

Child obesity targeted by schools

by Grace Edwards

The child obesity epidemic in New Zealand has prompted many parents, food outlets and schools to look at how they can protect the health of children.

Yet, before public concern had reached its current level, a number of schools had already stopped selling soft drinks and junk food in their tuck shops, instead providing students with healthier alternatives.

At Fairburn School in Otahuhu, students commonly used to bring two-litre bottles of soft drink and large bags of chips for lunch.

That was until 1997, when Fairburn decided to become a health-promoting school.

Principal Bruce Adin says the school successfully took over from an external canteen contractor and started a health-oriented lunch scheme.

"It is certainly seen by everyone, kids included, as a real strength of the school."

"It's proven to be very successful. We've been doing it for several years and it's been quite profitable, although that was not the original objective," says Mr Adin.

"It is certainly seen by everyone, kids included, as a real strength of the school."

Soft drink and junk food is also banned under the school's food policy.

After seven years of promoting healthy eating, Mr Adin says student behaviour in the playground and the classroom has improved.

"It's our view that kids' behaviour is better than what it used to be.

"Kids are much more able to concentrate on what they're doing in the classroom."

Another school that has made healthy food a priority is Te Puna School in Tauranga.

It was a co-winner of the Terrific Tuck Shop award at the 2003 Children's Food Awards, initiated by the Green Party.

Principal Mike Scadden says the main aim of the former Parent Teacher Association-run canteen was to make money rather than focus on



LUNCHTIMES: Unhealthy school tuckshops are being phased out and replaced by lunch schemes to combat child obesity.

providing children with healthier school lunches.

"A lot of the food was questionable, so we started a specialty canteen to try and encourage healthy eating."

The speciality canteen, built in 1996, employs a person to cook nutritious food onsite.

The menu aims to provide food that is low in fat, sugars and preservatives. It also incorporates organic food.

Mr Scadden says Te Puna takes a whole-curriculum approach to healthy living by including a lot of physical

movement for children in everyday classroom activities.

"If you're not healthy your brain is not going to function properly and you're not going to learn."

In Thames, Parawai School's health-promoting tuck shop was also a joint winner at the 2003 Children's Food Awards.

Principal Brian Sheedy says a new building project in 2002 gave the school the opportunity to start its tuck shop from scratch.

With input from dieticians, the

local hospital and a student council, Parawai School was able to use its new tuckshop to create an understanding of healthy eating.

"Schools have to work pretty hard to set up these programmes," says Mr Sheedy.

"We were fortunate to have had new buildings and a new start."

Mr Sheedy says the tuck shop does not make a profit but aims to provide healthy food at a reasonable price.

"We're concerned because of the evidence suggesting children who lead unhealthy lives when they're young may go on to develop heart disease."

Immediate past president of Diabetes New Zealand, Russell Finnerty, says it is good to see schools offering healthy lunches instead of only high-energy foods.

"It's certainly a pleasing move. I like to see schools offering alternatives," he says.

"New Zealand produces huge quantities of fruit and we make good quality, high-fibre bread. Sometimes when you go to schools all you see is white bread, white fluffy rubbish."

Mr Finnerty says he wants Government to encourage schools to offer more food choices rather than bring in a national school food policy.

The National Heart Foundation (NHF) helps schools develop policy to promote healthy food choices through its School Food Programme.

This includes encouraging schools to increase access to nutritious food.

NHF national dietician David Roberts says environmental factors — such as healthy food not being available to children — can contribute to obesity.

"We're concerned because of the evidence suggesting children who lead unhealthy lives when they're young may go on to develop heart disease."

Mr Adin, principal of Fairburn School, says it was not hard to develop the food policy and become a health-promoting school.

"This isn't rocket science. It's basic common sense."

AUT offers students online help

by Claire Ellery

If Auckland University of Technology's plans to develop online counselling are approved, students will be able to receive counselling without leaving their computer.

Amanda Lee, a counsellor at AUT, says with the increasing use of online resources and technology in the university it makes sense to look at the possibility of online counselling.

"It is the way to the future," Ms Lee says.

If the online counselling is approved by AUT management, Ms Lee says the service will cater for people who do not like face-to-face counselling because of lack of time, travel obstacles or a sense of embarrassment.

"Some people have a sense of shame about counselling or feel socially awkward," she says.

Creating a system where people can e-mail a counsellor or e-chat with them will alleviate some social discomfort.

"Some people have a sense of shame about counselling or feel socially awkward."

Ms Lee says that writing down your feelings can help to shift them from a raw state into something able to be expressed.

The service is currently at the research stage and a report will be submitted to AUT management before July.

Ms Lee started researching online counselling on behalf of AUT in November 2003 and counselling services provided an online and paper questionnaire for staff and students last month.

The office received 150 replies and found the online responses were more enthusiastic about the idea than the paper respondents.

Some concerns were raised about privacy, how staff would be trained and client safety.

"It is not a good medium for people in crisis," says Ms Lee. She is examining how to resolve these concerns in her report.

If the service does become available to AUT students, it will be free of charge and have the option of e-mail or live online chat.

Basics learned and going pro

by Marcus Stickley

In an industry that is growing up and growing fast, New Zealand's first hip hop magazine is going professional.

Back2Basics emerged as a community-funded project in Wellington, releasing free issues in September 2001 and June 2002. The first commercial issue of the magazine hits stores this month.

"For me this is a steep learning curve and I can take away [a lot of experience] from it at the end of the day. That's the same for everyone involved in the magazine," says editor Sen 'Khmer' Thong (23).

For him *Back2Basics* is not just his magazine, it is a vehicle for inspiring others.

"We want to showcase the essence of hip hop in the community, to encourage others to create."

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

I received a copy of *Te Waha Nui* in the post today and I'm impressed.

When I was a student at AUT, we didn't have such an outlet to showcase our work.

I know how much extra work everybody involved must have put in to generate the first edition.

Well done. I look forward to the next edition in 2004.

Liam Baldwin
Editor
Piako Post
Morrinsville

I have just received a copy of *Te Waha Nui*. Looks great ... pass on my congratulations to all concerned.

Ian Stuart
Lecturer in Maori Studies
Eastern Institute of Technology
Napier

Congratulations on *Te Waha Nui*. It's a great looking newspaper that has got a few people talking.

Andrew Melville
Marketing Manager
Communications Department
Auckland University of
Technology

Council works with bars to combat soaring youth drink-driving stats

by Aimee Nickless

A drink-drive campaign, launched May 4, is encouraging young people to take more responsibility for getting themselves home safely after a night out drinking.

The Start Here campaign urges 18 to 20-year-olds to become more responsible designated drivers.

"A culture of responsible designated drivers among North Shore youth needs to be created," says North Shore City Council road safety co-ordinator Helen Whittle.

Since the drinking age was lowered to 18, road crashes involving young people have increased. Twenty-two percent of North Shore drink-drive offenders were under 20 years old in 2003, prompting new action.

The goals of Start Here are to make youths think before they drink, to have them question their actions and to drink in a positive manner.

Participating bars and nightclubs on the North Shore will provide free, non-alcoholic drinks for designated drivers.

The bars will have posters and coasters advertising their involvement so that on arrival, designated drivers can receive free non-alcoholic drinks.

"Appointed drivers will get a stamp on their arm or hand entitling them to

free non-alcoholic drinks, such as soft drinks or water, for the night," says Ms Whittle.

According to the council, around eight North Shore bars initially showed interest in taking part.

"We would love to have all bars and clubs participating as it would raise awareness right across the North Shore," says Ms Whittle.

"A culture of responsible designated drivers among North Shore youth needs to be created."

Massey University students have been key contributors in planning the campaign, helping develop the idea and designing the t-shirts, posters, stamps and coasters.

Start Here is the first combined approach on the North Shore to deal with drink-driving. Along with Massey University students, the campaign involves Students Against Drunk Driving, ACC Prevention Care Recovery, the Regional Public Health Service, North Shore City Council, Rodney District Council and Alcohol Healthwatch.

North Shore City deputy mayor Dianne Hale says Start Here is a coordinated approach.

"This could be the first in a national campaign promoting host responsibility in support of travel-safe ideas," says Ms Hale.

North Shore youths have reacted positively to the campaign and are apparently keen to support participating bars.

Torbay resident Briar Sladen (20) says the campaign is a fresh approach to dealing with drink-drive problems on the Shore.

"I think it's a really good idea," says Miss Sladen. "Young people don't really think about that a lot I suppose, they just get drunk and go out, not thinking about how they are going to get home until it's too late."

"The free non-alcoholic drinks are a real incentive because I know when I am a sober driver and have to pay for water or for a Coke it's really annoying. So now I won't mind being the designated driver as much."

Ms Whittle says Start Here will be monitored to the end of June when it will be re-evaluated.

"Towards the end of June members of the awareness team will visit to see if the campaign is working and what we will have to adapt," she says.