Process evaluation of an up-scaled community based child obesity program: NSW Go4Fun®

Childhood obesity has been identified as a major public health problem in Australia, with both immediate and future repercussions on health services. In New South Wales (NSW), the prevalence of obesity among children aged 7-13 years had reached 6.8% in 2010. Currently, tertiary paediatric obesity services in Australia are inadequate to meet the treatment requirements of these children and funding for childhood obesity interventions is limited. Consequently, alternative treatment options like secondary prevention interventions “such as community-based programmes that have large population reach, are a priority.”

The United Kingdom’s Mind Exercise Nutrition Do it (MEND) programme is “an example of a community-based child obesity programme which has demonstrated efficacy in weight outcomes.” MEND has now been adapted to the NSW context as Go4Fun and disseminated across 296 NSW communities. Specifically, it focuses on reaching “disadvantaged communities and accordingly, low socioeconomic and regional areas.” This paper “describes the up-scaling of Go4Fun in NSW and the characteristics of the population it has reached and retained since inception in 2009, including the characteristics of children who completed and did not complete the programme.”

The Go4Fun programme targeted children between 7 and 13 years of age, with a body mass index greater or equal to 85th percentile and who had no comorbidities. Additionally, it was essential that children had a parent/adult carer to accompany them to each session. The theoretical basis of Go4Fun was “to engage families in the process of weight management by addressing key components for individual-level behavioural change and considering the need to engage multiple, interacting systems of influence with the family context.” Overall, the feedback from participants was positive with 95.5% of parents reporting a good or very good level of satisfaction with the programme as well as 87.1% of children reporting that they were happy or very happy with the programme. The conclusion from this study was that “the up-scaled and broadly delivered NSW Go4Fun® programme achieved success in terms of reaching almost 2,500 overweight/obese children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds who potentially would not have accessed primary care or tertiary obesity treatment services.”