



A youth led social marketing approach to encourage healthy lifestyles

Review of 'grey' literature and materials

Summary of learning from previous initiatives that focus on social marketing approaches to tackle obesity amongst children and young people

EYTO is an exciting new project led by the National Children's Bureau (NCB - UK) in partnership with organisations in Spain, Portugal and the Czech Republic. With funding from the European Union¹, we will be developing an innovative peer-led social marketing campaign to promote healthy eating and physical activity and stem the rise in obesity amongst young people.

To compliment a systematic review of effective social marketing and healthy lifestyle interventions across the four participating countries²; this review of the 'grey' evidence and materials consists of two parts. **Section A** summarises the important factors that contribute to successful initiatives focussing on social marketing approaches to tackle overweight and obesity. Section B provides an overview of the previous initiatives (from the UK, Czech Republic, Portugal, Spain and beyond) that were included in this review.

Section A - Key messages:

1. Overview

- To be successful campaigns need a **long-term approach**. Campaigns have failed where they have been too short-term as it takes time to change behaviour. Short and longer-term metrics/KPIs need to be considered, as well as sustainability.
- **Social marketing theory must be implemented effectively**. Involving formative research with the target group at the outset of the project and a systematic approach for identifying barriers/motivators and interventions. Recognised behavioural theory models should be applied throughout the strategy to help produce successful engagement.

2. Audience

- Local level social marketing campaigns should be **as comprehensive and relevant to the target audience as possible**. An 'ecological' approach that includes activities to address barriers to healthy lifestyles in young people's wider environment and engages their interests will command the most attention.

¹ The project runs from September 2013 - September 2015 and has received funding from the EU Executive Agency for Health and Consumers in the framework of the Health Programme 2008-2013.

² [A Social marketing approach to tackle childhood obesity: A review of the evidence from 4 European countries](#)

- **Avoid using government branding.** There is evidence that young people find campaigns that are clearly coming from the government off-putting and 'uncool'.
- Campaigns for young people should have a **'by youth for youth' focus**. Young people should be involved in all aspects to ensure messages, resources, communication channels and activities are appealing.
- Campaigns should avoid being puritanical and **set young people bite-size, realistic goals** to increase levels of physical activity and healthy eating. Young people are much more likely to engage and make positive changes if what is being asked of them does not feel over-whelming. It needs to be fun and exciting. Young people tend not to relate to messages about disease prevention as it is too abstract and long-term a concept.
- **Engage the decision makers.** Recognise that parents have a key role to play; for example they purchase much of the family's food. It may be that young people have greater 'say' over activity (exercise) whereas parents are more influential over diet.

3. Message

- Adopt a **holistic approach**. Learning from past initiatives suggests the need for health promotion campaigns to be coherent and avoid bombarding young people with lots of separate messages about health issues that are, in reality, inter-linked.
- Remember that **physical activity is not just about sport**. Vulnerable groups of young people can find traditional sports less appealing than more fun and creative activities like dancing, skateboarding, climbing etc. It is important to try and offer young people opportunities to engage in a range of activities and also give careful thought to the needs of girls, who can be particularly reluctant to participate in traditional sports as they enter their teens.
- Successful youth campaigns have often involved 'counter-marketing' i.e. confronting the food industry about health claims made on food packaging. Campaigns should aim to create messages that **empower young people and appeal to their need for independence/rebellion/sensation seeking**. Positive, 'can do' messages are more effective than directive messages that tell young people what to do. Employing social marketing experts to help develop branding is preferable.

4. Channel

- Campaign messages need to be communicated via a **mixture of communication channels** already used by young people.
- Campaign materials and resources should **be tactile, interactive and fun**. **Gifts, prizes and freebies** that help to reinforce campaign messages tend to work well as incentives for young people to engage with a campaign.
- **Securing the support of 'strategic ambassadors' is also vital**. It is easier to sustain and embed campaigns where there is 'buy in' from top-level commissioners and decision-makers (both locally and nationally).

5. Mechanics/delivery

- Adopting an **'outreach' approach** is important. To engage your target audience you need to go to them and not expect them to come to you.

- Campaigns should try to **make use of existing assets**. It is important to avoid replicating activities already underway and duplicating effort.
- **Engaging skilled, enthusiastic co-ordinators from these key stakeholder groups such as community groups and leaders** is a vital ingredient for success. Campaigns are more likely to succeed if supported by leaders in the wider community who can help drive activities and give credibility. If the campaign aims to target a specific community it is really important to involve young people from that community from the outset.
- Make sure **words are backed up with action**. There is evidence that past campaigns have often been more successful in raising awareness than changing behaviour. Messages need to be backed up with practical support to help young people make changes to their lifestyles.

6. Evaluation

- Evaluating the impact of preventative campaigns/initiatives can be very challenging especially when the strategy for changing young people's behaviour is necessarily wide-ranging. **It is preferable to try and go beyond young people self-reporting the impact of the campaign.**
- It is worth considering short-term and long-term metrics/KPIs against which to evaluate; for example, attitudinal indicators as well as behavioural outcomes.