



Pacific
Community
Communauté
du Pacifique

Healthy Child, Promising Future

Introduction to the Programme

Healthy Child, Promising Future is a school programme to combat childhood obesity targeting children aged 7 to 9 (Years 4 & 5) attending school in the Pacific Islands. Once every two weeks during the programme, a classroom session is held on the topics of food, eating habits, and physical exercise. The session can be taught by a teacher on their own or together with a health services officer. The 15 project themes are presented to the children through a range of educational materials (activity book, posters, videos, comic strips, board games) over a period of six months. For example, there are themes on balanced meals, healthy snacks, the importance of reading food product labels, the influence of advertisements, eating fresh local products and even, sustainable development. Daily exercise sessions during school time are also included in the project. So the programme's goal is to strengthen the actions already underway in schools to raise awareness among primary school children about balanced diets and the need for regular physical exercise. But the programme does not only target children since it emphasises an overall approach where parents play a pivotal role by applying at home the theoretical advice given in class.



PROGRAMME'S ORIGIN

A meeting of health and education focal points from Fiji and Wallis and Futuna (Fiji National University, Fiji Ministry of Education, Wallis and Futuna Health Agency, Wallis and Futuna Catholic Education Office) was held in May 2017 to develop a project to address the issue of childhood obesity in the Pacific Islands. Technical focal points from New Caledonia's health sector (New Caledonia Health and Social Agency) and the Pacific Community (SPC) were also involved in the meeting. Based on ideas from the various parties, the *Healthy Child, Promising Future* project was born. The programme's themes were set out and a committee consisting of teachers and a dietician developed the session contents using a variety of enjoyable materials. Funding was provided in part by the French Pacific Fund, together with additional funding by SPC.

REGIONAL HEALTH SITUATION

Noncommunicable diseases (e.g. diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, cancers, etc.) are the leading cause of death in the Pacific Islands. They are closely linked to unhealthy diets and a lack of physical exercise.

Such diseases are more likely to occur in people who are overweight or obese. Given that if no action is taken 40% to 70% of obese children will become obese adults, childhood obesity is one of the biggest health challenges in the Pacific. Teaching children as early as possible about the behaviours and good eating habits needed for a healthy lifestyle is a major issue for future generations.



PROGRAMME: PHASE 1

2018-2019

The programme was tested in one school in Suva, Fiji and in all the schools in Wallis and Futuna. At the same time as carrying out the sessions in class, the programme was assessed to check its effectiveness and identify areas for improvement. Questionnaires and group interviews were used to collect statistical data related to the project's impact on the lifestyles of the children and their families. The teachers also shared their views about the teaching tools and how the sessions went. In all, 12 schools with 700 children and 30 teachers benefitted from this first phase of the programme.

PROGRAMME: PHASE 2

2020-2021

Following the pilot phase, the programme was improved by taking into account the outcomes of the evaluation. So it is now available in French and English, deals with problems and issues found throughout the Pacific and is designed to be made available to all Pacific Island schools.



TEACHING MATERIALS AVAILABLE

The **Teacher's Handbook** lays out in detail the key messages for each session, instructions for the students about the various activities proposed, along with the required materials. The handbook allows teachers to prepare for the sessions and to plan additional educational activities.

Videos that show Vili and Malia (the main characters of the programme) dealing on a daily basis with the issues discussed during the sessions. This digital aspect allows the themes to be shared in a more enjoyable way that holds the children's attention better.

A booklet of activities for the children to do with their families covering 15 challenges to be done at home before each session. These involve questions, riddles, sports/games, activities and recipes to follow that get parents involved in their child's learning about how to create a healthy lifestyle and a responsible attitude towards food. By making a link between school and home, the advice given in class can be put into actual practice at home.

Other educational resources are also available during the sessions depending on the topics discussed. The tools include comic strips, books, Power Point presentations, board games and many different posters. The wide range of materials created, especially the use of digital tools, is designed to maintain the children's interest and involvement in the programme over the long term.

MEDIA

<https://www.spc.int/updates/news/2018/05/preventing-childhood-obesity-in-primary-school-children-in-fiji-and-wallis-and>

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