

Mithian Dash Project

A Case Study

The DASH project was started in the spring term 2009 and was originally initiated to support a child whose parents had asked for help regarding their child's health due to obesity. Following staff discussion DASH was seen to be a way forward for some of the children who were slightly overweight or had low levels of fitness, agility or involvement in sports.

Recruitment of Families

The recruitment of families is a potentially difficult factor in this project as the aim is to target families who have health or weight issues but may be quite comfortable with their current lifestyle. Families were approached by letter to invite them to join a group to help the children improve their multi skills and aerobic fitness and also for the families to be involved in activities with their children. A major barrier to family participation was predicted to be a lack of child care for siblings during the Friday Family Fun Fit Club; this was overcome by inviting siblings to join in the activities, following discussion with parents who had younger children.

Ten families were included in the initial invitation, however not all the families wanted to be involved so unfortunately some of the target children did not take part in the activities. Further children were identified and invited to join the club, these children did not necessarily have weight issues but were physically less able to participate in activities than their peers and it was felt it would be beneficial to their agility and overall fitness. Some of the families who were invited to join the scheme declined with no further discussion. The head teacher was approached by two of the families, on separate occasions before the scheme started, to voice concerns as to why their children had been chosen for the scheme. The head teacher was able to explain that through discussion with class teachers she had chosen children who would benefit through raised self esteem, agility and fitness. These families subsequently participated in the scheme. One family agreed to their child participating but were unable to attend Family Fun Fit club with them, so their child only attended the lunchtime activity session. One family were invited to join as their child was

particularly friendly with a targeted child and it was felt it would be a support system, this was not made explicit to the particular family as it was felt their children would still benefit from participation in DASH. Another child already attended an athletics club on Friday's and it was agreed that he would attend alternate sessions whilst his mum or dad along with his younger sisters attended all the Family Sessions. Seven families participated in the final project with the age range of children from 3 to 10. If all the families attended and all the children were present it totalled 17 children and eight parents. One family always included both parents in the activities and 2 families alternated with the father or the mother attending, the other 4 families attended with only the mothers.

Project Delivery

Lunchtime Club

A teaching assistant within the school undertook training to enable her to facilitate the lunchtime activity sessions with the children. The club was originally called the 'Hundred Mile Club' but the children preferred to call it the 'DASH Club'. The teaching assistant used a variety of resources to enthuse and inspire the children. Many of the resources were from the 'Huff and Puff' shed as it was felt by staff that the children may continue to choose these activities during lunch times when the equipment was freely available. It was hoped that other children who were observing the activities may also be motivated into using this equipment. This has proved to be the case, lunch time supervisors have noticed an increase in the use of the Huff and Puff shed and a more varied approach in the way the equipment is used by all children.

Family Fun Fit Club

The family fun fit club was originally run solely by the facilitator from the Healthy Schools team. The facilitator was joined on Week 4 by a teaching assistant from the school who wanted to gain more experience with working with parents. An added benefit of the teaching assistant joining the group was that she had prior knowledge of all the children and their families and was able to consider the large age range of the children and the usual behaviour they displayed in school. The children showed a tendency to become over excited with a combination of the fun activities and the fact their parents were participating with them and having two facilitators helped to keep

to the planned activities. The activities were planned around games which enabled parents of any fitness and ability to join in. Apart from the parachute and team building games all the other activities included parts which families could use at home together.

Activities

Week 1: This was an ice breaker session including parachute games and simple throwing and catching balls to help people get to know each other and begin to feel at more at ease with each other and the prospect of participating in activities.

Week 2: Team building games were introduced by the Healthy Schools facilitator.

Week 3: The main activity was skipping which was greatly enjoyed by some of the children, while others found it difficult.

Week 4: Mini Rounder's was a difficult concept for some of the younger children to understand, however the children and the parents all participated wholeheartedly. This was the first week that the teaching assistant joined the group for the end of the session.

Week 5: Scavenger Hunt – The facilitator introduced pedometers to the families so they could measure the amount of steps they took throughout the activity. The children and the adults were enthusiastic and competitive during the activity which involved finding clues and exercises in differing forms when they found the answers. The steps were measured at the end of the session and the winning family got a prize. Some of the children realised that you can shake the pedometer to increase the number but the majority of them, particularly the older children were taking extra steps and running on the spot to increase their total. The facilitator totalled up the equivalent in miles and highlighted on a map how far the families would have walked in Cornwall.

Week 6: Team building games included families balancing together on benches and working together to ensure different people could move around without anyone falling off. The families also played a game which involved them running to different

hoops and fitting as many people in as possible. The adults and children appeared to enjoy the hoop game as it was fast moving. The adults and the younger children quickly lost interest in the bench balancing. Pedometers were worn again.

Week 7: Fun Circuits – The different activities were set up at various points around the hall with different challenges to complete at each one. Unfortunately this session was not particularly well attended due to other commitments and only 2 families participated. However the families who did take part were very enthusiastic. One parent stated that they *“had forgotten how much fun hoola hooping was”*. Pedometers were worn again.

Week 8: We began the session with parachute games and continued with a game similar to Rounder’s with different rules. This game did not allow competitors to run around all the bases at once and was better suited to the abilities of the younger children. The older children worked well at encouraging the younger children and running with them if necessary. Pedometers were worn which encouraged the children to be competitive.

Week 9: Team Games – The facilitator was unable to attend this session which was run by the teaching assistant. The families divided into 3 groups and used different ways to travel along the hall and then completed an activity at the end before racing back. The adults and the children all participated enthusiastically and competitively with much laughing, cheering and encouragement. Pedometers were worn throughout the session. One mother said *“The kids are loving that I’m joining in, you don’t even think about playing things like this at home do you?”*

Week 10: The Healthy Schools Facilitator was unable to attend the final session. The Teaching Assistant asked the families what they would like to do for the last session. They all wanted to use the parachute and then play team games. The session was attended as enthusiastically as the previous one had been. The families became more involved by suggesting some very inventive ways of travelling between the cones including, hopping, crawling, a variety of jumps and walking like an Egyptian!

Celebration

The teaching assistant and one of the parents took 6 of the children who participated to the Healthy Schools Birthday Bash where they had a fantastic day enjoying all the activities that had been organised for them.

Measuring Success

The children's fitness levels were measured by the facilitator at the beginning of the programme and at the end. A further decision was taken to measure the fitness levels of each individual child after the long summer holidays to ascertain whether the DASH project had achieved its aim of helping to instil a healthy living aspect into the family's lives. The children all had increased levels of fitness following the DASH programme which although was not totally maintained through the summer holidays still remained higher than their original fitness levels before the project began. The facilitator considered some of the results to be slightly inaccurate due to the fact that some of the children ran on the final test. The Healthy Schools facilitator commented that she had noticed a difference during the final fitness test that as well as the increase in fitness levels the children were also working better together, being more supportive and encouraging each other.

The journal was not a success as an overall record as the majority of the children lost them at some stage in the duration of the sessions.

The parents were given a questionnaire to ascertain how successful they felt the Fun Fit Club had been. The responses were mainly positive with 4 out of the 6 responses stating, using a graded response, a 4 or 5 on the standard of the course presentation. The same parents also indicated at level 4 or 5 that they would take part in the programme again and recommend it to other parents. There were some negative comments from 2 parents. However one of these parents has children who are already active and fit but were included as one of the children had other physical difficulties so was not included particularly for the fitness aspect. The parent's comments included a large section regarding the fact that the exercise was not demanding

enough and also that the large age range of children made it difficult to cater for them all.

The concerns of the parents included:

“Their child being singled out as unfit”

“Worried that they would not be able to participate very well”

Positive comments from parents included:

“A good bonding experience with the children”

“The journal helped to highlight areas that needed change”

“It made me evaluate our lives”

“Good opportunity to meet other parents and do exercise myself”

“Learnt new skills”

“Enjoyed doing different activities that we would not do at home”

“We know more parents now”

Comments from children included:

“It was great”

“Not my favourite club but it did get my family to do things together”

“Multi skills was better than Fun Fit”

“I liked the bit where we bounced the balls”

“We could interact with our family properly”

“It was good to do stuff with my mum and my brother”

“I liked having fun with everybody”

Overall the response and participation was good and fun fit would be something that could benefit many families. Although the children were learning to keep fit and active one child’s response sums up the children during the majority of activities.

“I liked having fun with everybody”

Name	15/5/09		10/09/09
Female	39.6	44.9	Ab

Female	42.5	62.7	47.1
Female	34.3	39.5	41.8
Female	37.2	49.2	43.3
Male	48.3	64.2	64.1
Female	39.6	50.4	57.5
Female	43.4	60.2	39.9

