

## Helping Children to Make Healthy Lifestyle Choices



*Maria, parent of child participating in the programme:*

*“Grace would never eat anything that was green or grown, but now she always makes sure she has some kind of vegetable or salad on her plate. She’s always been quite active, but very stubborn about her food, and mealtimes would often turn into a stand-off where we had to sit it out while she ignored her vegetables. Now she’s trying things that she would have turned her nose up at before. It’s absolutely brilliant. Every school should be doing it.”*

The proportion of children who are obese has doubled in England in the last ten years, and currently, one third of 10-11 year olds are overweight or obese. Childhood obesity is associated with a range of health issues, as well as reduced self-esteem and quality of life. We still don’t fully understand, however, which approaches to improving the health of children work best, particularly if we want children and parents to be encouraged to make healthy lifestyle choices.

The Healthy Lifestyles Programme (HeLP) is an innovative school-based programme, developed together with schools, parents and children, which uses drama-based activities to deliver healthy lifestyle messages to children. Throughout the programme we invite parents in to see the activities and create a supportive environment at home for healthy choices. Key to this programme are creative communication techniques and the building of supportive relationships.

## What Happened Next?

The HeLP programme has worked with Year 5 (9-10 years old) children in 32 schools across Devon to assess whether this drama-based approach to help children think about their diet and activity choices is the best way to positively change their lifestyle. This project is innovative as it has been developed with schools, parents and children from the outset to include a range of activities such as activity workshops run by local sport and dance groups. There are also food tasting sessions, in which children sample healthy snacks such as dried fruits and seeds, often trying something new for the first time.

Results from the pilot project have been very encouraging, and suggest that the programme can have a positive impact on children's snacking habits, activity levels and weight. Children enjoy participating and schools are happy to host the programme. Should the programme be effective in preventing obesity we will continue to work with schools to roll the programme out across the South West.

**For further information visit:**

**[www.clahrc-peninsula.nihr.ac.uk](http://www.clahrc-peninsula.nihr.ac.uk)**



### References:

Lloyd J, Wyatt K. The Healthy Lifestyles Programme (HeLP) – An overview of and recommendations arising from the conceptualization and development of an innovative approach to promoting healthy lifestyles for children and their families. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 2015; 12: 1003-1019.

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### Useful Links:

[clahrc-peninsula.nihr.ac.uk/research/help-the-healthy-lifestyles-programme](http://clahrc-peninsula.nihr.ac.uk/research/help-the-healthy-lifestyles-programme)

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