YOUTH OBESITY PREVENTION PROGRAMME

Olympic City: Nanjing
Country: China
Edition of the Games:
2014 Youth Olympic Summer Games

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

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<th>2013-2015</th>
<th>Youth</th>
<th>No official website</th>
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The Nanjing Youth Obesity Prevention Programme was an educational initiative built around the hosting of the 2014 Youth Olympic Games.

The ultimate goal of the programme was to prove that there is a link between the level of physical activity and healthy lifestyle choices between young City residents and the incidences of obesity. This involved a unique, never-before-taken approach combining informational interventions and increased physical activity with principles of scientific measurement.

The programme was run by the Local Organising Committee of the 2014 Nanjing Youth Olympic Games and involved engaging directly with local schools, parents, as well as with the young participants themselves. It used the platform of the 2014 YOG to attract and inspire those involved in the project.

The target group was 4th and 5th grade school students located across 32 primary schools in 16 urban areas dotted around the City of Nanjing. Classroom-based tutorials were combined with incentivised competitions such as poster design, painting and essay writing, all specifically around the theme of educating pupils on the benefits of healthy and active living. Alongside this, interventions in the form of access to increased recreational time and better sports facilities were introduced during school hours, while specific home assignments were allocated to parents through the students to instigate changes in the domestic environment.

The success of the various interventions was measured by applying scientific analysis on the levels of improvement of participants across physical and knowledge-based metrics. This process measured the results between the experimental group and a separate control group. Clear evidence was found that interventions that promoted physical activity and changes in lifestyle could help to fight youth obesity. State institutions have taken these findings and will now use them to inform relevant aspects of their public health policy.
OBJECTIVES

Develop human capital and generate social cohesion

A strong focus was placed on educating the pupils through self-learning and creative expressions. Competitions in essay writing, poster design and other artistic endeavours encouraged students to take initiative in learning about healthy lifestyles and applying them in their own creative way. Students were also given the chance to be part of a radio production which focused on topics related to the programme. These were also supported by quizzes and academic tests that were administered at regular intervals throughout the programme. This helped build a bank of knowledge and skills within the group that can be taken forward and shared with the community as they grow older and enter into adult society.

Promote a healthy and active lifestyle

The Youth Obesity Prevention programme involved end-to-end interventions across both home and school environments to try and divert youth away from unhealthy and inactive lifestyles. This allowed the organisers to remove all possible barriers and introduce all reasonable promoters of positive behaviour amongst the participants. They were then able to test the effect of these changes on an increase in healthy activity in youth and the reduction in indicators of youth obesity. The data collected will now be used in the designing of public health initiatives centred on increasing the overall health of society within the City.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Internal & External Stakeholders

- Local Organising Committee for the Youth Olympic Games
- Department of Health for the City of Nanjing
- Numerous state schools
- Chinese Olympic Committee
- International Olympic Committee

Finance and Cost

- No information provided

Use of the Olympic Brand

Toolkit: Keeping the Flame Alive – Youth Obesity Prevention Programme
World Union of Olympic Cities 2017
The Youth Obesity Prevention Programme was designed and implemented under the umbrella of the Youth Olympic Games and so the Olympic brand was synonymous with the project throughout.

**Human Resources and Time**

No information provided

**EVALUATION**

The organisers recorded data across numerous separate but interrelated fields. This included the Body Mass Index of participants at various times, test scores and data related to physical activity levels, to name a few. This data set was captured from both the experimental group and a control group and the differences between the two were used to draw inferences on the level of success of the programmes’ various initiatives.

Academic studies and comprehensive assessment conducted after the programme led to the following conclusion: “This policy-oriented, multicomponent, school-based physical activity programme was scalable and effective in increasing physical activity and preventing obesity in Chinese children. The intervention strategies can be readily translated into large-scale obesity prevention programmes in a range of schools in China.” (Dr Fei Xu et al.)

**KEY CHALLENGES**

**Managing scale**

To ensure that the conclusions drawn from the programme were as accurate as possible, the organisers removed every possible external influence that could cause the results to be misunderstood. This involved a huge amount of work and a great attention to detail. Every point in the lives of the students was covered, both at home and in the classroom. Furthermore, data on a nationwide level was compared alongside data from control groups to verify causation between the actions taken by the organisers and the results being obtained.

The scale of this undertaking was only made possible due to the close coordination and cooperation of the state bodies involved in the programme. Existing close ties between the organisers, the Department of Health and the school systems meant that the implementation and coordination of the programme between these bodies was very straightforward and without complication.

**Generating parental buy-in**

The organisers of the programme were keenly aware of the fact that to truly impact behavioural change in young children, you needed to reach them at home. While school plays a very important role in education, it is at home where the most influential factors are at play and parents are the key influencers in this. As a result, it was absolutely critical to obtain the buy-in and commitment from the parents of
the students in order to generate real results. This was not always an easy proposition as many parents instinctively felt that initiatives related to physical activity and well-being were a distraction from academic work.

To help build buy-in from parents and reduce resistance to the programme, specific home assignments were delivered to parents throughout the programme. These assignments were designed to be completed at home with both the parent and the student working together. This helped build commitment from the parents as well as educate them on the benefits of involvement for their children.

KEY LEARNINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Take a scientific approach

The scientific approach taken by the organisers was particularly helpful. Firstly, it helped to convince people of the merit of the project. Where there is much scepticism and resistance, hard data and proven facts are difficult to argue with. Secondly, methodologies and results documented using the scientific method are far easier to take and replicate for later use. The local government has already signalled the usefulness of the results obtained and intends to use these results and the data generated from the programme to explore how they can better tackle child obesity in society on a larger level.

Believe in your objective

The key result arising from the programme was the evidence of a clear link between the initiatives introduced and a reduction in the levels of obesity-related indicators in the target group. Before the programme started there was still conflicting evidence and much public scepticism about whether low levels of physical activity and adverse lifestyle behaviour could have a major influence on youth obesity. The Nanjing Youth Obesity Programme successfully dispelled these doubts and proved that with the correct application, dangerous trends in youth obesity can be successfully reversed through the promotion of physical activity and positive lifestyle habits.

CONTACT

XU Fei, PhD. and Prof. of Epidemiology
Nanjing Municipal Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Nanjing, China,
Department of Epidemiology, Nanjing Medical University School of Public Health,
Nanjing, China
frankxufei@163.com

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