



National Health
Promotion Program

Building a connection with a school community

By Dr Roxanne Daniels, Healthy Spines Team Leader, Victoria



Dr Roxanne Daniels

I am excited to be part of the Healthy Spines National Health Promotion Program. Our team members are teaching young people why their spines are important and how to take care of their spines, indirectly bringing awareness of chiropractic to students all over Australia.

I presented to the Grade 5 students of my local primary school last year and will do so again this year and intend do so again next year and the year after that . . . Repeat visits to the same school create a school community awareness of spinal health. Follow up surveys report that teachers, students and even the chiropractors themselves made changes as a result of the program. In some cases school policies for supporting good spinal health were developed. The contact teacher at my school was of one of many who commented that there was an increased awareness by students after the program of their actions to support good health, such as moving their chairs rather than twisting to see the blackboard. I think that's awesome!

I ran the program over six weeks and visited each class three times. The visits lasted about an hour. In the first session we keep the model spine hidden until we are ready to reveal our theatrical trump card. It may be part of the furniture in your clinic but it is a showstopper in the classroom. My first session went into overtime with enthusiastic questions from the students. This even translated into some new patients for my clinic, but I was there for the buzz of children learning about their spine and nervous system. The patients were a bonus and are definitely not the focus of the Healthy Spines Program.

This is an interactive program, much more interesting than learning anatomy at PIT or RMIT. The students get to play with pipe cleaners, lego or straws to create spines. Can you guess what would make the best spinal column? If you choose to do this program next year, Kathleen Stacey, the program consultant working in conjunction with the CAA, will let you sit on the floor in groups and have a turn too. We play other games as well, handy for dissipating the high energy of a class or waking up a sleepy class. All these tips make for a much smoother and professional

presentation and that translates into a fun and memorable experience for the children.

The grand finale of the program is a media blitz where the students create skits, songs or posters on spinal health promotion. My classes came up with tried and true messages such as: 'Don't tip chairs' and 'Heavy lifting is bad for your spine' and they managed to combine a few campaigns such as 'Exercise, stretch & eat well to look after your spine', 'Don't litter, as this may cause people to trip and injure their spines' and 'Bullies may injure you'. We try to encourage the children to not just think about their personal actions, but also about how the school environment and policies can support them to have good spinal health. Some of these ads were hilarious and ideally are given a second airing at school assembly. They are definitely a talking point at home.

Overall, post-program surveys by parents were positive about the program and many parents wanted to know more and learn how they could support their child's health knowledge and skills. The Healthy Spines Program provides information that increases individual's knowledge and influences their behaviours, and assists schools in creating environments that support good spinal health in childhood.

This is an opportunity too good to ignore – our chance to establish chiropractors as spinal health experts in a whole generation, assisting in reducing the prevalence, severity and frequency of later spinal problems. This health promotion program is so good that teachers want us to come to them and my dream is to have this program running in every school in our country. If you decide to take part, then that becomes more possible to achieve.

For information on how to get involved in the Healthy Spines Program contact Leanne Jenkins at the CAA National Office: nhq@caa.asn.au or 02 4731 8011. More information on Healthy Spines is available at www.healthyspines.com.au where you can download copies of the 2005 Evaluation Report from the Healthy Spines Research section.