

'Stepping into health promotion' – reflections on the Healthy Spines training program

By Dr Bronwyn Lakay

I did the 'Stepping into health promotion' training program in 2006 to qualify as a Healthy Spines Program Team Member. The Healthy Spines National Health Promotion Program is a professional, proficiently organised and easily applicable health promotion program. It is a fantastic initiative that enables chiropractors to be actively involved with promoting spinal health in primary schools.

In the program I learnt that there was so much more to health promotion than just educating. Policy making and environmental assessment of the needs and requirements of the community at large are essential for health promotion to be successful and effective. We learnt all about this in the training program and then went into the practical application of teaching primary school students and working with teachers.

Toward the end of the training program there are role play exercises. These are designed to prepare us for the possible scenarios we may experience in our liaison with school principals, teachers and other key contacts in the schools that we approach. Kathleen Stacey, who presents the training program along with Dr Paula Stacey-Thomas who co-runs two sessions within it, led the role play exercises. Paula role plays different styles of principal such as a nonchalant principal or enthusiastic or interrogative principals. See photos 1 and 3.

As a training participant, you get to pretend you are a qualified Healthy Spines Program Team Member and are meeting with the principal for the first time to discuss the program and ascertain if the school wants to be involved. See photos 2 and 4. However, you can take your 'buddy' with you to debrief with and get reflections and ideas for your role, as the role play is paused on several occasions. See photo 5.

Kathleen is there to support everyone in the role play, provide guidance on working within a school situation and help us connect what we are doing in the areas covered in the training sessions. She asks us to reflect on how we are going and to also take the opportunity to try something again. See photo 6. Paula also provides guidance based on her experience with running the program in schools and developing partnerships with principals and teachers. See photo 8.



Dr Paula Stacey-Thomas



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We also discuss with the other group members who are watching the role play, how we handled the situation and how we could do it differently or better. **See photo 7.** They don't just observe though, because there is time for several people to be involved in the role play, as two sessions are now devoted to doing this sort of direct practice. Other role play scenarios include:

- meeting with the teachers;
- running a school-community meeting and talking to parents, staff or other interested community members; and
- running the classroom sessions with the students.

I found the practical role-playing opportunities indispensable. They ensured that I was familiar with the program, its goals and how to deal with potential challenges that may arise in communication with some people or from being in the classroom situation. Participation in the role plays was both challenging and fun and helped me feel more prepared and confident when approaching the school, as well as discussing the program with the parents and other community members at a community meeting.

Having become involved in a school, it is great to have the support of the school staff. The kids are enthusiastic to participate in the program and their interest in my visits has been encouraging. Interaction with the students is fun, fulfilling and rewarding and a fantastic way for chiropractors to contribute to our community and, more importantly, an opportunity to make a difference in children's lives!! I encourage everyone to undergo the training, whether you decide to get actively involved in a school or not.

NOTE: If you want the CE points you must do the training AND run the Healthy Spines program in a school.



For information on how to get involved in the Healthy Spines Program contact Leanne Jenkins or Jodi Millen at the CAANational Office: nhq@caa.asn.au or 02 4731 8011. More information on Healthy Spines is available at www.healthyspines.com.au. You can download copies of the 2004 and 2005 Evaluation Reports from the Healthy Spines Research section for a more detailed description of the evaluation outcomes of the program so far.