



Pivotal insight: Young People in the *EYTO* project

Highlights

- We must include young people as proactive agents in health promotion.
- Youth can contribute to health interventions, such as the improvement of healthy habits, when they have enough information, support and motivation.
- Young people can easily identify the main barriers and strengths of health promotion initiatives.
- Peer-led and social marketing have been effective in health promotion interventions with adolescents.

What is EYTO?

European Youth Tackling Obesity (EYTO) was a youth-led and peer-to-peer project that used social marketing campaigns to tackle obesity among young people (13 to 18 years old) living in disadvantaged communities in four European Countries (United Kingdom, Spain, Portugal and Czech Republic). Since obesity rates follow a social gradient in which the highest rates are present in racial/ethnic minorities and poor populations¹, actions with innovative and effective approaches are needed to prevent this health issue are needed in this populations.

The main project objectives were to increase skills and confidence in applying participatory social marketing techniques with adolescents; as well as engaging young people in campaigns created by peers to increase their motivation to eat more healthily and be more physically active, with the intention for a long-term obesity prevention.

What makes it different?

This project emerged from the social need of a more collaborative strategy that gives young people a leading role in addressing health matters affecting them (such as obesity). The campaigns were created across Europe by adolescents for adolescents in disadvantaged neighborhoods by Campaign Creators (the young people who were involved in the campaign delivery).

Although in the EYTO project each campaign was tailored for audiences in their own countries, different and innovative approaches had the following in common: youth-led methodology, placing young people at the center of the project, social marketing approach and peer-led strategies as methodological bases to support good practice in obesity prevention. The use of social networks as a communication tool and a health promotion channel with young people was also a singular approach. Including young people, researchers, stakeholders and policy makers was essential for creating a movement that addressed obesity prevention in the public health strategies of local areas.

Why are young people pivotal?

Adolescents represent a healthcare challenge, due to the transition process of parent-managed care to personal decision-making. In addition, adolescents experience a physiologic and cognitive transition, where they try to reshape their identity and establish relationships with their social environment. The adolescent period is crucial in determining longer-term obesity risks and provides different opportunities to develop healthier lifestyles². The EYTO project made young people a central partner in this obesity prevention challenge.

In adolescence, peers can be a deciding factor in the youth's decision making process, including an important influence on health related behaviors through their attitudes, and also the different information sources accessible to them. The EYTO project showed how viable and effective this type of intervention can be especially to prevent health issues in young disadvantaged populations, and underscored the need to integrate them in the general efforts for improving wellbeing in their communities. The created campaigns worked towards initial objectives of increased understanding and motivation for healthy eating and undertaking physical activities. These changes require increased collaborative working with parents and professionals in the community and from different sectors to ensure children and young people have accessible and available options to make healthy choices.

EYTO Contact information:

Website: www.eyto.org.uk

Amy Davies
Senior Development Officer –
Health & Social Care
National Children's Bureau
8 Wakley Street | London | EC1V 7QE
Tel: 07850 926988
Email: adavies@ncb.org.uk

Rosa Solà M.D.; PhD
Health Education and Promotion Research Group
Functional Nutrition, Oxidation and
Cardiovascular Disease Research Group
Medicine and Surgery Department
Universitat Rovira i Virgili
C/ Sant Llorenç, 21, 43201
Reus, Spain.
Tel: (+34) 977 759345.
Email: rosa.sola@urv.cat



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