

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 2.5 - Grünau Moves: Examples of Local Actions

Unit 2.5.2 - Case B "Programmatic Interventions in Malta"

Lecturer: Sharon Vella (Department for Health Regulation - Malta)

Slide 1

Hello everyone. I am Sharon Vella; I am a pharmacist and a nutritionist and very forward in Health Promotion and Disease Prevention in Directorate of Malta. Malta is currently implementing the best practise Grünau Moves as part of the Health4EUKids Project and this best practice aims to promote health and prevent obesity in children living in deprivate areas.

Slide 2

I shall be giving you a brief overview of the local actions, especially programmatic interventions which have been carried out in Malta.

Slide 3 - Area of Intervention: Hamrun – Northern Harbour District of Malta

The area of intervention chosen was Hamrun. Hamrun forms part of the Northern Harbor District of Malta, as can be seen on the map. It houses a total population of 10,540 people, out of which 692 are children between the age of 4 and 12 years. It is densely populated with around 10,000 people living per kilometer. And around the 25% of the population are of non-Maltese origin.

Slide 4 – Some pictures

Over here you can see some photos of the area, there is the local Council, there are two primary schools, there is also a community clinic and there are two supermarkets who selling you a variety of foods, but there are a lot of takeaway foods selling unhealthy foods, and other restaurants.

Slide 5 - Needs Assessment and Prioritisation of Actions

The availability of healthy food or unhealthy food in the area, physical activity and sedentary behaviour and is a good tool to assess places. The feedback and the rating were documented and were later used to organise a workshop with the residents, and it came out that education is really needed in this area.

First of all, we started to find a needs assessment and prioritization of actions. The need assessment was carried out in the form of focus group with different stakeholders and community leaders who play a role with children such as priests, catechism educators, football secretaries, or bent club secretaries, the educators themselves teaching at the Hamrun primary school and the students attending at the primary school. The Healthy Living Tool provided by the Work Package leaders was mostly used. The Healthy Living Tool consists of

a survey containing 14 questions which actually says the current situation whereby the survey had to rate the current situation and also, they had to provide feedback about what they would like to see in the future. Following this, all the information was documented and then a workshop was carried out with different residents and the actions were prioritized. The result indicated that education programs were mostly needed and that's why we empowered on delivery programmatic interventions in our area.

Slide 6 - Action 1: Health Education Programme during Summer school

So, as part of the first action, we organized the Health Education Program during the summer of 2024. We collaborated with the Foundation for Educational Services because they take care of the Summer state schools in Malta. We produced the content of the program, and we delivered the nutrition, physical activity, mental health and well-being sessions, these were skills-based sessions, and they were around 40 minutes, each lesson. They were given weekly to children from 7 to 10 years for over 6 weeks. Evaluation sheets in English and Maltese were also used to elicit feedback from the children and it is intended to repeat the program every year.

Slide 7 - Some pictures from our experience

Over here you can see some photos of our physiotherapist who first did some time in class explaining about the importance of physical activity and reducing sedentary time and he took the children to the playground where they did physical activity and playing different games such as the Robin Hood Game, Rock, Paper and Scissors Game.

Slide 8 - Some pictures from our experience

Over here you can see some photos of the physiotherapist doing physical activity with children.

Slide 9 - Some pictures from our experience

Over here you can see myself because I am a nutritionist as well by profession and we spoke about the different food groups and the plates and the portion size which we need to consume from the different food groups.

Slide 10 - Some pictures from our experience

We then played a memory game with the children where they were given different cards of different foods on them and then they had to place them on the different posters of the different food groups.

Slide 11 - Some pictures from our experience

Over here you can see our psychotherapists delivering mental health and well-being sessions with the children. They told them about the importance of resilience and told how to overcome the challenges of life. Also, they did activities with the children which focused on building self-awareness and understanding emotions through reflection and positive affirmations. They also practiced techniques such as deep breathing, grounding techniques, and creative expression with the children. And they also expect the importance of healthy habits, and they also gave parents some follow-up letters with practical tips and resources to support the emotional wellbeing of the children at home.

Slide 12 - Health Educational Material

Over here you can see some health educational material which was disseminated to the children and their parents. These included the dietary guidelines for Maltese children and lunch recipes as well as healthy summer recipe book.

Slide 13 - Evaluation of Summer School programme

Over here you can see the evaluation of the Summer School Program of the 48 questionnaires considered for evaluation and we got to know that the physical activity session was the most liked session, followed by the mental health and well-being session, then followed by the nutrition session. 48 questionnaires were considered for evaluation purposes of the 52 received as one was incomplete and 4 were filled by the educators themselves.

Slide 14 - Evaluation of Summer School programme

As you can see from the graph, most of the children liked the program and only 3 children said they didn't like the physical activity session, 4 didn't like the nutrition session and only 3 didn't like the wellbeing session. So, over all the program was very well received by the children.

Slide 15 - Action 2: School Play

Then we organized the School Play which focused on healthy eating behaviors. We obviously wrote the script, and this involved three members of staff, 2 nutritionists and a nurse and we performed display in front of 45 primary school age children and educators.

Slide 16 - School Play

Over here you can see some photos of us performing the play and the kids enjoyed it a lot.

Slide 17 - Action 3: Winter Afterschool Healthy Lifestyle Programme (March-April 2025)

Then we have organized as well a winter after school health lifestyle program in March 2025 and the first of all we had meetings with the Head of school regarding the logistics, and the rooms were to give the lessons, the gym were to do physical activity, and also room where to do the cooking class. The program was delivered to 8 and 10-year-old children and their parents or guardians. It was a six-week program and did involve the nutrition lessons, physical activity lessons and the well-being lessons. We have sent invitations to parents and guardians and children to attend the Health Lifestyle Program, and we created resources such as education and nutritional games and also snakes and ladders to promote physical activity and we also provided health educational material.

Slide 18 - Poster Reminder of Programme

Over here you can see the poster reminder of the program.

Slide 19 - Some pictures from our experience

Over here you can see some photos depicting the lessons which were taken with the nutritionist, with the physical activity officer as well with the mental health and well-being officer.

Slide 20 - Cooking Class

Over here you can see some of the food prepared during the Cooking Class. They prepared some tips and some vegetable crudité, and also some fruit kebabs as well as an open (incomprehensible) with healthy toppings.

Slide 21 - Action 4: Supermarket nutrition education

We also did a small supermarket nutrition education campaign. We contacted the owners of two main supermarkets in Hamrun, Alfsons and Interspar. We prepared the material to disseminate to customers. These included addressable books, shopping guides, information on salt, sugar, fat and also coloring books for children. And then we visited the supermarkets, both of them, for 4 times between August and October of 2024. In total we interacted with around 80 shoppers, and we spent the whole morning there basically when we went from 8 to noon.

Slide 22 - Some pictures from our experience

Over here you can see me at the supermarket.

Slide 23 - Some pictures from our experience

Over here you can see me and my colleagues delivering health information. We taught the shoppers how to read food labels, to choose for which are lower fat sugar and salt, and we also gave recipe books to shoppers shopping from these supermarkets.

Slide 24 - Some pictures from our experience

Over here you can see more photos of this event.

Slide 25 - Some pictures from our experience

And also, here you can see us also delivering nutrition information...

Slide 26 - Some pictures from our experience

... at other supermarkets.

Slide 27 - Action 5: Multicultural Activity in Hamrun

We also took part in a multicultural activity which took place in August 30th in Hamrun. We were invited over by the Immaculate Band club of Hamrun and there we disseminated health material and spoke with the residents. We spoke to around 77 people and over there we got the opportunity to meet non-Maltese residents residing in Hamrun.

Slide 28 - Some pictures from our experience

So very here you can see some of the photos of the event and it was perceptible by people that there was a really nice atmosphere.

Slide 29 - Action 6: Family Fest in Hamrun

And we then also took part in Family Fest which was organized by the local Council of Hamrun, this took place on the 24th of November 2024. They closed the main street of Hamrun to encourage more walking and activities in Hamrun. And we disseminated health material and performed health checks such as blood pressure, blood glucose tests. And the spoke to around 60 people and performed around 25 health checks on the day. It was a very good opportunity to meet the locals and to do brief health interventions and to teach some people for better health.

Slide 30 - Family Fest organised by Hamrun Local Council

Over here you can see some photos we took during the day.

Slide 31 - Poster Campaign for school – social media posters

Also, we prepared the Poster Campaign for school, we prepared different posters with different health message including oral health, the importance of reducing sugar intake and eating healthiest snacks and these were submitted to the Head of schools which then, the Head of school, placed on the Facebook page which is used by the parents.

Slide 32 - General Recommendations for Programmatic Interventions

Some General Recommendations from our experiences when we implemented the Programmatic Interventions. These included that it's important to perform the needs assessment, first of all, to assess the needs of the community and to prioritize the actions since funds are quite limited. It is important to involve a diverse group of stakeholders because the more opinions and the more information you get the better. It is very important as well to plan ahead with all other projects. And a number of human resources are needed to be involved. And it is very important to tailor messages and interventions to match the community values and practices.

Slide 33 - General Recommendations for Programmatic Interventions

It is important to choose programs which can be sustained by the chosen neighborhood and repeated over time. It is also a good idea after train the trainer as such as for example to train the scout leaders or teachers and community leaders so that they can take on the project forward and ensure sustainability of the project. And it is also important to set up robust feedback systems and evaluation so that you can adjust to the need of the community.

Slide 34 - Members of working Group

Over here you can see the members of the working group: our director Dr Paula Vassallo who is the Project lead of Health4EUKids and over head of Units, Dr Mariella Borg Buontempo and myself, as well.

Slide 35 - Thank you all for your attention!

And I'd like to thank you for your attention. Thank you