

EVALUATION OF
Fit Futures Yoga Schools Programme
As part of Sport Northern Ireland's Community
Sport Programme
June 2008

by
FKB Consulting



DERRY CITY COUNCIL

HOW I FEEL WHEN I AM DOING YOGA

BY

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Acknowledgements: we would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to all those who contributed to this research and gave of their time. In particular we would like to thank the schools who welcomed us warmly and to the children who kindly not only gave their time but also their contributions in art form.

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About the authors: FKB Consulting was established in 2001 with the aim of delivering research and evaluation activities from an ethically-based approach. We engage with a number of constituencies across the public and community/ voluntary sectors delivering research and evaluation on themes including sports, physical activity, equality and peace and reconciliation.

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HOW I FEEL WHEN I AM DOING YOGA

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HOW I FEEL WHEN I AM DOING YOGA

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SECTION 1- INTRODUCTION

This reports details the evaluation of Derry City Council's Fit Futures Yoga Schools Programme funded through Sport Northern Ireland's (SNI) Community Sport Programme through the Big Lottery Fund (BLF). The yoga programme aims to reduce childhood obesity and improve self esteem, confidence and flexibility in P7 children (10-11 year olds).

The programme operates within a cluster of 7 primary schools within the Outer North area of Derry, a defined Neighbourhood Renewal Area, which in terms of multiple deprivation (Noble Index) ranks within the top 10% most deprived wards in Northern Ireland.

It is now well recognised that rates of overweight and obesity are increasing in children worldwide. There is evidence that the 1990s rates in 7-11 year olds have accelerated in the UK. Recent data from the Young Hearts 2000 cohort in Northern Ireland support this interpretation with the prevalence of overweight / obesity increasing from 15% to 19.6% in 12 and 15 years old between 1990 and 2000. Furthermore these increases tend to be greatest in children living in households with lower socioeconomic status.

In general, those who live in a socially deprived area are more likely to be overweight or obese and to follow a less healthy lifestyle than those who do not. Nationally, 'The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal' aims to tackle the multidimensional nature of deprivation. Within the Northern Ireland context, the Department of Social Development (DSD) has identified a number of Neighbourhood Renewal Areas (NRAs) that represent the most deprived areas in Northern Ireland.

Local Context

The Greater Shantallow (Outer North) area is an area situated in Derry City on the West Bank of the river Foyle, with a population currently estimated at 30,000 people. This represents nearly 25% of Derry City Council area and comprises the electoral wards of Shantallow West (Galliagh), Shantallow East, Carnhill, Pennyburn, Ballnashallog and Culmore, all of which rank within the top 10% most

deprived wards in Northern Ireland.¹ Such is the deprivation in these areas that the Greater Shantallow area has been identified as a Neighbourhood Renewal Area (NRA) in terms of the DSD's Neighbourhood Renewal scheme, which is targeted as one of the most deprived wards in Northern Ireland.

In overall terms the Greater Shantallow area is disadvantaged in many ways. Its unemployment, low educational attainment levels, youth disillusionment and poverty problems are well documented, particularly for the electoral wards of Shantallow East, Shantallow West, Culmore and Carnhill. According to the recent deprivation indices (Noble 2005) these awards are particularly deprived and impoverished in terms of multiple deprivation, health and disability, living environment and education, skills and training.

For example, in relation to Income Deprivation Affecting Children (IDAC), the deprivation indices show Ballynashallog 1 is ranked as the worst Super Output Area (SOA) in Northern Ireland and Shantallow West 2 is ranked as the second worst SOA. Further, Shantallow West 1, Culmore 2, Shantallow East and Carnhill 2 fall within the worst 10% SOAs in Northern Ireland. These SOAs also fall within the top 10% (i.e. worst) in regards to education, skills and training and all fall within the worst 15% in respect to living environment.

Noble (2001, 2005) highlights and confirms the real need to improve the social and economic conditions of many of the local wards that make up Derry City Council (DCC) area including Shantallow East, Shantallow West and Carnhill, through processes to improve the capacity of the local community to advance social and economic renewal.

The legacy of the areas' troubled and divided past has been one of:

- Low educational achievement (including participation levels).
- Low literacy and numeracy levels among school leavers.
- Child poverty (Shantallow East ranks 1st in Northern Ireland for child poverty).

¹ Noble 2005

- Social unrest and exposure to varying degrees of criminality.
- Numeric and computer literacy levels well below the national average.
- Resultant apathy and low self esteem.
- Poor lifestyles in terms of health and as a consequence poor well-being.

Shantallow East

Shantallow East has a very youthful population with 34% of residents under the age of 16 compared to the Northern Ireland average of 24.3% (1999). It is ranked in the top 4% of wards in Northern Ireland suffering from poor educational performance, skills and training (Noble 2001). The Shantallow East Ward consistently ranks in the top 10% most deprived wards in Northern Ireland. According to Noble, 2001, out of 566 wards in Northern Ireland Shantallow East has been ranked as 1st for child deprivation. In the ward 92.39% of children under 16 live in families that claim the 'out of work' means tested benefits of Income Support and Jobseekers Allowance and the 'in work' benefits of Family Credit and Disability Working Allowance.

Shantallow West

Shantallow West has a very youthful population with 40% of residents under 16 years compared to the Northern Ireland average of 24.3% (1999). In Shantallow West 83.63% of children under 16 live in families that claim the 'out of work' means tested benefits of Income Support and Jobseekers Allowance and the 'in-work' benefits of Family Credit and Disability Working Allowance. The child poverty measurement has a range of ranks from 1 (out of 566) in Shantallow East to 461 in Ballynashallog.

Carnhill

In Carnhill 70.56% of children under 16 live in families that claim the 'out of work' means tested benefits of Income Support and Jobseekers Allowance and the 'in-work' benefits of Family Credit and Disability Working Allowance.

The above statistical evidence is a clear indication of the multiple deprivation that directly affects the lives of young people under 15 years of age in the Outer North Area.

The objective of the current investigation was to evaluate whether regular delivery of a school-based yoga programme (The Fit Futures Yoga Programme) across the academic year positively impacts on childhood obesity, improved self esteem, confidence and educational attainment and physical health in P7 children (10-11 year olds). The results of this study are expected to help to guide future work in this age group aimed at enabling fuller participation and adherence to physical activity programmes in this at risk population.

The evaluation posed a number of questions as to the effectiveness of yoga in primary schools:

- Does it improve self esteem and confidence in primary 7 children?
- Does it improve concentration in class?
- Does it have cross-curricular benefits i.e. group cohesion, concentration and respect for others?
- Does it impact on reducing childhood obesity?
- Does it promote inclusiveness and a non-competitive environment that enables everyone to take part?
- Does it improve physical fitness, literacy and flexibility?

The report is structured as follows: Section 2 describes the methodology used in the evaluation. Section 3 considers the policy and strategic context under which it developed. Section 4 details the development and implementation of the project, before Section 5 moves on to reflect upon the views of those consulted through the evaluation process. Finally, Section 6 presents recommendations and conclusions.

HOW I FEEL WHEN I AM DOING YOGA

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HOW I FEEL WHEN I AM DOING YOGA

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SECTION 2 – METHODOLOGY

At the outset of the assignment the evaluation team met with representatives from Derry City Council (DCC) to discuss research methodology, key questions and stakeholders to be interviewed.

At the beginning of the evaluation we conducted a review of available documentation; this formed the starting point of the **desk research**. This included a review of internal monitoring and evaluation data as well as monitoring reports to the funder. We also considered relevant strategic and policy initiatives, these are detailed in the following section.

The evaluation team then **interviewed** key individuals who provided insight into the programme and the context within which it operates². The interviewees comprised staff from Outer North partnership, the yoga instructor, DCC and Sport Northern Ireland (SNI):

- Darren Kirby, Outer North Neighbourhood Partnership
- John Bell, Fit Futures Yoga Instructor
- Barry O'Hagan, DCC
- Teresa Bradley, DCC
- Angharad Bunt, SNI
- Paul Donnelly, SNI.

In addition to this each school was visited by the evaluation team and **interviews were conducted with staff in advance of group interview sessions with the children**. In each school we spoke to the principal/vice principal and/or the class teacher.

The schools visited were as follows:

- Greenhaw Primary School
- St Paul's Primary School
- St Brigid's Primary School

² Copy of interview schedule and questions for children are provided in Appendix 1

- St Thérèse Primary School
- St Patrick's Primary School
- Steelstown Primary School
- Bunscoil Cholmchille

The children's session began with the children producing art work to illustrate how yoga made them feel. This process assisted the children feeling at ease with the researchers and also allowed them to consider at their own pace what they thought of yoga before taking part verbally in the group discussions. A selection of the art produced has been used in this report. Analysis of the art work has also been incorporated into the evaluation. Those children who were uneasy about producing artwork were encouraged to write down the key words that they thought of when they considered the question 'what does yoga mean to me?'. This method, known as concept mapping³ is used to provide a visual representation of the links or associations between different concepts or pieces of information, in this case how being involved in a yoga class made the children feel. In total over 120 children participated in the evaluation.

Interviews were also held with two parents and one teacher who had participated in yoga classes offered by the programme and part funded by the school through its Extended Schools budget.

The lead evaluator also observed a yoga class in Greenhaw school to gain a sense of how the yoga class was delivered and to allow for assessment of how the yoga instructor interacted with the children.

³ Thomson C.J. (1997) Concept Mapping as a Means of Evaluating Primary School Technology Programmes International Journal of Technology and Design Education, Volume 7, Numbers 1-2, pp. 97-110(14)

Lafferty, M.E. (2004). Junior Athletes Reflections of Concept Mapping. Paper presented at the 1st International Conference for Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise Science. Liverpool, UK.
Gill, P.E. and Persson, M (2008) Research note on using concept-maps to study school-children's understanding of leisure time. *Leisure Studies* 27 (2) 213-220

HOW I FEEL WHEN I AM DOING YOGA

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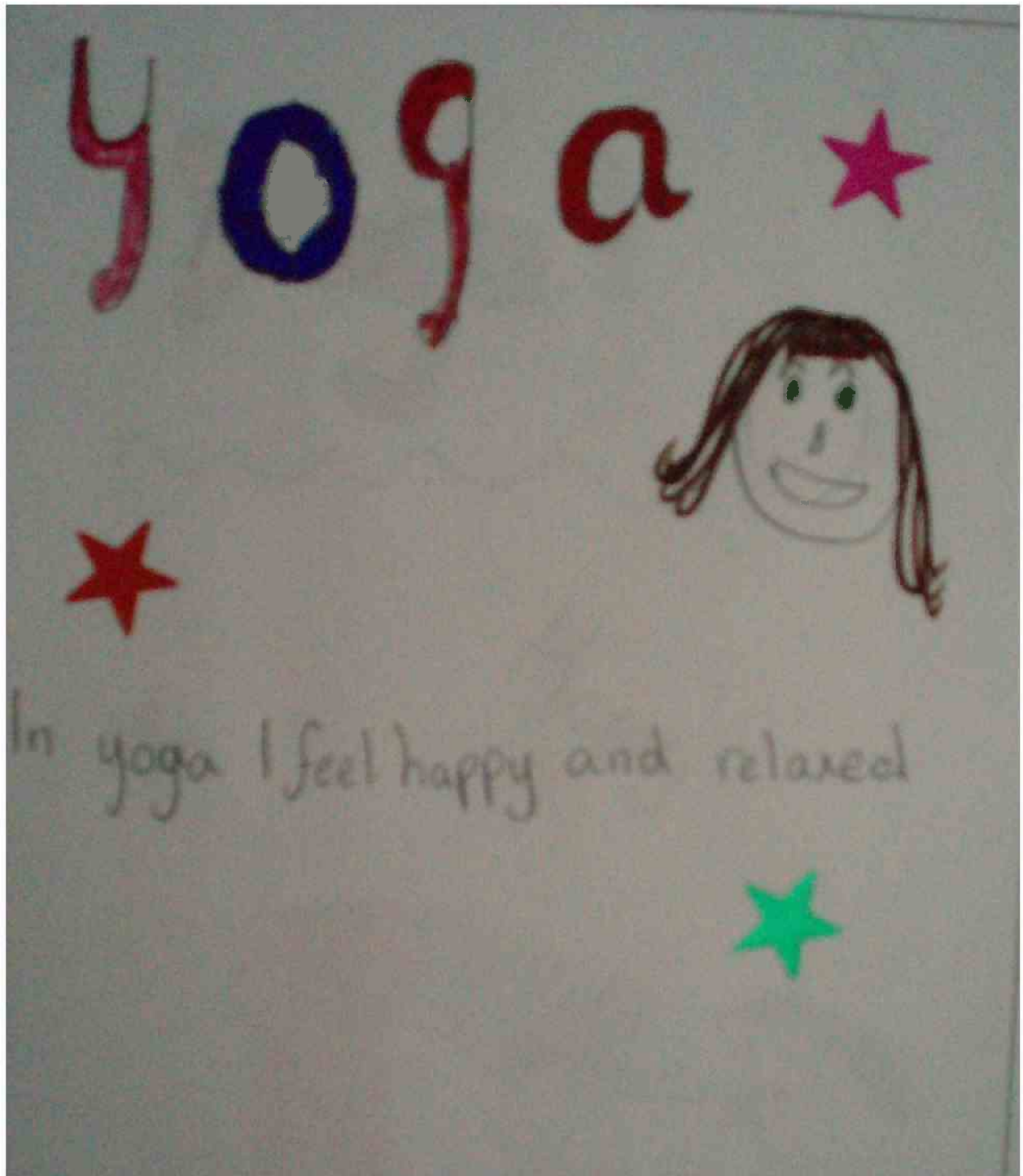


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SECTION 3 – POLICY AND STRATEGIC CONTEXT

In this section we consider the key policy and strategic documents of relevance to the Fit Futures Yoga Schools Programme.

Sport and Physical Activity

The **Fit Futures Task Force** (2006)⁴ recommended that: ‘Government Departments and agencies should establish a common vision for physical activity and its role in delivering government objectives. This vision should include agreed targets to increase participation in quality physical activity, including sport and leisure, active play and active travel and to improve levels of physical skills among children and young people, and should inform planned strategies and programmes on sport, active travel, physical activity and play’.

Government has recognised that a high standard of education for all children and young people will build their confidence and enrich their lives. There is also an acceptance of the need to ensure an effective match between the skill-sets of employees and the requirements of employers. Within an educational environment, there is early evidence to suggest that participation in sport and physical recreation can contribute to a child’s improved academic performance and perceived self esteem and that they are effective vehicles for re-engaging marginalised young people.

In terms of the strategic environment the key document currently is the **Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2007 – 2017**⁵, (Consultation draft) which outlines the Government’s commitment to sport and physical recreation. The new strategy, due to be launched in Autumn 2008 by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL), will underpin the development of sport and physical recreation in Northern Ireland up to 2017.

The definition of sport presented in the strategy is very broad, taken from that employed by the Council of Europe i.e. ‘All forms of physical activity which

⁴ <http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/ifh-fitfutures.pdf> - Page 91

⁵ The Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2007 – 2017 (Consultation draft), Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure Northern Ireland

through casual or organised participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships, or obtaining results in competition at all levels.’ This definition deliberately ties together sport and physical recreation.

The Strategy, in taking action that will develop sport and physical recreation in Northern Ireland, sets out a range of commitments for Government working through Sport Northern Ireland (SNI), the lead body for the development of sport and physical recreation, and in partnership with a variety of public, private, sporting and community organisations.

The Strategy defines a new concept of physical literacy as ‘the ability to use body management, locomotor and object control skills in a competent manner, with the capacity to apply them with confidence in settings which may lead to sustained involvement in sport and physical recreation’. The Strategy also highlights the need for the development of sport and physical recreation in Northern Ireland to take account of recent and significant advances in sports development thinking. The Long-Term Athlete Development model has been adopted across the UK, Ireland and beyond as a robust framework. The main elements of the LTAD model deal with the development of:

- Physical Literacy (PL)
- Lifelong Physical Activity (LLPA)
- Performance Sport (PS)

The Strategy highlights the links between obesity and a range of environmental factors:

- People are less active than they have been in the past
- They spend more time on sedentary pursuits such as television
- The places where they live have been built to discourage active lifestyles such as walking to school or the shop
- They spend a decreasing amount of active time in school

Sport NI's Corporate Plan 2007-2010⁶ states that it's Vision is: *"Through sport, to contribute to an inclusive, creative, competent, informed and physically active community"*. In practice, this means SNI creating and developing programmes and partnerships that will contribute to increased participation in sport and physical activity, improved sporting performances and improved efficiency and effectiveness in the administration of sport. Increased participation is not focussed on any one particular group, but is directed at those who do not participate regularly.

For SNI a key task in the forthcoming years 2007-2010 will be to develop effective relationships with key partners that deliver sport and physical recreation in Northern Ireland. In partnership with district councils, SNI hopes to develop closer working with partner organisations in relation to community based sport and physical recreation. This includes engaging with the Neighbourhood Renewal programme and using the model of community planning. SNI has also focussed on the need to overcome barriers in access to physical recreation and sport for different population groups in tandem with the need to improve personal well-being and reduce the number of obese and overweight people, as well as the need to create safe, secure and enjoyable sporting environments for all participants. It should be noted that SNI's strategic direction will need to take account of the new Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2007 – 2017 once the final version has been accepted by the Government.

SNI have also produced '**Improving Physical Literacy⁷**' which highlights evidence that physical literacy programmes have outcomes beyond physical including personal, social and cognitive; for example Henderson, May and Umney (1989) demonstrated that 'children who are proficient in skills such as running, throwing, skipping and balance are more likely to have higher self esteem and self-confidence. In addition, responsibility and discipline, coping with success and failure, and developing a sense of community, loyalty and cohesion, can flow from appropriate physical activity experiences (Australian Sports

⁶ Sport Northern Ireland (SNI) Corporate Plan 2007 - 2010

⁷ Sport Northern Ireland, 'Improving Physical Literacy', February 2008
<http://www.sportni.net/documents/ImprovingPhysicalLiteracy.pdf>

Commission, 2003)⁸. Whilst empirical correlations are difficult to establish there is evidence which suggests that in the case of young children, physical literacy programmes can lead to high self esteem, high levels of confidence, loyalty to school and teachers, positive reinforcement, parental support and good health, leading in turn to academic achievement.

Brian Delaney, Stranmillis University College, in his presentation in June 2008 at the Schools Yoga Conference, on 'Improving Physical Literacy', gave this rationale for focussing on physical literacy – 'Children who possess inadequate motor skills are often relegated to a life of exclusion from (the) organised and free play experiences of their peers and subsequently to a lifetime of inactivity because of their frustrations in early movement behaviour'⁹.

Recently the importance of regular physical activity and the benefits of it for maintaining good health and well-being were re-emphasised by The Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland (HPA) and SNI when the organisations signed an agreement entitled '**The Northern Ireland charter for enhancing health through sport and physical activity**'¹⁰ which tasks both bodies with the aim of promoting the significance of physical activity and sport at all levels for the good health and well-being of the population. The Charter defines an agreed vision between the two bodies – 'we will have a fit future in which everyone will be motivated to and be supported in their desire and ability to be active'¹¹.

Health and Well-Being

The environmental factors have led many health and physical activity professionals to refer to the rise in overweight/obesity rates as an 'epidemic'. A **Department of Health report (July 2006)** suggests that the current levels of obesity among UK men (22%) will rise to 33% by 2010 unless action is taken¹²,

⁸ Sport Northern Ireland, 'Improving Physical Literacy, February 2008, P20

⁹ Definition from 'Seefeldt, Haubenstricker and Reuchlien (1976)' from Brian Delaney presentation, June 2008

¹⁰ The Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland (HPA) and Sport Northern Ireland (SNI), '*The Northern Ireland charter for enhancing health through sport and physical activity*'

¹¹ <http://www.sportni.net/pacharter08.htm>

¹² Health Select Committee (May 2004), Obesity – Report of the House of Commons Health Committee

whilst data from 2004/05 indicates that in Northern Ireland 24% of young children are overweight or obese.

The **House of Commons Health Select Committee report, 'Obesity'**, (10 May 2004) noted that in the UK 'We spend £886 per head of population per year in providing what amounts to a national sickness service and we spend £1 per person per year on sports and physical activity which could actually prevent'. The National Audit Office estimated that the direct and indirect cost of obesity to the UK economy was approximately £3bn in 1998; latest projections suggest this figure will have risen to £7bn in 2010 – in Northern Ireland this would equate to an annual figure of £196m¹³.

When the cost of physical inactivity is added to that of obesity, the cost to the Northern Ireland economy in 2010 is likely to exceed £500m. From a non-monetary perspective, the Strategy suggests there are many other costs associated with failure. These include:

- An increasingly unhealthy population
- Lost opportunities to improve educational achievement among children and young people, especially those who feel marginalised

Investing for Health (IFH)¹⁴ was the cross-departmental public health strategy, published in 2002 which tackled the wide range of complex and inter-related factors that can impact on the health of the population. The Strategy was built around two overarching goals, which had been identified in pursuit of the aims of improving health and reducing health inequalities. The evidence produced in the report is clear and established a direct correlation between poverty, social disadvantage and health. 'Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to achieve the educational qualifications which are the key to improving their social status. People from lower social classes often live and work in more difficult conditions and suffer from poorer mental health'¹⁵.

¹³ National Audit Office (February 2001), 'Tackling Obesity in England'

¹⁴ Investing for Health, 2002 – present and update reports

¹⁵ Investing for Health, 2002, P6

The IFH programme had a number of goals which are relevant to younger people, including:-

- To improve the health of our people by increasing the length of their lives and increasing the number of years they spend free from disease, illness and disability.
- To reduce inequalities in health between geographic areas, socio-economic and minority groups.
- To enable all people, and young people in particular, to develop the skills and attitudes that will give them the capacity to reach their full potential and make healthy choices.
- To promote mental health and emotional well-being at individual and community level.

Overarching Strategies and Policies

Also of relevance in this context is a strategy published by The Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) entitled **Lifetime Opportunities** (2006) which addresses the issues of poverty and social exclusion. In accepting that government policy should focus on the different priority needs at different times in peoples lives, *Lifetime opportunities* defines specific goals and targets for four key stages in life:- Early years (0–4); Children and young people (5–16); Working age adults and older citizens.

The 10 year strategy for Children and Young people in Northern Ireland, ***Making it r world 2***¹⁶, commits to actions which will improve the play environment for children and provide access to play opportunities that will support children to realise their full potential. At NI level, work has commenced on developing a Northern Ireland Play Strategy led by OFMDFM. Play and leisure provision is also a key consideration in the Department of Education's Extended Schools Initiative.

In terms of statistics the strategy reports that only 36% of children (aged under 16 years) participate in sport/physical activity 3-5 times per week. This figure

¹⁶ OFMDFM (2004) Making It R Wrld 2. <http://www.allchildrenni.gov.uk/strategy.pdf>

contrasts with the estimated 1 in 3 young people in Northern Ireland who are overweight/obese.

In the educational context the **revised curriculum** in schools has been designed to ensure that each child has an education through which they learn what they need to for life and work and that they enjoy their learning and see it as relevant to them. The revised curriculum is now less prescriptive than previously, enabling teachers to tailor what they teach to suit the needs of their pupils. It will also better prepare young people for their future through a greater emphasis on developing skills and through the new area of 'Learning for Life and Work'. The compulsory elements of the revised curriculum have been reduced, but still cover all of the key learning areas including citizenship and physical activity.

The revised curriculum aims to produce individuals who are:

- personally, socially and emotionally effective;
- confident, informed and responsible;
- capable of leading fulfilling lives¹⁷.

Responsible citizens who:

- are ready for life and work;
- have the appropriate qualifications;
- can make the right career choices;
- are not afraid to take risks;
- will be the entrepreneurs of the future.

¹⁷ http://www.deni.gov.uk/information_for_parents.pdf

Area Based Strategy

Derry City Council's (DCC) Corporate Plan has a vision for the region as 'a vibrant, prosperous region with equality of opportunity for all'. Under the heading 'Community, Culture and Healthy Living' the Corporate Plan has as one of its strategic aims 'a culturally rich region made up of confident, safe and healthy communities' which notes the importance of healthy living and encouraging a more equal, inclusive society. Also reflected on is DCC's contribution to improving the capacity, confidence, health and well-being of individuals and communities. The Plan acknowledges that 'our experiences as a child and young person help shape the rest of our lives. All children deserve the best possible start in life – stable and safe home lives, excellent schools, a healthy lifestyle and positive leisure opportunities. We can have a significant effect on lives of children and young people in the area and need to continue to listen to their views and concerns'¹⁸.

The Council positions itself as one of the key players in the area of 'community, culture and healthy living' willing to work in partnership with other stakeholders to deliver its strategic objectives, which include:-

- Strong, confident communities able to participate in the social, cultural, economic and environmental regeneration of their areas.
- Inclusive communities where no-one feels alienated or marginalised.
- An improvement in the physical and mental well-being of the people living in the area.
- A reputation as a centre of excellence for the arts, culture and heritage through the provision of modern, accessible, cultural facilities, programmes and events.

DCC has a sizeable sports development department, comprising 17 staff whose responsibilities include sport-specific areas such as GAA, football and judo, as

¹⁸ Derry City Council Corporate Plan (P31)

well as posts responsible for specific geographic areas such as the Neighbourhood Renewal Areas.

In the Outer North Neighbourhood Renewal Area (NRA) the need to promote the physical literacy of the people in this area as part of Neighbourhood Regeneration process resulted in an inclusive integrated **Community Sports Development Plan** (Active Lifestyles Strategy) for the Outer North NRA. The Active Lifestyle Strategy, based on identified need, provides a clear strategic direction for the future provision of sport, recreation and leisure facilities and services in the Outer North Area. The development of Physical Literacy for all the citizens of the Outer North NRA has been accepted as a vital aspect of the Neighbourhood Renewal process and has been accepted by the Neighbourhood Partnership Board as a key element in the regeneration of the physical well-being of people in the area.

A range of programmes and activities have been implemented specifically targeted at local youth so as to engage / re-engage them in a range of physical activity / sporting and educational programmes aimed at ultimately improving activity levels, thus improving health and well-being and tackling sedentary lifestyles and obesity.

Although the remit of the Fit Futures programme is primarily young people under 15, the Active Lifestyle Strategy will address the cross generational needs of the whole community. The totality of the above programmes address a comprehensive range of physical literacy programmes, which are about developing access and engagement in building healthier lifestyles for all the people in the Outer North NRA.

DCC in the '**North West of Northern Ireland Development Framework**', August 2007, has identified five Strategic Priorities for the work of DCC in the period up to the formation of new council structures in the North West following the Review of Public Administration. Out of the five Strategic Themes, two relate closely to the Fit Futures Programme; 'Education and Skills' and 'An Inclusive, Integrated Region'.

The report highlights the fact that education and skills 'provide both a problem and an opportunity to the North West. They provide a problem in that the level of educational attainment in the North West is low, compared both to Northern Ireland as a whole and to other regions. However, the region has significant educational resources in the Magee Campus of the University of Ulster, the North West Institute and the various well established and high quality secondary schools'¹⁹.

A major emphasis of the Development Framework is on inclusive processes. Identifying the community and voluntary sector as a central player, the report tasks the sector with the vital role of ensuring that potential inequalities are identified and addressed. The role of the sector is also noted in relation to Neighbourhood Renewal . 'As an example of this approach, DCC has developed a range of approaches to the use of sport as a means of extending opportunities and bringing the communities together, drawing on the experience and resources of voluntary sports organisations on a local and regional basis'²⁰.

In its '**Sports Development Overview**' paper DCC defined community sports as 'utilising sport, physical activity and training programmes innovatively to effect and contribute to the improvement of individuals self esteem, health, education, life skills and employability and thereby their capacity to contribute to and participate in the life of their community'²¹. The paper highlights the linkages between the Neighbourhood Renewal process and sports development in contributing to:

- assisting people to achieve healthier lifestyles
- creating safer communities
- promoting positive behaviour and confidence
- improving educational attainment
- helping build social networks within communities
- reaching out to engage marginalised people

¹⁹ Derry City Council, in the 'North West of Northern Ireland Development Framework', August 2007, P10

²⁰ Derry City Council, in the 'North West of Northern Ireland Development Framework', August 2007, P29

²¹ Derry City Council, 'Sports Development Overview' paper, P2

In '**Towards a Child Friendly City**'²² the right to play is highlighted as an internationally agreed key principle as stated in the UNCRC (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child), which the UK and Irish governments signed in 1991. The importance of play to children's holistic development is recognised in the outcome statements of the Green Paper *Every Child Matters* in the UK context as well as within Children's Services Planning for health and social services in Northern Ireland.

From a health perspective play is recognised as being crucial to tackling child obesity and associated problems. The **Interagency Play Strategy** for the DCC area therefore gives local realisation to an issue now recognised as central to addressing children's needs and rights regionally, nationally and internationally. It brought together a partnership of key local players including DCC, Derry Children's Commissioner, WELB, the North West Development and the Local Strategy Partnership. The **Play Policy for Derry City Council Area** developed by the Steering Group has six Key Elements informed by research on the importance of play to the physical and mental well-being of children.

1. Play is natural
2. Play is vital for children's development
3. Play deprivation affects Children
4. Play is the right of every child
5. Children need space to play
6. Play is central to Decision Makers

Having reviewed the policy and strategic context we shall now move on to consider previous research related to yoga and children.

²² 'Towards a Child Friendly City', Interagency Play Strategy for Derry City Council Area (2006-2009)

Related Research

An internet based search for research related to yoga and its benefits for school children reveals various sources for information but little concrete evidence. The studies that do exist focus on the benefits of yoga for those with a disability²³ or on adults²⁴. One organisation appears frequently in internet archives, Research on Yoga in Education (RYE²⁵). Whilst the title of the organisation implies that it conducts research on yoga in education, little quantitative evidence is offered. However its ethos is based on one of sound practice over many years of experience.

One of the few studies which has looked at the impact of yoga on children is Stueck and Gloeckner (2005)²⁶, who studied a programme aimed at handling stress for children. The programme, 'Training of Relaxation with Elements of Yoga for Children', focused on the communication of self-control and relaxation based on experience using breathing exercises, imagination journeys and specifically selected yoga techniques for children. Using both a before/after and test/control group design the researchers found evidence supporting the view that the training increased emotional balance in the long term and reduced fears:

Feelings of helplessness and aggression were clearly reduced. Beyond this, the participants transferred the learned breathing techniques and self-instructions to situations beyond school, in order to relax after the lessons, to improve well-being and to control negative feelings. The effects found out here indicate that yoga is suited for children as an independent control method.

²³ Telles, S., Dash, M., Manjunath, N. K., Deginal, R. and Naveen, K. V. (2007) Effect of yoga on visual perception and visual strain. [Journal of Modern Optics](#), Volume 54, Number 9, June 2007 , pp. 1379-1383(5)

²⁴ http://www.health24.com/fitness/Specific_Sports/16-2175-2187-2277,33333.asp

²⁵ RYE was founded by Micheline Flak an English teacher, in Paris in 1978. Ms Flak taught yoga and discovered a way of combining her two passions to form RYE – yoga in the classroom. RYE uses simple yoga techniques – postures, breathing, relaxation and concentration techniques in small amounts throughout a lesson to improve learning <http://www.ryeuk.org/about.htm>

²⁶ Stueck, M. and Gloeckner, N. (2005) Yoga for children in the mirror of the science: working spectrum and practice fields of the training of relaxation with elements of yoga for children [Early Child Development and Care](#), Volume 175, Number 4, May 2005 , pp. 371-377(7)

Fridholm²⁷ (2007) in a small sample study found that a systematic use of breathing exercises, yoga postures and guided relaxation “provided useful strategies for emotional regulation for children with autism spectrum disorders.” Subjective outcomes included “improved focus, strength, flexibility, and balance; improved sense of self-awareness and pride; and improved ability to calm themselves.”

In overall terms it is clear that as one commentator has stated “*Research in the field of yoga therapy, however, is largely exploratory at this time and warrants further investigation*” (Binzen, 2007)²⁸.

In this section we considered in detail the policy, strategic and general context under which the yoga programme was created and developed. It is evident from the review of key documents that Government has recognised the need to encourage those who do not regularly take part in sport and physical activity to do so. The new Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation will underpin the development of sport and physical recreation in Northern Ireland up to 2017 delivered through SNI in partnership with a variety of public, private, sporting and community organisations. The range of strategic initiatives also points to the fact that research has demonstrated not only the physical and mental benefits of physical activity but also the social benefits.

Sport and recreation are now closely linked strategically to health matters, particularly the obesity debate, and to education through a range of initiatives including the Extended Schools initiative. At local level the impact of this debate is clearly visible in the Play Strategy and the Community Sport Strategy.

In relation to yoga, there is clearly a dearth of research to document its impact on children, despite its seemingly obvious potential.

²⁷ Fridholm, R (2007). Increasing Incidence of Emotional Regulation in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders Using Yoga Therapy STYAR symposium
<http://iayt.fmdrl.org/index.cfm?event=c.AccessResource&rid=1296>

²⁸ <http://www.yogachicago.com/mar07/yogachildren.shtml>

HOW I FEEL WHEN I AM DOING YOGA

BY

KERRY- ANN NEVIN

STEELSTOWN PRIMARY SCHOOL



HOW I FEEL WHEN I AM DOING YOGA

BY

ÉADAOIN DAVIDSON

ST PATRICK'S PRIMARY SCHOOL



SECTION 4 PROJECT DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

Background to the Funding Programme

In 2003 Sport Northern Ireland (SNI) secured £2.4 million from the Big Lottery Fund (BLF) to deliver the Community Sport Programme with the specific aim of improving the health and well-being of those communities most at risk of low levels of participation in sport and physical recreation.

The BLF funded Community Sport Programme builds on a pilot of six projects that were jointly funded by SNI and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL), and is designed to create, develop and manage opportunities that enhance the development of community sport and physical recreation within disadvantaged communities. The Programme aims to improve the health and well-being of individuals and build community cohesion through increased participation of children, young people and adults in areas of high social need and groups traditionally marginalised in sport and physical activity and in particular:

- To increase levels of sustained participation in sport and physical activity among under-represented groups;
- To improve the health and well-being of programme participants;
- To develop capacity and build community participation and cohesion; and
- To establish and support the development of structures to sustain longer term provision for the Community Sport Programme across Northern Ireland.

Following the open application and assessment process, 20 investment awards were made in October 2004. The investment awards to projects covered a range of statutory, voluntary/community organisations and charities and, following project initiation meetings, the recruitment process for the Community Sport Development Officers began, with awards live from the first day of employment²⁹.

²⁹ SNI (2007) Community Sport Programme- End of Year Report, Year 2 (of 3) 2006-2007

The Fit Futures Yoga Programme

The yoga programme began in 2006, with the current funding due to end in June 2008. It is part of a wider programme, Fit Futures which received its funding from SNI in April 2005. Fit Futures is aimed at:

- Young people under 15 to tackle sedentary lifestyles and obesity.
- Utilising sport and physical activity as a vehicle to improve their health and well-being.

Specific projects include:

- Teenage girls programmes
- After schools sports programmes
- Midnight Street Soccer programmes
- Training programmes (First steps for Fit Futures)
- Teenage Mums Healthy Living programme
- Summer Schemes
- Fit Futures Schools Research Programme
- Easter sporting programmes
- Risk Education and Practical Physical Learning programme 4 Young People (REAPPLY)

The programmes are run in partnership with the local community and schools in the area, to maximise the benefits for the young people from the Outer North Neighbourhood Renewal Area (NRA). Before commencing the programme an audit of existing initiatives was carried out and reviewed to ensure complementarity and avoid duplication of existing initiatives.

The Outer North Neighbourhood Partnership Board has been very pro-active, and in partnership with the Fit Futures project is developing a five year integrated Active Lifestyle Strategy for the Outer North NRA. The vision statement and integrated action plan are expected to be finalised by September 2008.

Why yoga?

Consultation with stakeholders revealed the need for an activity based programme targeted at Primary 7 children. The key factors behind choosing yoga included recognition of the need for:

- a programme that was not based around organised sports
- a programme that was accessible to all children
- a programme that did not isolate those children who were concerned about their ability to do sport
- an activity that was fun and enjoyable and would become something that children would turn up at consistently
- an activity that could readily be delivered to whole classes comprising up to 30 children
- an activity that was non - competitive and skills based

A pilot yoga programme started in November 2006 running in two schools for a six week period. A review of the pilot indicated that it had been very well received and that all concerned were keen to see it continue. The programme was then rolled out to all seven primary schools in the Outer North Area, with on average 300 children participating in yoga each week. Seven schools began the programme in 2007. Whilst 6 of the schools began the programme with the primary 7 pupils, one, St Paul's, decided that they had wanted to try the programme with the younger children in the school (ages 5 to 6 year olds) as at that time the primary 7 pupils were involved in other activities. Over several weeks the yoga instructor tailored the yoga programme for the younger children but found that many were too young for the activities. As a result the instructor ended up employing less yoga techniques than he wished to. Following consultation with the school the programme was halted, with the tutor returning to the school in 2008 when the primary 7 pupils had time to engage with the programme.

The yoga programme entails one 30 minute session per week with each class of primary 7s. Each session followed a similar pattern: warm up exercises, yoga postures and finishing with a relaxation exercise.

In delivering each session the yoga instructor explains what he is doing and what parts of the body are affected by the moves he makes. The children are taught how to breathe effectively and how to hold postures. The postures are based on animals, objects or activities that the children can easily relate to such as the lion, the table and knees on elbows. As the children's knowledge of the postures develops over time the instructor then asks the children 'what parts of your body are you using when you do that?' He also uses positive language in talking about each of the postures, with words and phrases such as 'strong, confident, proud' used to enable the children to view what the postures can achieve, what it says about themselves and in turn to improve children's perceptions of themselves so that they then see themselves as 'proud, confident, strong'. The instructor also discusses with the children ways in which they can adapt their knowledge to different situations, for instance using the breathing techniques to cope with stress.

The work with parents and teachers has a similar focus in terms of body awareness, breathing techniques and relaxation but is delivered in a more subtle way than with the children.

Delivery Approach

The overall approach used by the instructor is based on the implementation of the 8 yoga limbs³⁰:

1. YAMA: The moral commandments

(Non violence, truthfulness, non stealing, restraint and religious study, and non covetousness)

2. NIYAMA: The voluntary vows

(Purity, contentment, fortitude, willingness to learn and devotion to one's self to achieve 'yoga' or union)

3. ASANA: Physical postures

³⁰ http://www.ruthwhiteyoga.com/the_eight_limbs_of_yoga.htm

A scientific system of exercise and physical discipline that promotes physical and mental well-being.

4. PRANAYAMA: Breath control

Breathing practises that promote a balanced, less stressed frame of mind.

5. PRATYHARA: Sense withdrawal from the external world into the interior self

The control of mental energy to preserve personal energy.

6. DHARANA: Concentration of mind on a particular point or object

Development of the concentration.

7. DHYANA: Meditation

An uninterrupted flow of concentration, thus correct concentration leads inevitably to meditation.

8. SAMADHI: Self-realisation

Samadhi is the end result of dhyana; when the yogi becomes at one with the universal.

The instructor explains to the children what each of these mean in terms that they can relate to, alongside an overview of the ethos of yoga and its origins. As a result the children learn not only new skills in terms of postures, breathing and relaxation but also gain knowledge on the yoga philosophy in a manner which benefits them.

In this section we have considered the background and reasoning from which the yoga programme developed. We have also presented an overview of the implementation of the programme. In the next section we shall consider the key findings from our consultation with stakeholders and the participants.

HOW I FEEL WHEN I AM DOING YOGA

BY

ADAM MORRISON

STEELSTOWN PRIMARY SCHOOL



SECTION 5 KEY FINDINGS

In this section we consider the key findings from our consultation with all stakeholders. These findings are themed under the key questions as to the effectiveness of yoga in primary schools:

- Does it improve self esteem and confidence in primary 7 children?
- Does it improve concentration in class?
- Does it have cross-curricular benefits i.e. group cohesion, concentration and respect for others?
- Does it impact on reducing childhood obesity?
- Does it promote inclusiveness and a non-competitive environment that enables everyone to take part?
- Does it improve physical fitness, literacy and flexibility?

Whilst this section primarily focuses on the children's element of the programme we shall also, at the end of the section, give some consideration to the work with parents and staff.

Before we begin looking at the key questions, we shall take a brief look at what the children thought of the programme in an overall sense:

- Fun
- Relaxing
- Excellent
- Imaginative

These words were used repeatedly by the children when asked 'what does yoga mean to me'. Even the very small number of children who were not as keen as others on yoga all produced very positive artwork about it during the sessions with the researchers. Only one child out of over 120 wrote negative phrases, such as 'I don't like yoga'.

Self Esteem and Confidence

As outlined in the previous section the approach used by the yoga instructor combined using yoga postures with positive reinforcement of how the children viewed themselves; for instance when doing the lion posture, the instructor employed the phrase “a lion is proud, confident strong...you are proud, confident, strong”.

In relation to the children, the language used, when asked what they thought of yoga both in the art work and in discussions with the researchers, illustrates the impact on their self esteem and confidence:

It makes you feel big

Makes me confident and proud

Don't get bullied as much as used to cos I stand up to them (child)



The non-competitive element of the yoga classes also had a positive impact on confidence:

Kids are very good at figuring out where they are in the 'pecking order' with yoga all get involved on a level playing field so this boosts their confidence (teacher)

If children feel confident then this will undoubtedly have an impact on how they interact with others, (need quote/reference here to back that up), this issue of inclusiveness is one which we shall deal with later in this section in more details.

The instructor's approach, however, goes beyond a simplistic understanding of self esteem and confidence. He also commands their immediate respect in the way in which he relates to them and handles situations, such as over-confidence, with diplomacy and sensitivity:

The boys at that age are starting to get a bit of an attitude – John immediately centres them (principal).



Concentration

Yoga requires concentration, not only to hold the postures but at the same time to remember how to breathe properly. Whilst many of the postures are conducted solo on one mat, the use of activities with one or more classmates, such as the Chinese Dragon, entailed the children working with other classmates and so warranted attention being paid not just to what they themselves were doing but also what their partners were doing and what needed to be done to work together. As noted by one principal “...*work with others increases concentration*”.

Many of those we spoke to commented that in the period after doing a yoga class the children were noticeably more settled than they normally would be. Others in the school, such as the staff in the canteen regularly commented to teachers that they knew when it was ‘yoga day’ as the children’s behaviour was calmer for the rest of that day.



It was evident that for many of those we spoke to concentration had improved in the classroom as a direct result of attending the yoga class:

It helps you concentrate and makes you happy (child)

The kids are calmer, more focused (principal)

It has a very settling effect on the children (principal).

This would undoubtedly have an impact on children's performance in the classroom if they were better able to concentrate more on activities to improve their education and, as we shall discuss below, this also has cross curricular benefits.

Cross Curricular Benefits

The first set of cross curricular benefits that were discussed in consultation sessions with teachers and principals was the aspect relating to group cohesion and respect for others. They had observed both improved teamwork and increased respect amongst the children.

There has been good team work through mirroring each other (principal)

Those who don't normally excel at contact sports show great grace and poise and they and other kids are quite surprised by this (teacher)

One school stated that they had brought in circle time after the yoga class, an initiative normally used for younger children - "*we started doing it after yoga worked so well... they were in the right frame of mind and it was a very levelling experience.*" It was also noted by some that the yoga instructor was able to discuss with the children how aspects of yoga could be used to deal with particular situations such as handling aggression and dealing with stress in a productive manner.

He shows them how to get rid of aggression in a safe way (teacher)

It is very useful when kids are stressed, we used breathing exercises on morning of 11+ exam (teacher)

If people are relaxed and calm they will respond differently to situations (principal)

Principals and teachers also highlighted the links between yoga and the revised curriculum currently being adopted in schools throughout Northern Ireland.

Yoga works well with the revised curriculum... Taking a step back and reflecting (principal)

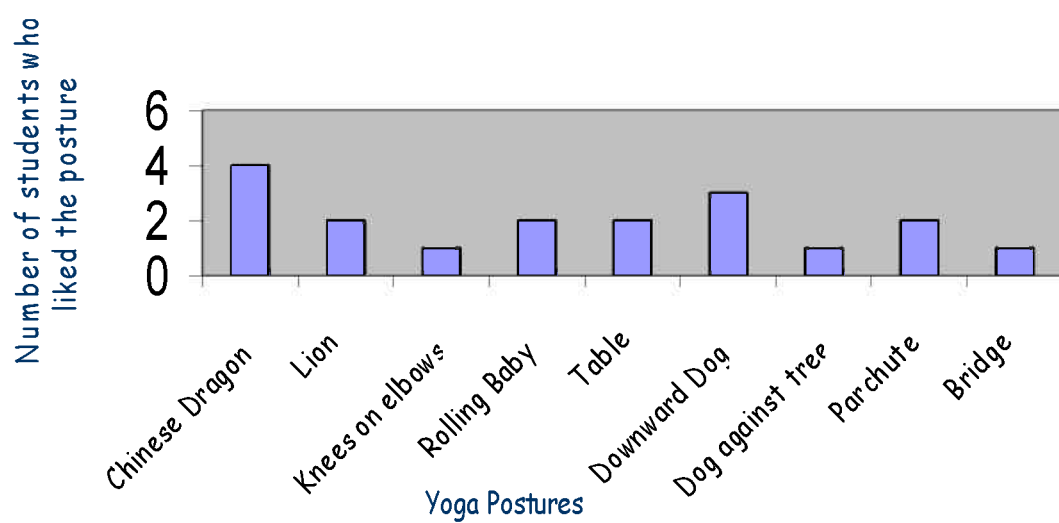
It was evident too that the yoga instructor's approach to teaching the children, incorporating awareness of how the body worked, would benefit them in relation to science topics in school. One school also stated the attendance levels at school increased on the days on which yoga was on offer. This same school also utilised yoga in pupils ICT accreditation work:

The children embarked on a project to photograph each other and as part of their IT accreditation mounted the pictures on reflective backgrounds. The choice of backgrounds was particularly interesting and reflected the feelings or mood that they associated with their yoga experience. They also did a survey of each classes favourite yoga postures... I was in the class when the teacher said we are going to doing a survey - kids all picked up when he said they would be using yoga as the subject (principal).

Examples of work from pupils utilising yoga in school:



Bar Chart Showing Our Favourite Yoga Postures



The yoga instructor has ensured that the programme as a whole is adapted to meet the changing needs of the children, recognising that in their last year of primary school they are facing a transition period as they move on to secondary level education. This ranges from talking about how they might feel when they move from being the senior children in primary to the junior children in their new school, as well as issues about bullying.

I talk to them about how their body language will give off signals about whether they are confident or not, if they will be seen as weak... and I talk to them about my own experiences and how that made me feel.

Childhood Obesity

This, along with self esteem, was the issue which some of those we consulted with were hesitant to comment on. They felt that in the absence of a monitoring system to note related information on each pupil at the start of the programme, and to measure this again at the end, it was difficult to say if any impact on this index had been achieved. Indeed one principal went as far as stating *“its obvious that these objectives were not written by an educationalist”* and one of the teacher commented *“its been running less than a year, it’s too early to say”*.

Even with these reservations stakeholders could see how the programme could contribute to reducing childhood obesity:

It encourages a healthy lifestyle and gives the less active kids an option (teacher)

You would need to measure this at the start... but I can say that the children...they are more motivated to take part in yoga than in other activities, and it has created enthusiasm (principal)

With obesity we would expect the impact to be seen over a longer term but yes we have examples of children who are overweight who are becoming more active thanks to yoga – we have one child who is not interested in PE or swimming but they can do yoga (principal).

One principal also commented that obesity was less of a problem among current P7s when compared to younger children in the school

I am not worried so much about the P7s, we maybe have 1 or 2 who are overweight, but if you look for instance at the P3s we have some children who are so overweight they can't sit on the floor, they can't sit and cross their legs (principal).

Inclusiveness

Inherent within the yoga approach is that it is inclusive, that it is not competitive and it is this phrase 'not competitive' which the children used repeatedly when asked what yoga meant to them and an issue which teachers and principals also concurred with. Many of the stakeholders we spoke to highlighted the need for non-competitive activities in the school to counteract competition with the school environment and society as a whole.

Participative activities can be equally enjoyable and beneficial to health which doesn't have to have a competitive angle, which can re-inforce popularity and unpopularity with children" (teacher)

You try your best, you can't go wrong, not like PE (child)

You don't have to be fast or strong (child)

Its not challenging - in other sports there is competition – PE is too competitive (child)

It is very inclusive – it levels out the playing field for some kids (principal)

We have one child who has not engaged with anything, at the start she was not interested in yoga but now she's there every week (teacher)

In some classes you have a child who turned 11 in the October of the previous year and another who is not 11 'til the June... there can be huge

differences in their developmental abilities... and yoga copes with that so well (stakeholder)

It gives kids who are not good at PE a chance. Not the attitude of 'it was my fault our team lost' (teacher)



Aside from a very small number of children with severe ADHD, yoga was viewed as an accessible activity, which all children could take part in:

We have three SEN kids - all take part equally (principal)

We have one child who has faced many challenges, she is very aware of her limitations, in the class John makes her feel like a star, I am not sure when else in her life she will get to feel like a star (teacher)

Teachers and principals frequently noted that very few of the children forgot to bring in their PE gear on yoga day, an issue which often impacted on regular PE days.

When asked if they would recommend yoga to a child who had just joined their class, all of those children we consulted with replied with a resounding 'yes'. The explanations they offered included:

It helps you fit in with everyone else

It will help you make friends

It will help you if you are feeling a bit nervous or stressed 'cos you are in a new school.

Physical Fitness, Literacy and Flexibility

In the views of the children yoga made them feel “*energetic, flexible*” and kept them fit. Some also commented that it helped their co-ordination. Changes were also noted by the teachers:

We had some in class who couldn't balance at all – but now they can (teacher)

Gives the boys flexibility for football (teacher).

One principal pointed out that any new skills would impact on physical literacy “... *as long as they doing it consistently it will impact on their fitness levels*”. This was a view echoed by others who commented that skills developed only when the children were allowed sufficient time to learn and practise new movements. Another commented:

It is the most innovative initiative we have seen in years, and in schools we are used to seeing a lot of initiatives, it had the teachers energised and the kids too (principal).

When asked ‘how is yoga different to PE?’ typical responses from the children were:

PE is chaotic..... mad. Yoga is fun and relaxing

You have your own space in yoga

You don't be tired after yoga

You do more exercise in yoga than PE

Yoga benefits you even when you are not doing it

PE is far better – yoga..... you are doing the same thing.

The last comment above, from a child, was one of the very few comments about the programme that might be regarded as negative. It was made by a child whose main sporting interest was football, he also stated that yoga was too slow. The very few who did not like yoga tended to also state that this was their main reason for disliking it.

Transferring the Learning

During the consultation sessions with the children we also addressed the theme of using yoga outside the yoga class. The children provided numerous examples of how they are able to adopt their yoga skills into a variety of other situations. These included:

When I was car sick I just sat and thought about the butterfly and I was ok

When I get home from school it helps me relax

When you are out playing and ones start looking for a fight, I just walk away and use the breathing so I don't get frustrated

When playing games outside I use yoga to get more confident

When my wee sister is annoying me and my mum tells me to take a chill pill, that is when I use my yoga, to help chill me out

I think it really helped me when I was doing the 11Plus

Go on Wii – game there does yoga and so I get to practice at home

If scared or nervous it calms you down.

All of these examples are evidence of the children learning new skills and being able to adapt them to a variety of situations. Again the role of the yoga instructor has been key – in directing the children to think about how yoga is useful in a range of aspects in their life.

Yoga Instructor

As detailed in the previous section the approach used in the yoga programme entailed a combination of yoga postures, visualisation, positive reinforcement, body awareness and breathing techniques.

The yoga instructor adapted approaches used to work with adults to ensure that the children could relate to both the postures they were being asked to do and could apply them to situations outside the yoga class.

From discussions with the yoga instructor it is evident that he is a very committed individual and very motivated to help get the message of yoga across to the children. Whilst he repeatedly emphasises that the success of the programme is due to yoga, undoubtedly his approach has had a significant impact on the children:

Brilliant attitude with the kids, he gets their automatic respect (teacher)

He rocks (child)

He is very in-tune with the kids, picks up when one feeling bit low, makes sure they are ok (teacher)

John is a great male role model, works against that image of yoga being for middle aged women (principal)

Having John is an added bonus, he has great empathy with them (principal).

Challenges

The only challenge noted in running the yoga programme in school was finding a suitable room. In some schools for instance the only available space was the multi-use assembly hall. This meant co-ordinating timetables to ensure the hall was available during times in which the instructor was also available.

In relation to expanding the programme to other years in the school two potential hurdles were identified: accessing a yoga teacher who can relate to the children and programme costs. One principal commented that whilst the school had been able to source another provider for junior classes, the costs were prohibitive. This also was raised by DCC who commented that whilst the hourly rate for a yoga instructor was high “the benefits far outweigh the costs”.

Parents and Staff Programme

One school in the programme, having run the programme last year with pupils, accessed funding from the Extended Schools programme to fund a course directed at staff and parents. The principal stated that, following the success of the children’s programme, she was keen to see some support offered to teachers and parents, both of whom were in stressful situations educating and raising children. The comments from the parents below illustrate the impact not only in health terms but also in family relationships and personal well-being:

Feel mentally more fit

Feel more agile

Taught me how to breathe

It gave me time for my body, I don’t have any space in life for me to do that

It helps me stop getting stressed with the kids, I stop and think now and try to remember how I feel when I am at yoga, when I see the swimming bag

lying in the hall... I don't yell at the kids to get it lifted, I ask them in a calm, measured manner, that feeling I have when I have done yoga, I try and replicate that feeling through the week, it leaves me feeling so calm, you see things differently then.

These views provide an illustration of the potential benefits of yoga to the wider family environment and suggest that it would be beneficial to consider including yoga within a parent support programme in schools.

The one member of staff from the programme who took part in the evaluation also spoke highly of its benefits and commented on yoga's ability to help deal with stress and allow participants some quality time for themselves.

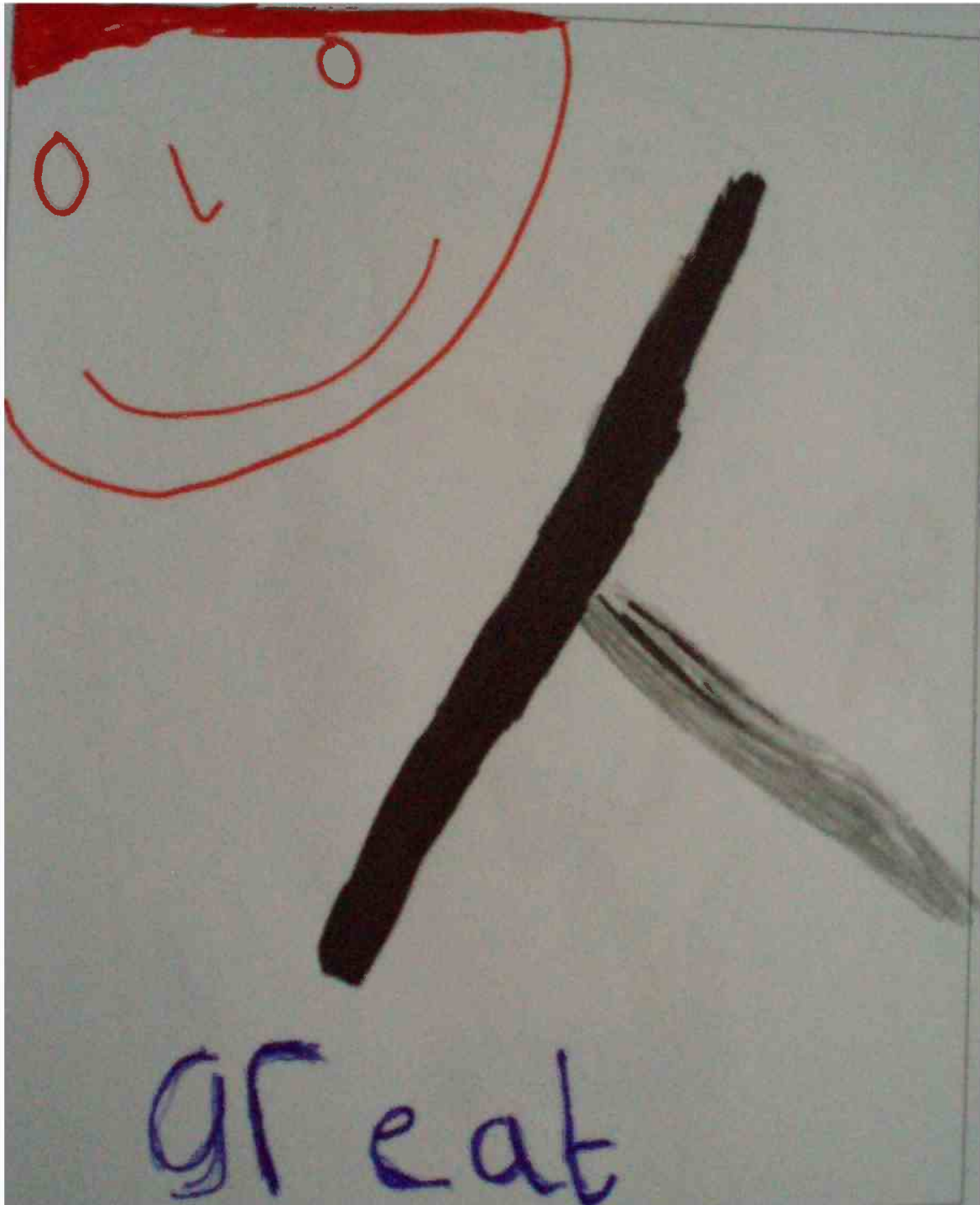
Within this section we have heard from the range of stakeholders and from the children themselves on the impact of the yoga programme. It is evident that it has been a significant success and as we shall discuss in the following section, has the potential to impact significantly on the personal and social well-being of the children and parents.

HOW I FEEL WHEN I AM DOING YOGA

BY

SHANE STOKES

ST THÉRÈSE PRIMARY SCHOOL



SECTION 6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In approaching our conclusions we have taken into account the overall Terms of Reference for the evaluation, as detailed in the project specification.

The objectives of the evaluation were to consider the following questions in relation to the Fit Futures Schools Yoga Programme:

- Does it improve self esteem and confidence in primary 7 children?
- Does it improve concentration in class?
- Does it have cross-curricular benefits i.e. group cohesion, concentration and respect for others?
- Does it impact on reducing childhood obesity?
- Does it promote inclusiveness and a non-competitive environment that enables everyone to take part?
- Does it improve physical fitness, literacy and flexibility?

Before we begin considering the impact it is important to note that one of schools included in the research had only been running the yoga programme for a short time before the research was conducted. Whilst this made it difficult to measure the medium term impact of the programme the staff at the school had already witnessed the positive impact of the programme on the children.

Taking each of the key questions above we shall consider on the basis of the evidence provided if the desired impact has been achieved:

Does it improve self esteem and confidence in primary 7 children?

The overwhelming evidence gathered for this assignment indicates that self esteem and confidence have improved for children. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this study to quantify the increase, the testimonials from teachers and principals suggests that for some of the most vulnerable children the impact has been significant.

Does it improve concentration in class?

The concentration required to perform some of the yoga postures and the frequent use of the terms 'settled' and 'calm' to describe how the children behaved after a yoga class, are all enabling factors to improve concentration in class. Principals and teachers, and the children themselves, could all identify improved concentration as a direct impact of doing yoga.

Does it have cross-curricular benefits i.e. group cohesion, concentration and respect for others?

The cross curricular benefits are largely related to the impact in terms of inclusivity and self esteem; group cohesion has improved as the children worked as a team on certain poses; the non-competitive element allowed the children to take part without judging who was better; and finally the children were able to use yoga to improve skills in the classroom such as IT.

Does it impact on reducing childhood obesity?

The views of those consulted for this evaluation suggest that the programme has not, as yet, had any significant direct impact on childhood obesity. The reasons for this are varied, firstly the age range, 10 to 11 year olds, do not appear to exhibit the same levels of obesity as younger children in the school. Secondly, given the length of time that the programme has been operating, this is too ambitious an expectation. Given these considerations however, the evidence certainly points to yoga being able to create an environment in which healthy lifestyles are encouraged, energising the children to become more active.

Does it promote inclusiveness and a non-competitive environment that enables everyone to take part?

The yoga programme has been hugely successful in creating an environment in which inclusivity is paramount. All those consulted were confident that yoga had delivered an activity accessible to children of all abilities and developmental ages. This in turn had seen benefits in how the children saw each other and as a result this impacted on their own self esteem and confidence.

Does it improve physical fitness, literacy and flexibility?

Children, teachers and principals all commented that participation in yoga had improved children's physical literacy. As noted previously this included the children feeling "*energetic and flexible*" and improved their co-ordination.

Added Value

As noted in the previous section this programme has also seen learning transferred to both the classroom and life at home. The children have adapted their skills to deal with stress, to help them feel more confident and to become fitter.

In addition, the work with parents suggests that yoga has helped parents have some 'me' time and to respond in a calmer manner to the pressures of family life. Whilst the evidence is based on the views of two mothers, their experiences suggest that extending the programme to parents should be given due consideration. The fact that one of the parents described being provided with the opportunity to do yoga as 'a present someone has given me' is an indication of how worthwhile the activity has been for the parents and indirectly their families, which will undoubtedly benefit from having a parent whose well-being has improved.

In reflecting on the impact of the programme, the quote used by Teresa Bradley in a workshop to interested stakeholders in June 2008, sums up well what it has achieved:

When we initiated this project we were trying to find an accessible physical activity that would address issues of obesity and improve the well-being of all children, we had not anticipated the significant impact on mental well-being that we have seen subsequently.

The yoga programme is teaching young children that if you are not interested in an organised sport you can still engage in physical activity. It gives children the motivation to continue with physical activity - a motivation founded on the self confidence and self realisation that they have experienced in the schools yoga programme.

The strongest advocates of the programme are the children themselves, as demonstrated in examples of their artwork throughout this report and the staff in the schools:

I can't tell you how much it has done, it's hard to find the words, it's been overwhelming (teacher)

The whole child is benefitting (principal).

Context

In sections 3 and 4 of this report we considered in detail the policy, strategic and general context under which the yoga programme was created and developed. It is evident from the review of key documents that Government has recognised the need to encourage those who do not regularly take part in sport and physical activity to do so. Research points to not only the physical and mental benefits of this but also the social benefits. It is within this context that this yoga programme developed. As discussed above the yoga programme has been very successful not only in making physical activity very accessible and inclusive but also in impacting on the mental well-being of the children. The extent to which this has happened and the extent to which it can be maintained clearly warrants further research, an issue which we shall detail below in the recommendations.

The key learning points derived from this evaluation are as follows:-

- Yoga can be delivered to whole class groups as an inclusive and non-competitive activity
- The approach of the instructor is key in being able to empathise with the children
- The physical aspect of the programme, coupled with positive enforcement in terms of language used by the instructor, was core to its success
- The impact on self esteem and confidence was considerable
- Mental well-being is further improved through the programme being able help children manage their emotions

- The programme has the potential to impact on childhood obesity by increasing children's interest in being physically active
- Cross curricular benefits are achievable as well as learning transferred outside of the classroom
- The programme has the potential to be beneficial for staff and parents.

Recommendations

In considering all the evidence gathered for this evaluation we wish to make the following recommendations:

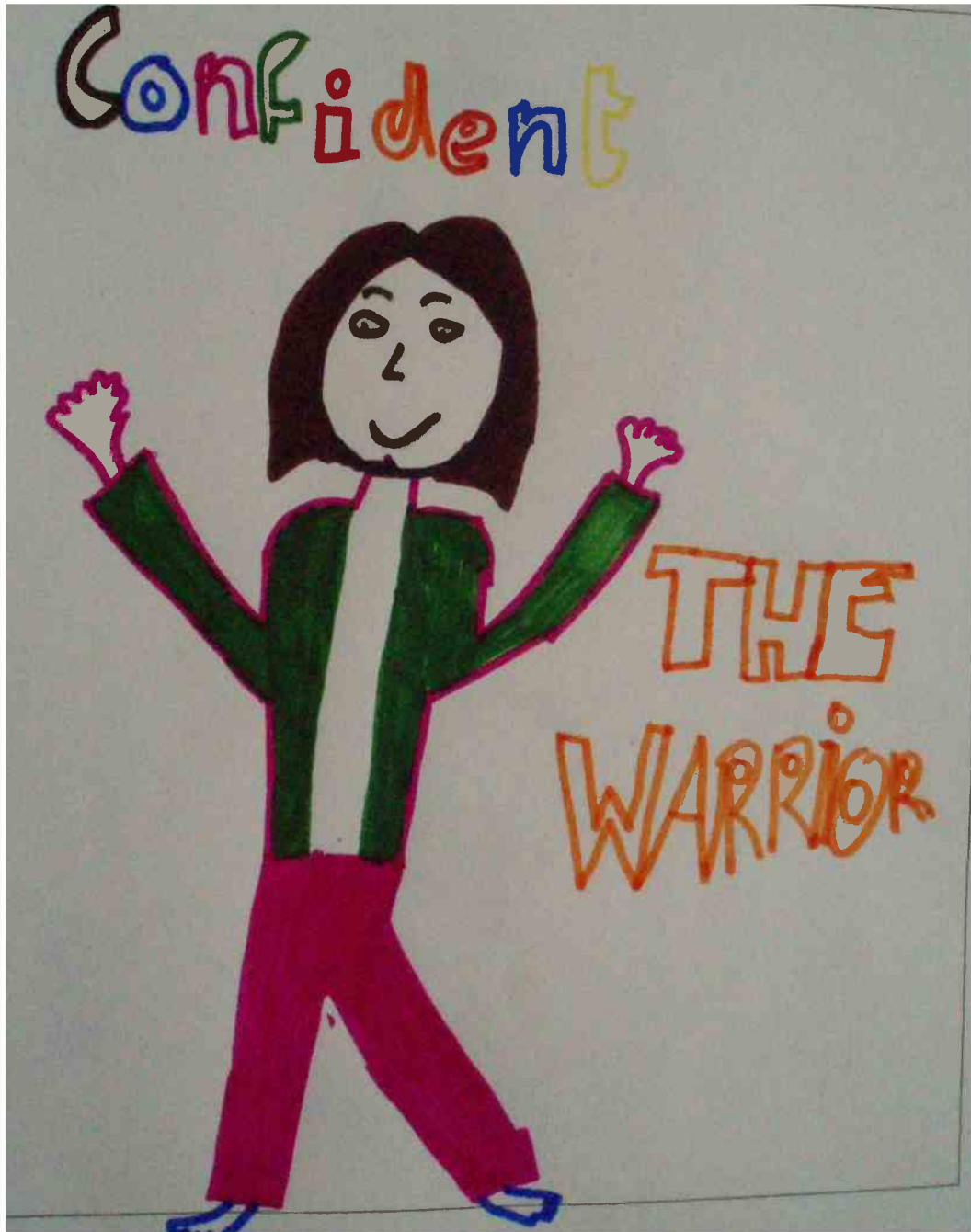
1. Funding should be sought for a research study which could measure, on a before/after basis, the impact on children participating in a yoga programme. We would recommend that this is applied over a full school year and should incorporate a control group of non-participants. Consultation on the design of this study should entail engaging with children and principals / teachers to ensure relevancy of indices to be measured. We would suggest that both DCAL and DENI should be asked to fund the research as it fits with both areas of interest.
2. Consideration should be given to offering the programme to other age ranges. Some stakeholders have suggested rolling out the programme from P1 onwards, others from P5 onwards.
3. Consideration should be given to offering the programme to parents as part of a parent support programme.
4. Information on alternative funding sources should be provided to schools / clusters of schools to allow them to expand the programme as needed.
5. Consideration should be given to assessing what yoga techniques could be adopted in the classroom by teachers, such as breathing techniques to deal with stress. In this instance, capacity building training should be offered to teachers to enable them to offer reminders to the children to help maintain the benefits of yoga. This model has been used in the RYE (Research on Yoga in Education) programme which intersperses short and simple techniques throughout the school day.
6. The findings of this evaluation should be disseminated widely, in particular to stakeholders such as DCAL, the Western Education and Library Board and DENI.

HOW I FEEL WHEN I AM DOING YOGA

BY

KAREY-ANN CONDREN

ST THÉRÈSE PRIMARY SCHOOL



APPENDIX 1

FIT FUTURES YOGA SCHOOLS PROGRAMME

Stakeholder/ Principal / Teacher Questions

1. When did you become involved in the programme and why?
2. Has the programme met its aims and objectives? To what extent has it had a positive impact on the following:

| | Extent of impact | Give examples, provide evidence |
|--|------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. self-esteem and confidence | | |
| 2. cross-curricular benefits i.e. group cohesion, concentration and respect for others | | |
| 3. educational attainment and concentration in class | | |
| 4. childhood obesity | | |
| 5. physical health - physical fitness, literacy and flexibility | | |

3. Has the programme been able to promote inclusiveness in a non-competitive environment that enables everyone to take part? Please explain
4. What challenges has the programme faced? How were these challenges dealt with?
5. Do you think there is a continued need for the programme? If so why?
6. Have you any recommendations/changes for future programmes?

7. Do you have any final comments to add?

Thank you for your time and co-operation

FIT FUTURES YOGA SCHOOLS PROGRAMME

Group Questions for Children

Hello, my name is Fiona/ Kellie and today I want to ask you about what it is like doing yoga.

First I want to get you to do some art work for me. Take a sheet, write your name and school on it and then draw me a picture about how you feel when you are doing yoga (see separate sheet). I will select some of the pictures to put in my report about the yoga programme. You can do a picture of just your face showing how you feel or do one of your whole self whenever you are doing yoga—whatever you prefer. Draw the picture in the box. I will give you 15 minutes to do that and then we can have a chat about yoga and what you think of it. Remember this is about how you feel when you are doing yoga?

(Allow 15 minutes for this)

Now I want to talk to you about yoga. I have a few questions to ask. I would like everyone to get a chance to talk but I can't make sense of what you are saying if everyone talks at once so it would be good if we could take turns and not talk when someone else is talking. Is that ok?

When you are talking I am going to take some notes but I will not write your names in the notes – so that what you tell me today is anonymous – that means whatever you say today no-one will know that it was you that said it when I write the report. So you can be honest with me about what you think of yoga.

I then type up the notes on my computer. Then me and Kellie/ Fiona who I work with will look at the notes and write a summary of them. We talk to other people too and put all that information in a report. The report tells the story of what you and the other people thought of the yoga programme. The report then goes to Sport NI, who gave the money for the programme, to the school and to the Council who looked after the programme.

Does all that make sense? Do you have any questions for me?

Ok let's begin ...

1. When did you start doing yoga?
2. In the pictures you did a drawing of how you felt doing yoga ...
tell me in words what the picture is about?
3. Is doing yoga different than doing PE? Why is it different?
4. Do you play any sports when you are not at school? If yes is
doing yoga different than doing these sports? Why is it
different?
5. Would you advise a friend to do yoga? Why?
6. What is the best thing about doing yoga?

Thank you so much for your time and for the drawings. I will ask Teresa Bradley who runs the programme to make sure your school gets a copy of the report so that you can see the artwork in it and what you said about the yoga programme.

Fit Futures Yoga Schools Programme

Name _____

School _____

When I am doing yoga this is how I feel

