



A youth led social marketing approach to encourage healthy lifestyles

Interim summary of learning

EYTO is a peer-led social marketing project working in four European countries to promote healthy eating and physical activity and stem the rise in obesity among adolescents. The National Children's Bureau (NCB) leads the partnership with organisations in Spain, Portugal and the Czech Republic.

The project has four core elements:

- Reviewing effective social marketing interventions to promote healthy lifestyles.
- Recruiting groups of disadvantaged young people (Campaign Creators) to research, design and launch new social marketing campaigns across their local communities to promote healthy lifestyles amongst their peers.
- Providing support to the young people across the partnership to share learning and ideas.
- Promoting cross cultural campaign messages, associated tools and resources across Europe.

The NCB Research Centre is leading the evaluation of the project; evaluating the impact of the campaign on outcomes for young people and those working to support them. This briefing presents an interim summary of learning.

Perceptions of obesity among young people:

The interim evaluation included an online survey of 139 young people, across the four partner countries, who had engaged with the EYTO campaigns. The survey data highlights that young people perceive obesity to be a complex issue – determined by a range of internal and external factors.

Overwhelmingly young people identified **internal, emotional factors** as the main **barrier to making healthy lifestyle choices**; choosing lack of motivation and will power, as well as lack of enjoyment of exercise as the top three challenges. Young people thought that more support from parents and greater access to activities would help them to live healthier lives; alongside internal factors of enjoying healthy eating and caring about how you look. The young people responding to the survey also identified primarily internal factors as the **causes of obesity**.

These views echo those of the young Campaign Creators working on the project. Across all partner nations, young people overwhelmingly express that messaging to tackle the issues of overweight and obesity with their peers needs to be grounded in how young people feel about themselves and their lives. Early indications are that addressing self-confidence, resilience and life skills may be an effective route to empowering young people to make healthy lifestyle choices.

"I have always thought about healthy lifestyles only in one way – how to lose weight. Now I see that it's more complex. It's also about your motivation, about your emotions and your whole life". EYTO Young Campaign Creator

The power of social marketing approaches:

Overall, the majority of young people responding to the surveys (88 percent) felt that the EYTO campaigns were effective in **encouraging** young people to eat a more healthy diet and be more physically active. 83 per cent of respondents felt that the campaigns had been effective in both **motivating** and **showing** young people how to eat more healthily and be more physically active. 90 per cent of respondents felt that the campaigns were effective in **communicating** why this is important.

Young people responding to the surveys found the EYTO campaigns to be effective in improving motivation: 96 per cent overall had discussed the campaign; thought about making a change to their lifestyle, or tried to find out more about living healthily. However, just 17 per cent have made a change to their behaviour in terms of eating or exercise habits. This finding may be accounted for by the fact that the survey data was gathered during the early stages of the campaigns. The EYTO project team will continue to monitor ongoing self-reported responses from young people about making real change to their behaviours over the remainder of the project.

The young Campaign Creators involved in leading the project have increased confidence and skills to engage with communication and social marketing activities, as well as an appreciation of learning about social media as a route to achieving serious objectives. Early outcomes for these young people also include increased awareness and understanding of the issues, motivation and ideas for leading a healthy lifestyle, and encouraging others to do so.

“It’s a problem in everyone’s country...and I hadn’t realised that before.” EYTO Young Campaign Creator

Supporting successful youth-led work:

From the experience of managing EYTO, project partners - through the interim evaluation process - identified a number of aspects that support successful youth led social marketing work. These include; developing a bespoke approach to involving young people; taking timing and context into account when recruiting young people; ensuring that content creation is actively managed; bringing people together; and balancing youth-led approaches with the need to achieve project outcomes.

The EYTO project has developed a youth-led approach to using social marketing techniques to address lifestyle issues with adolescents. The model has young people’s participation and **co-production** at its heart, which has ensured the work is engaging and relevant for their peers. It has also taken an **ecological approach** – promoting good nutrition and physical activity within the contexts and environments of young people’s lives as whole: where they live, study, work and hang out. By supporting the young people to take creative control, grounding the work in their lives and showing them how they’re influencing their peers; young people involved in the approach have developed new **skills and confidence**. The model is also developing a more **coordinated approach** to tackle obesity at a local level.

“At the beginning of the project, we were shy, and now we know how to talk and communicate with others.” EYTO Young Campaign Creator

The final findings from the EYTO project will be published by the end of 2015.

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