith

that we need to improve the food quality and types of food we feed our children. We have become a nation addicted to junk food whether it comes from a fast food restaurant or a processed ready meal from the supermarket.

In Israel research was carried out titled "*Prevalence of overweight in Kindergarten children in the centre of Israel- association with lifestyle habits*" Pinhas-Hamiel.O, Bar-Zvi.E, Boyko.V, Reichman.B, and Lerner-Geva.L (2009). This research looked at various different reasons for the increase in obesity in children age four to six years. The research noted that although poor life style habits were noted they only accounted for a third of the children in the research other factors were sedentary lifestyle and parental obesity. This research found: "*overweight children eat according to mood status and preferred eating candies as a snack*" Pinhas-Hamiel.O, Bar-Zvi.E, Boyko.V, Reichman.B, and Lerner-Geva.L (2009, P147). This is something the researcher of this paper can identify with. Lots of children are spending time in front of the television or computer grazing on snacks. We all appear to know what is right for us but in practice it is very different. The report on children in Israel also drew comparison with children in America and Australia finding similarities although figures in Australia were slightly better. The findings of the report noted that carers of young children can put in place programmes which: "*can educate young children and influence parental attitude to support healthy lifestyles.*" (2009, P151) This very much reflects the view of the Scottish Government, and their current Health Promotion initiatives which are in place in Early Years Establishments.

The Scottish Government published: "*Improving Health in Scotland – The Challenge*" (2003). This document covers all topics relevant to health promotion in Scotland, concerning both adults and children. For the purpose of this paper it is the topics relating to children especially early years that the researcher has investigated physical activity and healthy eating. In the document the government discusses the amount of physical activity each child and adult should be doing each day. Physical activity levels in children should be an hour a day although this should be built up

Health Promotion: Is it having an impact? By Kate Smith

into smaller time periods. The Scottish Government is aware of the work that needs to be done and has put in place new initiatives, including all schools to be health promoting by 2007.

As rates of obesity are so high in Scotland healthy eating is a major concern for the Scottish government. Scotland has one of the poorest diets in Europe. Scottish school children consume more fizzy drinks and sugary sweets than most of their European counterparts. Their intake of fruit and vegetables are low. November 2002 the Scottish Executive produced the document: *"Hungry for success: A Whole School Approach to School Meals in Scotland"*. The document focuses on children 5-18 years and covers all meal opportunities throughout the school day, from breakfast clubs, snacks and vending machines, lunches and water provision. Palmer (2006) in her book also realised that obesity had become a huge issue within the school system and that vending machines and their contents need to be reviewed. The document Scottish Executive, (2002) sets out to establish standards for school meals, consider the presentation of the schools meals and remove any stigmas attached to children receiving free school meals. The initiatives from the document were implemented through positive ethos, partnership working pupil consultation and incentives to improve the number of children having a school lunch. It is a whole child whole school approach to improving the diet of Scottish school children.

As realised from *"Hungry for success a whole school approach to school meals in Scotland"* Scottish Executive (2002) children under the age of 5 years in early year's settings have different nutritional requirements and food service issues. Early years was highlighted as an area for improvement in the Scottish diet. Nutrition in early years is determinate of growth and development and influences adult health. The document, *"Nutritional guidance for early year's food choices for children aged 1-5 years in early education and childcare setting"* Scottish Executive (2006) was produced. This document should be in use by all Early Years Establishments and childminders caring for children under 5 years of age.

Health Promotion: Is it having an impact? By Kate Smith

The guidance focuses on three main areas eating habits, nutrients, food and menu planning. This document is well received by early years practitioners and works with the current curriculum Scottish Executive (1999).

Nutrition for the early years children is a compelling factor influencing their abilities to not only develop physically but intellectually as well, Palmer (2006, P28) states: "*if children's diets lacked a variety of minerals in the first three years, the children were more likely to be irritable and aggressive at eight years old, more likely to swear and cheat at eleven, and more likely to steal and bully at seventeen.*" If this statement is to be believed then obesity is not our only problem society will be facing in the years to come. The researcher feels that society and how we live our lives in this modern society impacts hugely on how our children grow up.

Children appear to be targeted from a very early age by the marketing giants. In an article published in The Herald (Graeme Smith, 27-02-2009) it reported that children's television aimed at pre-school children had doubled and quadrupled on dedicated channels. It went on to inform the reader that for every hour of sitting watching the television adds an extra kilogramme to their weight. The writer suggests that it is not the inactivity but the grazing on snacks whilst watching the television. Something which was earlier suggested in the report "*Prevalence of overweight in Kindergarten children in the centre of Israel- association with lifestyle habits*" Pinhas-Hamiel.O, Bar-Zvi.E, Boyko.V, Reichman.B, and Lerner-Geva.L (2009).

Celebrity chefs are also being blamed for our obesity. In a different article published by The Herald (Jonathan Liew, 12-03-2009) "*the high levels of saturated fat in many celebrity devised meals pose a significant health risk.*" The article reports that the celebrity chefs are trying to tempt the general public with their delicious recipes and encourage us to be more adventurous with our meals but at the same time they are filling our bodies with saturated fats. It appears to the researcher that although we may try to eat healthily by following recipes from celebrity chefs we are

Health Promotion: Is it having an impact? By Kate Smith

actually tempted from all directions to eat foods which are laden with hidden fats.

Dental and oral health is another concern in which the Scottish government has worked hard to improve with the introduction of a national tooth brushing programme. In the Scottish office paper, "*towards a healthier Scotland – A white paper on Health*" (1999) this document states; "*sugar in foods and drinks is a leading cause of Scotland's poor dental health*" the paper makes a link between tooth decay and deprivation. It also links lack of childhood dental decay to fluoridation of water supply particularly in areas of deprivation. National pilot projects were introduced to promote tooth brushing and reduction of consumption of sugary drinks and food. Following the report *Prevention and management of dental decay in the pre-school child* NHS (2005), A national tooth brushing programme was introduced and all early years children now brush their teeth during their day within the Early Years Establishment. This works well and the children appear to be enjoying brushing their teeth, with no hesitation. Peer pressure working well with young children.

In conclusion it is clear to see from all the literature there are many reasons why society in particular young children need Health Promotion initiatives. The Scottish Government have put many Health Promoting initiatives in place within Early Years Establishments. It is the intention of the researcher to discover if these Health Promotion initiatives are having an impact on the children attending the Early Years Establishments. Providing children with positive lifestyle choices which will become positive habits taking children from a healthy childhood to a healthy adulthood.

Health Promotion: Is it having an impact? By Kate Smith

Methodology.

Rationale

For the purpose of this small scale research project, the researcher will adopt a Qualitative approach. Qualitative research methods allow the researcher to use a variety of appropriate methods and theories of data collection, as Flick (1998) discusses. This will allow the researcher flexibility. The research is being carried out in the workplace setting of an early years establishment, within a limited time scale. Bell (2005), describes the Qualitative approach as one which allows the researcher to gather information by listening to and taking account of individual viewpoints in relation to the research question and the objectives. This method of listening to and taking account of individual view points is one which is current practice to the researcher based in the workplace. Children within this early years establishment are comfortable when talking to adults to express their views. The establishment uses consulting with the children to inform planning. This is good practice within early years establishments and is in line with current Scottish Executive thinking, (HMIE 2007). The researcher will invite staff and selected parents and children to express their views on the effectiveness of the health promotion initiatives which have been implemented within the early years establishment.

Research methods

The researcher will carry out both structured and semi-structured interviews. The structured interview allows the researcher to ask a "*pre-established questions, with pre-set response categories.*" Punch (2005, P176), which the researcher considers a good method of collecting data from staff, children and parents. The researcher will also carry out semi-structured interviews. These allow the interviewee the opportunity to talk more about what is more important to the individual in relation to the research question. The semi-structured approach allows the researcher to follow an interview schedule which maintains control but also allows flexibility to explore answers in greater depth. Bell (2005) discusses this point as she explains the limitations of a questionnaire. Another limitation

Health Promotion: Is it having an impact? By Kate Smith

of interviews is that they are *"time consuming"* Bell (2005 P157). By carrying out a semi-structured interview the researcher should gain a more substantial view in relation to the research question and objectives.

The researcher in conjunction with collecting data from semi-structured interviews will also analyse Primary source documents, as described by Bell (2005), which relate to the research question and objectives. The documents are inadvertent sources *"they are produced by the process of local and central government and from the everyday working of the educational system"* Bell (2005 P126). The documents are concerned with the research question and objectives and provide *"witting"* evidence Bell (2005 P127).

Ethical consideration

The researcher has invited all participants to take part in writing, (see appendix). The letter informs the participant of the research topic and how the information gathered is going to be used. By doing this the researcher is ensuring informed consent. Treating all participants with respect and protecting their identity. All names used will be fictitious. The researcher has given careful consideration to the code of ethics as set out by SERA (2005) when planning and carrying out this research. Ensuring all participants are not harmed but are valued and respected. In particular making sure the rights of the child are observed " *Article 12 of the Convention which requires that children must be given the opportunity to express their views freely in all matters affecting them*" SERA (2005 P5). This is particularly important when interviewing children of a young age.

Findings

Objective 1

In order to address the first objective the researcher looked at the two main documents used by the Early Years Establishments. Scottish Executive (2004), was produced to help schools to become health promoting by 2007 and *"recognises that schools are uniquely placed to play a crucial role in promoting good health"* Scottish Executive (2004, P4). The primary use is within educational establishments and recognises that the educational establishments have the best opportunity outside the home to make a difference to the life style of Scottish school children. As health promotion takes a holistic view this document recognises that it is a shared approach which is needed.

The second document used within early years establishments, Scottish Executive, (2006), was produced to support practitioners, child minders and carers to meet the nutritional needs of the children in their care: *"improving the country's diet is a key part of making people in Scotland healthier. Encouraging young children to eat healthily not only helps their growth and development as children, it also establishes good eating habits for life"* Scottish Executive (2006, Pv). The nutritional information this document contains is easy to use and delivers clear guidance of the nutritional requirements of children under five years of age. This document also supports dental hygiene and physical activity. This document brings together many policies that the Scottish Government would like early years establishments to implement.

Objective 2

The researcher used semi structured interviews to record the data for this objective. The researcher talked to some of the children attending the establishment to discover what they understood as being healthy. All children, when asked were able to identify something that they do to keep healthy throughout their morning in the establishment.

Health Promotion: Is it having an impact? By Kate Smith

"Eat healthy things, clean hands" Stuart aged 4 years.

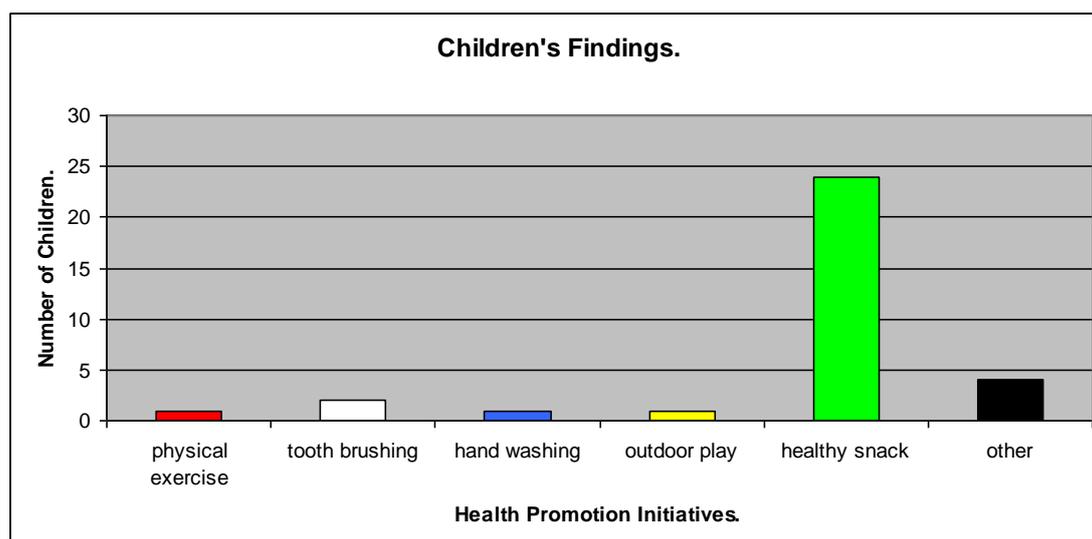
"Dancing and swimming" Andrew age 5 years.

"Eat healthy things brush our teeth" Helen age 4 years

The children have a very good understanding of what they do, to keep healthy within the establishment. During interviews with adults both other practitioners and parents were able to comment on the knowledge the children have about being healthy. This is supported by the following quotes: *"Yes the children can tell you why we brush teeth, eat snack"* Mrs Jones staff member.

"informed her Nana you can give me too much chocolate" Mrs McDonald parent of a 4 year old daughter.

The results from the interviews are further supported with the following graphs. The first graph was formed from the information from the children. The graph shows what the children consider they do to keep healthy while attending the establishment.

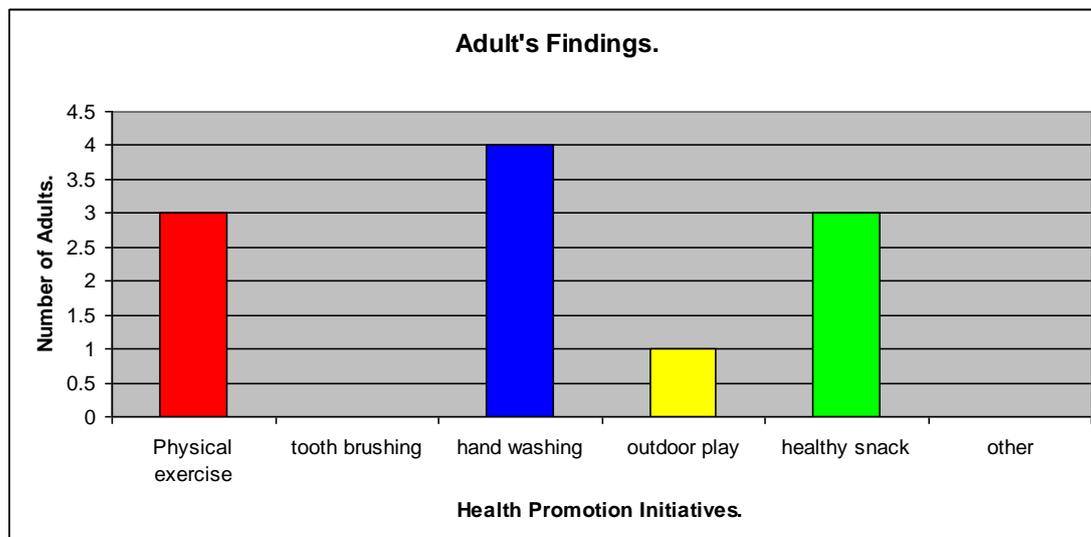


You can see from the graph that nearly all the children indicated that they have a healthy snack to keep them healthy. The term healthy snack applies to the foods offered to the children in line with the document Scottish Executive (2006).

Data from the interviews carried out with adults has a different view. The

Health Promotion: Is it having an impact? By Kate Smith

Adults were asked what they consider to be the most important health promotion initiative currently being used with the establishment ? The results are shown in the following graph.



The graph showing the views of the adults indicates a very different view to that of the children. The adults appear to place importance on differing initiatives and appear to support the government's view that there is no single approach to a healthier life style. The researcher also supports this view.

The results from the interviews also indicates that Early Years Establishments are having an impact on changing the life style habits of the children attending: *"Are very effective Jane is happy to brush teeth, happy to eat fruit, she is aware of the importance"* Mrs Walker, parent. This quote from a parent supports the work that is going on within the establishment. Parents are finding it easier to promote a healthier lifestyle at home due to the fact the children take part in health promoting activities. A working parent strongly supported the physical activities that take place within the establishment as it removes some of the pressure from herself knowing that her child has access to dancing and swimming: *"Highly effective, dance is done in a way boys and girls are comfortable with it, swimming brilliant"* Mrs Brown, parent.

Health Promotion: Is it having an impact? By Kate Smith

Objective 3

As the interviews indicated behaviours have changed regarding health promotion: *"Yes snack, children used to bring their own snack to nursery bringing unhealthy sweets and chocolate but now I am amazed at amount and variety of fruit the children eat"* Mrs Matthews staff member. The establishment now offers a healthy snack always a selection of fruit and something else in line with the Scottish government recommendations. Parents are also aware of changes in their child's behaviour: *"Was fussy but now happy to eat raw vegetables, trying more because her friends are trying"* Mrs Davidson parent. As this quote indicates the health promoting initiatives are having an impact on the eating habits of Scottish children. It is not just the children though: *"Attitudes have changedI would have put crisps in lunch boxes every day but now once a week , you know 1 in 5 are obese and you don't want that to happen to your child"* Mrs Davidson parent. Health promotion initiatives are having an impact not just for the children but for the adults as well.

Health Promotion: Is it having an impact? By Kate Smith

Analysis

From analysing the primary source documents the researcher has been able to identify that the Scottish Government is promoting positive healthy life styles through educational establishments. The discourse of the documents Scottish Executive (2004 and 2006), supports individuals to make changes in their life styles, by selecting activities offered throughout their school day. The researchers findings support this view, throughout the establishment daily session there are many opportunities for children to take part in healthier life style activities.

Early years establishments follow nutritional guidelines from the document, Scottish Executive (2006). The interviews indicate that the guidelines Scottish Executive (2006) are working well providing the establishment with the information required to provide the children with a healthy snack. The Scottish Governments discourse about food choice appears to be working well proving popular with children and parents.

However there are some mixed messages that the researcher has found. The Scottish Government is recommending healthy eating, but at the same time supports suppliers of junk food and convenience foods from the supermarkets. As Palmer (2006) has stated we have created generations of children and adults addicted to junk food. The governments have allowed food retailers to supply these products cheaply with attractive packaging aimed at young children.

It is not only the children who are being encouraged to eat foods which are not necessarily healthy for them. The media is having a huge impact by delivering healthy food options right into our homes through the television. Celebrity chefs have never had such a high profile, but are they really presenting the public with healthy options. In a recent newspaper article Liew, (12-03-2009) identified the large amounts of hidden fats in many celebrity chefs recipes. If the researcher was to carry out further research into eating habits, this would be an area the researcher would investigate.

Health Promotion: Is it having an impact? By Kate Smith

The Scottish governments discourse on physical activity recommends a minimum for one hour of physical activity a day for young children. This comes at a time when many local recreation centres are facing closure, and families rely heavily on their cars. The early years establishment is providing plenty of opportunities for children to be physically active, through swimming, dancing and general physical play, both inside and outside. Parents can be reassured that their children are experiencing plenty of physical activity.

At home though it appears that children are spending a lot of time inside watching television this is reflected in the report from Israel (2009) and articles from the media Smith (2009) reported children are grazing on foods whilst watching. The researcher would suggest that whilst children are being targeted by television programmers parents are happy to keep their children inside. The researcher would like to suggest this is due to the breakdown in today's society which conspires against children playing outside.

The research indicates that early years establishments are providing plenty of opportunities for young children to choose healthier life styles, which should form positive habits for their future lives.

Conclusion

The researcher concludes that after careful consideration from the document analysis and the semi structured interviews, that all the different health promotion initiatives the Scottish Government has implemented are having an impact on improving the health of Scottish children. Using educational establishments working together with staff, parents and community appears to be the best approach.

The children within the Early Years Establishment are very familiar with the health promotion initiatives. The children can confidently inform the researcher of what they do to keep themselves healthy and this can be seen daily within the early years establishment. Peer pressure appears to impact on how all the children behave towards all the health promoting initiatives. Children are also informing their own families on what is healthy and what is not.

The indications from the research are very positive regarding the Scottish Governments approach to using educational establishments to promote healthier life styles. These children are forming positive habits which should remain with them as they grow from child to adult. The researcher would like to carry out similar research with older children to see if the habits the children form in their early years establishment really do stay with them through to adult life.

Health Promotion: Is it having an impact? By Kate Smith

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Health Promotion: Is it having an impact? By Kate Smith

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Health Promotion: Is it having an impact? By Kate Smith

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Health Promotion: Is it having an impact? By Kate Smith

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Appendices

Quotes from interviews.

Interview Schedule.

Letter inviting participation.

Health Promotion: Is it having an impact? By Kate Smith

The following are quotes from interviews with parents and staff in relation to the research question.

"hugely important, raises awareness at early age"

"yes I do think they work well and most of the children are aware of why we do them"

"yes he definitely has understanding of what healthy life style is"

"children talk about what's healthy and what's not"

"no do a very good job, hand washing, pleased to see the children are out more this week any opportunity to get outside. Not concerned, tooth brushing great as well if you forget in the morning you know she will brush them at nursery don't know what else you can fit in, in 4 hours"

"teeth brushing, can't go to bed unless brushed his teeth, knows it has to be done,..... added weight when it comes from nursery"

"Physical exercise swimming and dancing, a chance to do that at school"

"outdoor play really hard to find a nursery with outdoor play area"

"outdoor play, because it's important that children exercise every day and they don't always get the chance at home especially in the poorer weather"

"good to start children very young to good habits, lots of choice teach them good to eat healthy food to have a balanced diet from an early age"

"She happy to try- pineapples more adventurous with food"

Health Promotion: Is it having an impact? By Kate Smith

Interview Schedule

What do you understand by the term, health promotion ?

How important to you is health promotion ?

Objective 1

Can you tell me of any health promotion initiatives implemented in this nursery ?

Which one of the following would you consider is the most important health promotion initiative currently being used in the nursery?

Physical exercise including swimming and dancing

Tooth brushing

Hand washing

Outdoor play

Healthy snack

Why do you think ... is the most important health promotion initiative?

Objective 2

How effective do you feel the health promotion initiatives are in this nursery?

Do you think the health promotion initiatives are working well within the nursery?

Do you feel the nursery could do better when implementing the health promotion initiatives?

Health Promotion: Is it having an impact? By Kate Smith

Objective 3

What health promotion initiatives have had an impact on your child's behaviour?

Have you see any changes in the children's behaviour since the health promotion initiatives were introduced?

Has your own behaviour changed since the implementation of any health promoting initiatives?

Have your own attitudes towards health promotion changed?

Do you feel your child's behaviour at home has changed in relation to health promotion?

Health Promotion: Is it having an impact? By Kate Smith

Dear

I am currently undertaking some part time study. As part of my course work I am required to carryout a small scale research project. My project is focused on the Health Promotion initiatives being used in the nursery.

My research involves collecting information by way of interviewing parents, staff and children. I want to discover if the Health Promotion initiatives being implemented in the nursery are having an impact.

All information collected will be kept confidential and only used for the purpose of the research project. In order to recall what has been discussed I intend to record the interview. No names will be used in the written assignment so that confidentiality is respected at all times.

I would be grateful for your participation. If you are willing to be interviewed for the purpose of this research project please let me know so that I can arrange a suitable time and location to carry out an interview. The interview should not take any longer than 20 minutes.

Thank you for your co-operation