Fit as a Fiddle
Community Project

St Louis de Montfort’s
Primary School
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The proposed school community partnership “Fit as a Fiddle” between St Louis de Montfort’ s Primary School, Bendigo Bank, Central Bayside Community Health, Go For Your Life and Kilbreda College intends to provide both physical resources, including a fitness trail, and expertise from community professionals to address the ever increasing problem of student obesity within our school. It is intended that this partnership will enhance learning in related curriculum areas and create opportunities to empower students to take meaningful and effective action regarding personal health and wellbeing.

Therefore, the purpose of the school community partnership is to address the increased incidence of obesity in the school population by creating opportunities for students to initiate relevant, personal action and make informed decisions which promote personal health and wellbeing. St Louis primary school is a school of approx 700 hundred children in a middle income socio economic area. It is evident that the changes in student’s lifestyles, as a result of the influence of technology, together with poor dietary habits, has lead to an increase in sedentary behaviour and an increase in the overall number of obese children in the school population.

Statistics related to absenteeism also support this with the higher incidence of these students being away on days when they are required to participate in sporting activities.

This is a problem which is reflective of wider social trends which indicate that childhood and adolescent obesity has increased dramatically over the past 25 years in Australia. Currently over 20% of Australian children are overweight or obese. (McLennan J1990)

The increasing prevalence of overweight and obese children in Australia since the mid 1980s is well documented. The 1985 Australian Health and Fitness survey was conducted by the Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation (ACHPER) on a sample of over 8000 Australian school children, aged 7–15 years. Booth et al (1990) compared this data to three more recent studies in the light of current definitions of overweight/obesity in children aged between 2–5 years. This demonstrated a rise in overweight and obese children from 11.8% of boys and 10.7% of girls in the 1985 ACHPER study to over 19% of boys and 21% of girls in the three years 1997–2000. Increased obesity rates also have significant health consequences for children and adolescents, both in the short term and for their adult life. Short term complications of obesity relate to its effects on growing bones, the endocrine, cardiovascular, and gastrointestinal systems and the prevalence of type 2 diabetes and mental health issues.
St Louis Primary School is committed to creating the necessary conditions that will enhance student learning and empower students to make responsible decisions regarding their personal health and well being. Presently the staff at St Louis feel that the issue of student obesity effects many aspects of student wellbeing: including self esteem, self image, and possibly mental health; and may be the beginning of other long term issues which may include depression and even higher rates of youth suicide. These issues impact negatively on effective learning and personal interactions within the school.

The commitment that the school has in relation to student wellbeing is also evident in our involvement in the KidsMatter initiative which is based on the following 4 components to improve student wellbeing, namely: Developing a positive school community; Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) for student; Parenting Support and Education; and Early Intervention for students experiencing mental health difficulties.

Experts recommend that a combination of dietary modification, increased physical activity, decreased sedentary activity, family involvement and behaviour modification will improve children’s outcomes in relation to obesity. In response, St Louis Primary school has developed an action plan and formed partnerships with Central Bayside Community Health and Go For Your Life to formulate and implement a project to decrease obesity levels in children, improve children’s fitness levels and educate children so they understand the importance of healthy living. This means leading an active life through exercise, healthy food intake and being proactive in life choices. Our project is to build a running/fitness track around the perimeter of the school with a number of exercise stations, and to educate students about healthy lifestyles to improve children’s health outcomes.

Another important component of the plan is to identify and target the children at risk. Therefore we have designed a survey to measure children’s exercise regime and eating habits. This survey will be administered prior to student involvement in the program and readministered during and after participation in the program to assess the effectiveness of the program.

“Fit as a Fiddle” aims to include all relevant areas of the curriculum and all aspects of school life to enhance learning in Health, Maths, Science and Physical Education, particularly in relation to body image and Social and Emotional Learning. The expertise accessed through the range of proposed community partnerships, such as an allied health professional from Central Bayside Community Health will enhance learning for students in these curriculum areas.
A high priority of the project is to identify opportunities within present educational curriculum for meaningful learning experiences which will contribute to the overall anticipated and valued learning outcomes. This ensures that the learning will be embedded within the existing teaching and learning expectation and practice of the school and therefore be sustainable over time. The curriculum co-ordinator and leadership team have brainstormed how we could incorporate all elements of the program across the curriculum. It was decided that the program would focus on enhancing learning in Health, Science, Physical Education, Sexuality Education and Social Emotional Learning.

The project that we are planning to set up will address concerns about the increasing obesity levels in children, improve children’s fitness levels and educate children so they can understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle. This means leading an active life through exercise, healthy food intake and being pro active in life choices. This program will also promote wellbeing in students.

The activities that will be undertaken will educate children in healthy foods, the importance of exercise and how this impacts on a person’s wellbeing and longevity in life.

The project will provide students with high quality, student focused activities that link clearly to the identified needs and goals of the program. This will be evident firstly in the education element of the program which is connected to our curriculum outcomes. The curriculum co-ordinator, physical education teacher and classroom teachers will be working closely together to ensure that all related curriculum areas are covered.

Staff will work closely with Sue Moulton from Central Bayside Community Health Services and the expertise of dieticians, medical staff, physiotherapists, dentists and psychologist who will contribute to the school based education programs.

Curriculum related education sessions will be developed for the students as a result of this collaboration. A session will be presented by the dietician on healthy foods and healthy diet. The medical staff will present children with information on the affects of healthy eating on all parts of the body and the stresses caused to the body by being overweight.

The focus for students in relation to the track and exercise stations will be to provide an environment, activities and programs that excite children to exercise. We will do this in collaboration with all parties so the program we provide for students will not only meet the curriculum outcomes but also stimulate the children to want to exercise. The track will also cater for different needs of the children that must be
prioritised and targeted. As part of the exercise stations we will include PMP activities that will improve student’s fine and gross motor skills. These stations will also support the children in the school who have disabilities.

The design of the track and the fitness stations will be the result of collaborative efforts between physiotherapists, medical staff from Central Bayside Community Health Services, the Physical education teacher and teachers at St Louis, a personal trainer and nominated landscape architect.

Our work with Kilbreda will involve their Year 10 students designing fitness sessions using the track and exercise stations to improve our year prep – two students fitness and motivation to exercise.

In relation to improving the wellbeing of students we will work closely with the school staff who comprise the wellbeing team and the psychologist targeting the children at risk of low self esteem due to body image issues.

We will also plan to provide parent education evenings to increase family involvement and understandings about healthy life choices, understandings of healthy food choices and strategies to decrease the sedentary lifestyles of their children.

Expected improvements in students should be wide ranging. Firstly we would expect that students would have a greater understanding of what healthy food is, what the different food groups are and why they should choose to include a range of healthy foods in their diet. They should have an understanding of the impact of unhealthy eating habits on both their body and how they feel about themselves.

Indicators of improvement or success would include:-

- Observed change in the types of food that children bring to school in their school lunches.
- Increased participation of children who are entering the Healthy lunch competition held at the school each Wednesday.
- Regular use of the track by students across all levels of the school.
- Higher levels of student engagement observed in relation to using the fitness track and stations to improve their fitness levels.
- Increase in the attendance of students who are absent from school on sports days and an increase in these students attending the fitness sessions that will be provided.
• Observed positive changes in the children’s responses to the survey that indicate that they are making healthy food choices, participating less in sedentary activities and taking part in more exercise.

Further benefits:

Staff:
• Increased exposure to professional expertise in many areas of health and fitness, therefore increased opportunities for professional development in these areas.

Parents:
• Access to and involvement in the education sessions.
• Fitness sessions for parents and students where the students can show parents how they use the exercise track and fitness stations, thereby ensuring sustainability and outreach of student learning at home.

School Resources:
• The track and fitness stations would be an added resource for the school used not only by the students at the school but also by other members of the wider community.
• Visual presence for sponsors as you can see the track and stations from the adjacent bike track and arterial road.

Building school relationships with wider community:
• The Netball, Auskick, Goalkick and Milo In2 Cricket teams will use the track and exercise station as part of their training program. The Hall/Gym users will include outside training activities where suitable.
• Offering the area to the personal fitness trainer to use before school for training sessions with adults and provide early morning, lunch time and after school sessions for students at the school.
• Sessions for interested parents could also be arranged at suitable times.
• An afterschool program runs at the school and the children who attend from St Louis and the local primary school will use the facilities during these time.
• Providing these services would raise the profile of the school in the wider community.

Central Bayside Community Health Services:
• Providing early intervention and upstreaming of health and support services.
• Providing proactive rather then reactive support when responding to community need.
• Hopefully decreasing obesity levels in children by improving eating habits and increasing exercise rates.

**Kilbreda College:**

• Secondary students will have the opportunity to design and implement a program to improve fitness levels of younger students.

• A real “hands on” approach to their learning, requiring them to consider in detail the intended learning outcomes and the need for effective strategies and communication. This experience is intended to enhance their learning experiences and improve their learning outcomes.

The school is committed to improving the wellbeing of all students as demonstrated in our involvement in the KidsMatter initiative. KidsMatter was designed to improve the wellbeing of students. One of the components of the project is to provide early intervention for students at risk of mental illness knowing that poor self image through being obese can impact greatly on a child’s self image. Therefore this new initiative supports this program.

KidsMatter also have a very strong belief in upstreaming, focussing on prevention rather than reacting to situations after the event. The “Fit as a Fiddle” project endeavours to achieve this by providing education and programs to prevent obesity in children.

Another component that fits in with KidsMatter and the School Improvement Plan for the next four years is the emphasis we place on building community partnerships and increasing the involvement of parents in the school. This project would support both these areas of planned improvement.

The school is committed to using the VELS curriculum outcomes. The topics that we plan to cover will be supported and enhanced by our partnerships and the “Fit as a Fiddle” project.

There is also a firm belief that the best way to make change in terms of student health is early intervention and the “Fit as a Fiddle Program” and our partnership provided by the Central Bayside Community Health Services is a wonderful opportunity to be proactive and provide early intervention through education and exercise programs to improve student health outcomes. This in turn has the potential to improve students’ lives as adults as the statistics show that obese children become obese adults.
The partnership with Kilbreda will continue as Kilbreda is our feeder school and we already collaborate with the work experience program and other community projects.

The landscape architect will continue to provide support as he has developed an overall school plan for the improvement of all areas of the school and at this point we are only at stage one of the development.

As the school has shown by this initiative and others in the past we are very proactive in improving children’s wellbeing in all areas of their lives. Therefore this project will be a vehicle to continue with our school improvement plan and improve the future for all children in the school.

**Bibliography**

**John McLennan article, Obesity in children Tackling a growing problem (MBBS, FRACP)**