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Mid North Coast Local Health District, Health Promotion | Kempsey and Coffs Harbour

Introduction

Aboriginal Go4Fun is a free culturally adapted version of the evidence based Go4Fun obesity treatment program, which aims to promote healthy eating, physical activity and behaviour change strategies for children aged seven to 13 years, who are above a healthy weight and their families. Aboriginal Go4Fun offers 10 weeks of practical education on nutrition, physical activity and behavior change strategies over two hours per week after school for Aboriginal families. The program is funded by the NSW Ministry of Health and managed by the Office of Preventative Health and delivered through partnerships between Local Health Districts and local Aboriginal Organisations.

Partners

Burrun Dalai Aboriginal Corporation Incorporated – Kempsey

Coffs Harbour and District Local Aboriginal Lands Council – Coffs Harbour

Objectives

The co-delivery model allows for Local Health Districts to support Aboriginal organisations to build their capacity, and work towards the eventual transfer of the program delivery responsibilities to Aboriginal organisations.

The program recognises the importance of community in Aboriginal societies and allows for siblings, extended family or friends to participate, regardless of whether they meet the eligibility criteria. With preventable chronic diseases having a large impact on Aboriginal communities, the family-based model of Aboriginal Go4Fun aims to:

- Instill healthy lifestyle education in younger children;
- Build their self-esteem and empower them to make healthier choices; and
- Improve their overall health and fitness levels

Simple and practical advice about nutrition and physical activity using behavior change strategies also has an effect on family members participating in the program, who are responsible for supporting children to implement changes within the household. Local input into Aboriginal Go4Fun is an important element and allows our communities to build community ownership and value the program.

Methods

Various recruitment activities were undertaken to recruit families to our programs, which included:

- Social Media campaigns using Facebook
- Local Radio Announcements
- Public Community and Local Organisation Events
- Program Leaders attending School Events
- Attending Aboriginal Education Consultative Group meetings
- Advertising in School Newsletters
- Attending Local Aboriginal Interagency meetings
- Information about Programs circulated to Community Organisation electronically
- Partner Organisation mail outs to their clients
- Referrals from health professionals

Retaining participants throughout the program is of paramount importance for the impact of behavioural changes to be implemented within the family unit, therefore, a variety of resources were introduced to encourage program attendance and completion, such as:

- Fruit and Vegetable vouchers provided to parents for every session that their child/children attend
- Aboriginal Go4Fun branded resources for children
 - Frizbees, water bottles, backpacks, bucket hats, high bouncy balls, wristbands and t-shirt
- Graduation Event at a local child-friendly venue, inclusive of a Certificate of Completion and Graduation Prize



Kempsey Aboriginal Go4Fun Leader Brittisha Davis with participants during a food label reading session



Kempsey Aboriginal Go4Fun Leaders (L to R): Nathan Cooke, Brittisha Davis (lying down) and Jodi Baum with Term 4 participants, 2018

Lessons Learned

The recommended co-delivery model for Aboriginal Go4Fun is a partnership with Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service (ACCHS) or Aboriginal Organisation. Local Aboriginal organisations are willing to support the program with upskilling local people to become Program Leaders as well as assisting with recruitment of participants to the program and embedding local cultural activities into the sessions to support the key messages of the program. The development of relationships with external Aboriginal organisations take time and this was something that we recognised from the beginning.

The co-delivery model also supports Aboriginal Leaders by providing appropriate financial support to register as a subcontractor and cover insurance and training. A mentoring agreement between mainstream Go4Fun Leaders and new Aboriginal Leaders has been successful for maintaining the integrity of the program and building the capacity of new Leaders.

Parents are very happy with the amount of resources given to them and their children and appreciate the additional incentive of receiving a fruit and vegetable voucher, which assists with increasing their access to fresh fruit and vegetables. The relationships that our Leaders build with parents at the programs are also immensely appreciated and give an opportunity for sharing of information in a safe environment. A collection of quotes have been included below;

'Very good program. Instructors are excellent'

'All in all, very happy with the program & the knowledge available from the great staff and Leaders at Go4Fun'

Best aspect of the program... 'Talking about things & knowing I can change'

'Kids learning together, sharing their stories, learning of healthy eating'

The greatest strength of the program is recruiting local Aboriginal community members to become trained to work as Leaders on the program. Our Leaders know the community dynamics and families and understand family kinship ties. All of this knowledge helps to create culturally safe and supportive environments for families to feel welcome. It also allows for the exchange of cultural understanding and knowledge to occur between our Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Leaders, who are working on the program with families.



Coffs Harbour Aboriginal Go4Fun participants learning about local bush tucker with Mid North Coast Local Health District Aboriginal Health Worker Ruben Browne (R) Term 2, 2018



Coffs Harbour Aboriginal Go4Fun participants enjoying their Term 4, 2017 Graduation



Kempsey Aboriginal Go4Fun participants enjoying a game of soccer



Coffs Harbour Aboriginal Go4Fun Leaders (L to R) Kristie Orr, Amanda Donovan, Katie Bright (kneeling) and Karina Rothacker with parents and children at their Term 2 Graduation Event, 2019

Impact/What's next?

Since implementing Aboriginal Go4Fun in 2017 at Kempsey and Coffs Harbour, we have achieved the following results to date:

- Delivery of 8 programs
- Enrolled 104 children to the program; 47% of children met program BMI criteria
- 100% Completion rate for participants
- Reductions in sedentary behaviours, consumption of sugary food, drink, fried and takeaway foods
- Increases in fruit and vegetable consumption, water intake and physical activity

We will continue to work closely with our partner organisations to strengthen our relationships in an effort to achieve the goal of transitioning the delivery and management of Aboriginal Go4Fun programs into local Aboriginal organisations.

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