

## **Best Practices in action: how to transfer, implement, and sustain effective health promotion interventions for children (0-12)**

Module 2 - Grünau Moves: a Best Practice to promote health and prevent obesity in children

Session 2.3 - Grünau Moves: Conducting the Needs Assessment and Health Assets Map

Unit 2.3.1 - Case A "Participatory tools and methods – Group Model Building and Photovoice"

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### **Slide 1**

Welcome everybody to Module 2 of this e-learning which is about Grünau Moves, a best practice to promote health and prevent obesity in children.

### **Slide 2**

Specifically, this is Unit 2.3 "Grünau Moves. Conducting the Needs Assessment and Health Assets Map". We are going to talk today about participatory tools and methods that we used in Belgium, which were Group Model Building and Photovoice. My name is Jessie, and I work at Sciensano, which is the Public Health Institute in Belgium.

### **Slide 3 - The Needs Assessment**

So, what did we do exactly? We organized two Group Model Building sessions with local actors and once we finished those, we organized Photovoice in neighbourhoods with children. And we did this in two municipalities in Flanders. Simultaneously, we also conducted some interviews with parents and teachers, but this is outside the scope of the e-learning.

After we did everything, we reported everything back, all of the experiences, to the local actors and that allowed them to develop actions.

### **Slide 4 - Participatory methods: Group Model Building**

But what is Group Model Building? Group Model Building is a method within systems dynamics which can include elements of qualitative and quantitative modelling, and the goal is to generate a dynamic hypothesis around the central complex problem. So, we used it mainly qualitatively and we used it with stakeholders, and then it could be used to create a shared understanding.

So, what we mean by that is when we asked the question "How do you feel about the obesogenicity of the living environment? What contributes to it or what hinders it?", they all had a fairly different opinion (like you also see in the picture). But when you combine everything and you talk to each other, they saw the complexity of the system and they saw that all of their opinions were valid or, like in the picture, the scientist would understand that it's an elephant standing in front of them.

## **Slide 5 - Participatory methods: Group Model Building**

Group Model Building has several benefits. The most important one is that it really engages stakeholders and it gives them a voice. It is a co-creation process in which the most important part is given to the stakeholders. Researchers mainly facilitate and model the sessions. It helps to develop, like I said, a consensus about the obesogenicity of the living environment. But it also helps to identify why something works or doesn't work. If they already have certain programs in action, they might see it through the visualization of the complex system why it did or did not work.

Also, a major benefit is that this does not operate in a controlled environment. It really takes a living environment as it is, and it allows for comparing effects. And for the researchers, it has different options for implementation, so there are these different scripts available, and you can make a session as you go or as you, please using these different scripts, which would suit you best or which option you prefer best.

Of course, there are also certain barriers to Group Model Building. Group composition is very important. You want to avoid having dominant voices and silent voices. So, it really should be a dynamic group. It is also a very time-consuming process. You have to take sufficient time to build your model, your causal loop diagram. You have to have sufficient time to discuss everything, and afterwards, you also have to take the time to validate and to digitalize your loop as a researcher. So, it is also not easy. And all of these actually led to the final point, which is that it requires active participation, good modelling and facilitating skills and a basic understanding of the process both from your participants as well as from your researchers.

## **Slide 6 - Participatory methods: Group Model Building**

So, we did this in two municipalities, and this is actually the output of one of them. So, as you can see, the obesogenicity of the living environment is the central variable in this causal loop diagram, and the stakeholders identified three main environments, which were the food environment, the socioeconomic environment and the physical activity environment. But this visualization helped them to understand that all of these environments are linked to one another, and it is not limited to just these environments.

We also discussed mental health and climate change during the sessions, but this was outside the scope of the project. So, we focused mainly on these three environments, and as you can see, all of them are interlinked. So, the stakeholders understood that if they did something in the food environment, it also had an impact on the socioeconomic environment and vice versa.

## **Slide 7 - Participatory methods: Photovoice**

So, once we had this, after two sessions, we conducted some photovoice. Photovoice is a media-based method. We used photography and then subsequently interviewed the participants, and it really deepens the understanding of the lived experiences of vulnerable populations. In our case, we specifically did this with children.

## **Slide 8 - Participatory methods: Photovoice**

So, the benefits for photovoice are that it actually empowers children. It is a fun activity to do, it helps them explain what they want to say because they can show it without actually the researchers having to go with one of them to all of these places. And because we have a visualization of the explanation or what they want to say, we can also later use these photos to explain certain cases to the stakeholders.

On the other hand, we have some barriers. One, it is also very time-consuming. Both for the participants who need to actively think about taking these pictures, but also for the researchers, as it requires a lot of cleaning up. You also have the price of the cameras you have to take into account. We bought this fun, child friendly cameras because we worked with very young children and we did not assume that every one of them already had a smartphone or camera.

they could use. So, if you really want to work with vulnerable populations or with little children, it is best to include you buying the cameras.

### **Slide 9 - Some pictures from our experience**

These are some of the pictures they took. On the one hand we had photos about the physical activity environment and maybe they don't really say something right now to you, but this really helped them explain. For example, you see the picture of the picnic bench with the roof, but this roof is actually too short to provide any shelter. So, they asked for a very long time to get a roof and when the government finally said: yeah, sure, we're going to install a roof, they installed the useless one. So, this is what they were trying to explain. And then the stakeholders could actually see, yeah, if we look close enough, we can see that the roof is useless.

On the other hand, we had the food environment, and there we mainly had pictures of advertisement. So, this really helped to convince the stakeholders that children still notice advertisements and that it has a big impact on their food choices.

### **Slide 10 - Some results from implementation**

So, eventually, we needed to report everything back and we did this during, again, a final Group Model Building session, where we zoomed in on certain parts of our causal loop diagram and we linked the pictures to these variables. So, for example, one of the variables in the system was "Options to cross roads near schools safely", which would have an impact on active transportation for children from and to school.

So, one of the actions proposed would then be car free school streets or school zones. And they implemented this already. So, stakeholders will look like, yeah, but we're already doing this, so we are helping. But then the children took a picture of this sign saying that on school days, between school hours, the road is blocked. So, it should be a car free school street. However, we crossed that road, we walked through it, because it was supposed to be safe, but when we got to the end, the gate was open. And this was during a school day during school hours. So, this just doesn't make sense. This is a worthless solution if the gate is not closed.

On the other hand, stakeholders were talking about bad road infrastructure, bad biking infrastructure. But they said this was mainly a problem of the city centre and they were working on it. But then we went with some children to a neighbourhood which was quite far from the city centre, and we wanted to visit the forest. In doing that, if we wanted to bike or walk there, we needed to use this road, which, as you can see, has no foot path or bike lane. And this is a road going to places where children gather, but it is also a road where cars are allowed to drive fifty kilometres an hour in both directions. So, children are not inclined to walk or bike here. Nope, they ask their parents to drop them off by car.

### **Slide 11 - General recommendations**

So, these were our experiences and some examples from what we did in Flanders, and these are some recommendations. So, based on our experiences, we can highly recommend using participatory methods to engage your community. We used different techniques, to try to make them age-appropriate and interactive. This to really give the voice to the participants and not the researchers. And these age-appropriate and interactive methods gave actually a stronger voice to our participants. And also, it allowed us to combine different views and methods and to create a shared understanding between children, then also parents and teachers, and the local actors.

But I think the main advantage of these two techniques is that they visualize things. Either through pictures when using photovoice or through a causal loop diagram when using group model building. And this visualization is a huge advantage when you want to identify targeted context specific actions.

## **Slide 12 - Thank you all for your participations!**

Thank you very much for your participation and see you later. Thank you.