



National Health
Promotion Program



Marita Smith

Representing something bigger than yourself – my Healthy Spines experience

By Marita Smith

When I heard Kathleen and Paula speak about Healthy Spines at the National Conference in Hobart, I knew that this was just what I was looking for. I had been teaching obstetrics and gynaecology to final year chiropractic and osteopathic students for nine years and had reached the point where my own family commitments were requiring more of my time. The Healthy Spines Program gave me an alternate focus for teaching. My children are in primary school and it was very appealing to be involved in educating them and their age group about how to care for their spines from an early age. It just seemed to make a lot of sense to help children gain some knowledge of their spines and how to care for their health. This, I feel, will lead to having better informed patients with less drastic problems in the longer term. This is an indirect benefit to us all as health professionals.

I am also proud to be a member of a profession that has taken an initiative in this area of responsibility. The fact that this is



Marita Smith with her son William.

not self promotion or even chiropractic promotion makes it an easy thing for me to do. In a way, it removes a sense of embarrassment by de-personalising the process. You are representing something bigger than yourself, that I believe our profession is unique in offering.

Whilst doing the training, the idea of being in the classroom with the children is quite daunting. However, to help prepare for the task, role playing is included in the comprehensive training program to help get you ready for various scenarios – even the most “rascally” of children don’t distract and interrupt as often and as badly as Kathleen and our colleagues do during the role plays! Of course, you always have the teachers with you who know and love these children and help to pull them into line if necessary.

By far the most difficult aspect of the Healthy Spines Program is the homework you need to complete for the training program – a rude awakening for some of us chiropractors who usually attend the seminars, sign in and that’s it! There is take-home work that Kathleen expects to be completed and on time! Tricky with our busy lives! However, it is crucial in terms of our preparation to ensure we understand what we are doing and why.

My first class was one that my eldest son is in. He was well primed beforehand ie “This is part of Mum’s work and so you need to think of me as a chiropractor and not Mum and behave really well”. He did behave very well and this included critiquing me afterwards, concluding with “You did really well. No-one else’s parents could have done that”. (There are no other chiropractors who are parents of students in his class.) You need to know William to realise that compliments are not too freely given and so they are well appreciated when they do come.

The sessions in the classroom were really enjoyable. The concepts and ideas for the final activity – a Media Blitz – were fantastic. In 10 to 15 minutes various groups came up with skits such as a “take-off” of popular advertisements and the production of invented groovy songs. One group of girls made up a rhyme saying, “Are You Carrying Your Back-Pack Right?” with actions to match.

This year the Grade Prep teachers asked me to speak to the new students about how and why to carry their back-packs correctly. The girls who made up the song with actions last year came in and performed their skit for the Prep children, which went down very well. This was a great follow on from the Healthy Spines Program.

It seems that when you have successfully completed the Healthy Spines Program well at your first school, this can be a stepping-stone for lining up your next school. In my case, the mother of one of the students was a teacher at a school in the next suburb. She was impressed by what her son brought home from the program and thought it would go well at her school. She had already introduced the idea at a staff meeting before I

contacted the principal. The local school principals also meet fairly regularly, so they can also be good referees.

In conclusion I would recommend that if you are at all interested that it is highly likely you would enjoy participating in the Healthy Spines Program. I have certainly found it to be fun work.

For more information on how to get involved in the Healthy Spines Program contact Leanne Jenkins (projects@caa.com.au) or Denise Nixon (nhq@caa.asn.au) at the CAA National Office or ring 02 4731 8011. More information on Healthy Spines is available at www.healthyspines.com.au where you can download copies of the 2006 Evaluation Report from the Healthy Spines Research section.