

# **ANNAPOLIS VALLEY HEALTH PROMOTING SCHOOL PROJECT**

**“Making the Healthy Choice the Easy Choice”**

**Funded through the Canadian Diabetes Strategy, Health Canada**

*January 2002 to March 2004*

## **The Annapolis Valley Health Promoting School Project**

Several schools in the Annapolis Valley Regional School Board (AVRSB) are changing how they work so that the learning and health of their students can be improved. They are doing this by adopting a Health Promoting School approach to create supportive school environments.

The Annapolis Valley Health Promoting School Project (AVHPSP) was a 2.5 year project. Eight schools in the AVRSB took this opportunity to make it easier for their students to make healthy choices in physical activity and healthy eating as one way to contribute to the prevention of type 2 diabetes.

### **Goal of the Project**

To enable children to make healthy choices about nutrition and physical activity on a daily basis, which will reduce their risk for developing chronic diseases and provide them with the skills to develop healthy food and activity behaviours for life.

### **Evolution of the Project**

- In 1997 a grass roots movement from parents and teachers at Port Williams Elementary School initiated changes in the school menu from 'fast food' to more nutritious food.
- As a result, a school food program was established and a school board food policy drafted.
- The grass roots movement incorporated into Port Williams Nutrition for Health Association and expanded their mandate to include supporting the link between healthy eating and health maintenance with an emphasis on physical activity as a part of a holistic approach to health and well being.
- Building on its success and wishing to support and strengthen the development of similar programs in additional elementary and middle schools in AVRSB, the Port Williams Nutrition for Health Association received funding in 2001 from the CDS.

### **Schools & Partners**

- Elementary Schools: Champlain, MCS, Somerset, New Minas, Port Williams
- Middle level schools: Coldbrook & District, EMS, Wolfville School
- Community Partners for the Project Advisory Committee: Port Williams Nutrition for Health Association, AVRSB, NS Sport & Recreation Commission, VRH & Annapolis Diabetes Education Centres, Public Health Services in Annapolis Valley Health and Capital District, Breakfast for Learning - Nova Scotia, EKM & Annapolis Community Health Centres, O.H. Armstrongs Ltd., Annapolis County Community Health Board, NS Fruit Growers Assoc., Program & Evaluation Consultant, Dalhousie University - Population Health & Research Unit.
- Project Schools also have partnerships with local businesses, organizations and community groups.

### **Project Strategy**

- A Project Advisory Committee - made up of members from education, health, sport & recreation, and food industry - was formed to support & evaluate the schools' health promoting initiatives.
- Multiple strategies were used: policy, education, awareness, leadership development, program implementation, advocacy for supportive long term funding, multisectoral partnership development, project evaluation.
- Health promoting school teams were formed at each school to assess needs and develop strategic plans at their schools.

- Schools used a Population Health Approach that aimed to improve the health of the entire student population. The broad range of factors that have a strong influence on our health, such as income, social environment, social support networks & healthy child development, were looked and acted on.
- The schools were the voice and the leaders in the project. It was their input that guided the project's direction.
- Capacity was enhanced among the schools and partners through training and skill building. At workshops there were opportunities to share ideas and stories between schools and partners.
- A sustainability plan for health promoting schools was created by schools and partners which is our blueprint for action to keep things moving forward.

### **How the Schools are Working**

- Making the healthy choice (nutritious food and physical activity) the easy choice.
- Building on successes of schools' current health promoting activities.
- Creating environments that support healthy food and physical activity choices.
- Documenting strategies and activities that appear to be the most effective.
- Building sustainability into the project.
- Planning initiatives with equity in mind, which helps to involve people who otherwise may not participate.
- Use of project funding - making plans with input from students, parents, staff & teachers.
- Student input - through formal/informal surveys, student leadership, student implementation of projects, focus groups, student council, student representation on their school health promoting committee.

### **School Initiatives**

- Wellness Fairs - an interactive, informative day where students (and parents) took part in physical activities, nutrition activities (making healthy snacks, taste tests of more nutritious foods), and information sessions on linking physical activity and healthy eating with disease prevention & protection.
- Incorporating an interdisciplinary unit with learning outcomes directed at healthy eating and physical activity at the middle school level.
- Development of Playground Games handbook with weekly introduction of new games from students at recess and lunch hour.
- Opening of school gyms to students after school and offering a variety of non competitive activities.
- Kids teaching kids coaching clinic.
- Parent/student surveys to assist with future healthy food & physical activity program initiatives.
- Research on resources for classroom teachers to use to implement daily activity programs.
- Change of name of annual field day to 'Active Living Day' with additional components added to traditional slate of activities.
- Nutrition Program enhancements to provide desirable, low cost, nutritious foods and reduce the number of food items with a low nutritional value.
- Creating a strategy to sustain a nutritious, low cost recess/lunch program for ALL students.
- Increasing consumption of fruits & vegetables by increasing availability in school recess/lunch programs, i.e. offering fruit &/or veggie cups/plates; adding fruit or veggies to other menu items, etc.
- Increasing consumption of fruits & vegetables through improved marketing strategies and by introducing students to those food items in taste tests or at other opportunities (e.g. Exams).

**This information was taken from the “How To Guide” prepared as part of the project. For more information please contact the Annapolis Valley Regional School Board 902-538-4600 or Public Health Services 902-542-6310 or visit the Health Promotion Clearinghouse Website at [www.hpclearinghouse.ca](http://www.hpclearinghouse.ca) . Click on their Features section-Healthy Eating & Physical Activity.**

