



OPAL Case Study Active Under 5s!

Mid Murray Council

Goal: Active Travel

Theme: Active Travel

Strategy: Programs and Services

Summary

Mid Murray OPAL partnered with the Mannum Kindergarten and Rural Care and the Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure (DPTI) to run a locally tailored OPAL Active Under 5s program. Families changed their travel behavior to incorporate more active trips.



This project has been so positive right from the start. At the start of the program we weren't sure the kids would be able to walk more than 400 metres without a rest, but it didn't take long before they were walking 1-2 kilometres each time we went out.

Mary Langsford, Mannum Kindergarten and Rural Care Director

Our approach

With 22 families enrolled, the Mannum Kindergarten and Rural Care is the largest kindy in the Mid Murray region. Kindy Director, Mary Langsford, expressed an interest in being involved in an active travel project. She believed children are able to walk significant distances and enjoy it if there is a supportive and fun environment.

The Mid Murray OPAL team adapted the centrally produced active travel program and resources developed for under five year olds, taking into account the needs of the local community. An eight-week program commenced with a launch including the Road Safety Rangers Show.¹

Other activities included:

- community walks building children's strength, familiarity with the local neighbourhood and interest in nature combined with awareness campaigns around walking and active travel
- 10 Active Family Kits for the children to loan on weekends (now a permanent kindy resource)
- walking kits distributed to all families taking part in the program (these included magnifying glasses, pedometers, bag tags, walking calendar charts and more)

- community events, including a huge Walk to Kindy Day involving 80 people as well as a celebration event walk, a picnic and presentations by the Mayor
- support from a DPTI funded part time project officer offering parents and carers ideas to overcome active travel barriers and help families see the benefits of children's increased physical activity levels.

Our achievements

The focus was on changing the knowledge, self-efficacy, attitudes and behaviour of individual children and their parents regarding active travel.

During the course of the program:

- 20 of the 22 enrolled families participated in the program, reaching 32 children in the kindy setting.
- pledges to be more active were made by over 92% of the families
- the kindergarten led 10 group walks with all 35 children participating
- 35 children and their families participated in the Active Kit Journals
- 18 different children used and displayed 122 feet sheets to record their active journeys.

Opal

Over the eight-week program the participating families cumulatively swapped more than 530 car trips for walking. This included 261 walks to and from kindy and 273 adventures on weekends and other times.

Feedback and input from families who took part in the program is being used to inform an Active Family Map for Mannum. This will show safe and accessible family walking/cycling routes, as well as the best places to walk and cycle to playgrounds, parks and shops. Other kindys and child care centres are now keen to implement the same program.

Evaluation showed the program helped build children and families' confidence and enthusiasm for walking longer distances, knowledge of pedestrian safety and understanding of road traffic rules.

Why

The journey to and from schools, work, shops and other local community destinations provides an opportunity to be active as part of daily life. The OPAL active travel theme 'Think Feet First - step, cycle, scoot to school' was underpinned by the need to encourage children to be more active, especially for the trip to school or kindy, and for parents and caregivers to support children to achieve this aim.

DPTI was also keen to implement an active travel program in the Mid Murray region in line with its aim to encourage people to replace car trips



with alternative transport to improve road safety and reduce emissions. The agencies worked together to develop an integrated approach with benefits for family health, education, community safety and the environment.

Who

Preschool children and their families attending the Mannum Kindergarten and Rural Care were the key focus, with kindy and rural care staff a secondary focus.

Rationale

In 2007 only 32% of Australian children aged 9-16 years met national guidelines for physical activity² that recommend children accumulate at least 60 minutes (and up to several hours) of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day.³

Rates of active travel have declined significantly: in 1970, 55% of young people walked to school. By 1994 this fell to just 22%. It is estimated that further falls have happened since that time. In the same period, cycling to school

decreased from 7.5% to 3.5% and car travel increased from 14% to 55%.⁴ Whilst this might be different for preschool children the pattern is likely to be similar.

Resources

A variety of resources were developed for families, for children and for the kindergarten. Examples include a brochure with tips to get active on rainy days; pedometers; pledge forms and a board to display pledges and the Active Under 5 loan kits. Mid Murray OPAL also developed evaluation surveys.

About OPAL?

The OPAL (Obesity Prevention and Lifestyle) initiative supports children, families and their communities to eat well and be active. It is South Australia's largest ever investment in obesity prevention. OPAL uses a range of interconnected strategies to build knowledge and skills and change policies and environments in partnerships with others to support healthy behaviour. This case study is one of many linked projects that together are helping children, through their families and communities, to be healthy now and stay healthy for life.

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¹ See www.brightsparkentertainment.com.au/performance_rsr.html

² Commonwealth Scientific Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) Preventative Health National Research Flagship, and the University of South Australia. 2007 Australian children's nutrition and physical activity survey. Canberra: Aust Govt; 2008.

³ Department of Health and Ageing. Physical activity guidelines. [on line] www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/health-pubhlth-strateg-phys-act-guidelines. (Accessed 4 July 2013).

⁴ SA Health. Think Feet First stakeholder kit. [on line]. Available from: www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/public+content/sa+health+internet/healthy+living/healthy+places/where+we+live+and+play/opal/think+feet+first+step+cycle+scoot+to+school. (Accessed 4 July 2013).

