

ewba in action...



Morphett Vale and Murray Bridge communities share how they've put *eat well be active* into action

Name of site and author of this story:

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What has your site been doing in relation to ewba's key message/s and strategy/ies for action? Who has been involved?

A key ewba strategy at our preschool has been the implementation of our 'Walk and Talk' program (a program developed several years ago by the Children's Health Development Foundation and Noarlunga Health Services). In this program, our staff have guided children on regular 'walk and talk' excursions around our local community. The focus of these excursions has been to increase children's physical activity levels and enjoyment, as well as their language and literacy skills. Parents have also been invited on these excursions, and it has been enjoyable for the children when some parents have been able to join in.

We have established a "Children's Walk and Talk Committee" to enable children and their families to have input into the program and be involved in the planning and decision making (where to go, what to look for on our walks, etc). The Committee indicated a preference for walking to their own houses. This has become a wonderful way for the children to learn more about what is in their local neighbourhood, orientating themselves and finding out how to get places. So, from an outlook of improving children's health and language skills comes an unexpected bonus of developing safety awareness and local community knowledge.

Another unique strategy incorporated in our program has been the provision of walking bags and hats branded with our preschool's logo for the children. This was made possible through a 'Communities for Children' grant. The hats have been available for purchase at our preschool, however, they have been provided as a special free bonus to children whose parents participate in the 'Walk and Talk' program with them.

Has this been a new event/project/activity/practice/environmental changes/policy for your site, or does it build on existing elements?

'Walk and Talk' has been a new initiative for our preschool, however, has built on existing physical activities within our preschool program.

ewba has supported our preschool to implement this program by:

- Providing the 'Walk and Talk' program training session for staff;
- Providing us with a free 'Walk and Talk' resource kit, including program folder, pamphlets, stamps, 'Walk and Talk' backpack and persona doll, Wowwie Bear;
- Working with us to develop our 'Active Play' policy, which supports our regular walking excursions.

What has been the best part of your site's action/s?

The connection with visiting the children's homes has been a great way to enjoy a fun-filled outing without the cost and logistics of planning a big excursion. Some highlights have included meeting some pet chickens, collecting their eggs, being spoilt with freshly cooked eggs and going on an Easter treasure hunt to find toy chickens to keep!!

What has been the biggest challenge (if any) that has had to be overcome?

The weather! Our preschool makes adjustments for winter weather, so that 'rain-hail-shine' our children continue walking! It has been useful to use the Coorara Primary School gym, a short walk away. This has enabled us to extend upon children's physical activity participation by incorporating learning and physical activities around the line markings in the gym, as well as using 'active stations' set up by Coorara primary students.

What have been some of the outcomes so far, what changes have you noticed, or what are you hoping for as a result of your new activity/project/policy?

When we first started 'walking and talking' many of the children fatigued very quickly. It seemed that they were not used to walking for any distance. As we have continued the children's stamina has increased. Through modelling from the staff the children are also more observant now while walking – asking questions, making comments, wondering about things! Many of the parents who have joined us have also benefitted from our modelling on language that could be used, discussions that could be had etc. We have included many safety aspects during our Walks & Talks as well – e.g. road safety.

What do children and parents say about this?

Many of the parents who have joined us have had younger children who have come along in their prams. Parents have commented that it has been an opportunity for them to get to know other children and members of staff, as well as spend quality time with their own child/ren.

The children often point out houses of people that they know (grandparents, friends), comment on numbers on letter boxes, street signs, cars/buses/trucks. The day one of the children spotted a koala in one of the trees was very exciting and we talked about for a long time afterwards.

Where to for the future?

'Walk and Talk' will remain a part of our ongoing program. As our cohort of children changes regularly there are always new ideas of places to go and people to visit. We have also discussed the possibility of combining a bus trip and walk and talk to visit another kindy or homes that are further away from us.

What advice would you give to others who would like to start a similar project?

Keep it simple!

We started with going for a walk around our Primary School – using maps and trying to work out which way we would need to go to get back to kindy. This way you are able to get back quickly if needed until the children get used to the idea.

Book all your 'Walk & Talks' into the diary at the beginning of term and post a list up on the pinboard for all to see – use notes/invites/incentives to encourage parents to come along too.

Make sure that it is relevant to children, incorporate it into your program, make it fun!

If you would like to ask any questions or follow up further about this story, please contact Michelle (Director) at Coorara Preschool, email: kindy.director@coorarapre.sa.edu.au

Do you have a photo/s you would like to share to accompany this story?

