

HOMEWORK KEEPS KIDS AND PARENTS HEALTHY

A homework programme that encourages children to be active and eat well at home is being trialled by AUT University as a new approach to addressing the prevalence of serious yet avoidable health disorders such as obesity and type II diabetes.

Dr Scott Duncan, from AUT's Centre for Physical Activity and Nutrition Research, says that physical activity and good nutrition in children are key priorities for New Zealand's health and education sectors.

While most health promotion interventions in young people focus on the school setting, evidence suggests that children are less active and have greater access to energy-dense foods outside of school.

"Healthy Homework is a novel initiative that teaches children the benefits of being active and eating well as a family," says Dr Duncan.

Funded by the Health Research Council, Healthy Homework takes the form of a six-week homework module accompanied by in-class teaching resources. Each week the children must complete at least one of three physical activity options and one of three nutritional options given to them in their homework booklets.

Emphasis is placed on 'doing' by combining education

elements with practical tasks such as active games, simple exercises, and healthy cooking activities.

As with conventional homework, students are required to complete the allocated tasks and report back to their teacher.

Coloured wristbands are provided as incentives to those who complete their tasks each week and a final wrap-up session, where children get to talk about their favourite aspects of the Healthy Homework programme, brings the course to a close.

Four classes of children aged 9-10 years from Browns Bay School (located on Auckland's North Shore) and Mangere Central School (located in South Auckland) are participating in the pilot.

"Healthy Homework provides schools with resources that support children learning about the lifelong benefits of regular activity and healthy eating," says Dr Duncan.

"The results of this pilot study will enable us to develop Healthy Homework into a comprehensive programme that can be offered to other primary schools around New Zealand."

Scott Duncan is also the recipient of the Vice-Chancellor's 2009 Emerging Researcher Award which is awarded for excellence in the area of research.



Browns Bay School Children participating in the programme; Finn Owen & Zander Paulsen

AGED CARE FOCUS FOR NURSING SCHOLARSHIP



Nursing student Holly Parmenter

Attracting new blood into aged care health roles is the focus of a new scholarship being offered to AUT University nursing students.

Oceania Group chief executive Geoff Hipkins says the scholarship is part of a wider commitment to aged care and to developing a workforce that exceeds the expectations of residents in the organisation's care.

National training manager Mike Knowles says aged care is often overlooked but it is a vital nursing role and one which "puts the care back into nursing".

"Aged care is an area of nursing that doesn't often get new blood and yet it presents an opportunity to apply a unique spread of nursing skills."

"By aligning with AUT, we are able to work with these nursing students and graduates to train them and offer them a long-term career path."

AUT Bachelor of Health Sciences third-year student Holly Parmenter is the first to receive the \$3000 cash scholarship and job placement with Oceania Group.

"Gerontology or elder care is where I want to work. It is such an important area of healthcare and yet it is an area where sadly the quality of care can fall short."

"The scholarship provides a guaranteed job and a great start for my career. I am going to use the time with Oceania to learn as much as I can, to get as much experience as I can - I'll be a human sponge."

Parmenter will begin working in one of the Oceania Group homes next year, but she has not decided which one. Oceania has 63 sites throughout New Zealand, including the North Shore, and employs around 3400 staff.

Oceania Group is offering six scholarships in 2009 for nursing students and graduates and will continue to build on the initiative next year, opening the programme to students through year one to year three of their studies.

When I was a child my mother bought a corner dairy. A kid's dream - ice cream, lollies and fizzy drinks on tap! I put on weight. Today New Zealanders live in the midst of their own dairy - within easy reach of relatively inexpensive high calorie foods and beverages.

Over 30% of New Zealand children are overweight or obese - and weight keeps piling on during teen and adult years. The adverse health impacts are multiple. Obesity is a major driver of health inequalities. Obesity-related morbidity has the potential to overwhelm already strained health services. AUT North Shore academics are at the forefront of research to stop this happening. Professor Elaine Rush hit the media spotlight with research suggesting children would have to walk an extra 150 minutes a day to get the average weight back to where it was 30 years ago. The alternative - cut daily intake by 350 calories - equal to a can of fizzy drink and a chocolate bar. While there is debate about the relative importance of input and output sides of the equation, measures to address both clearly have a place and it is generally better to keep weight off in the first place. Dr Scott Duncan's research is profiled in this edition. It extends work in schools to create healthier food environments by including homework to encourage increased activity and improved nutrition at home. While there is no simple fix to the obesity epidemic the effects of measures such as this, if widely introduced, have potential to combine synergistically to make a positive difference. This will require Government leadership and active support from the health sector.

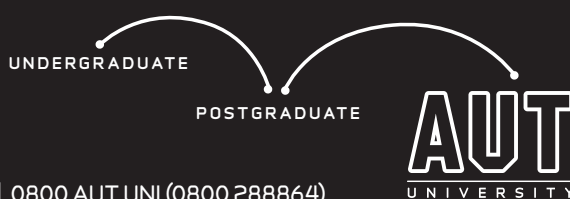
Max Abbott, Pro Vice-Chancellor, North Shore



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