



Kathleen Stacey

What do school staff think of the Healthy Spines program?

By Kathleen Stacey, National Program Consultant

In last month's article I said I would write a two-part series on three sites of change that result from Healthy Spines programs: individual students, whole classes of students together with their teachers, and the whole school. I have decided to make this a three part series, by including this article where you hear directly from school staff that participate in and support Healthy Spines by working with a Program Team Member in their class.

There have been 196 school staff, teachers and principals involved in Healthy Spines to date. Here are two vignettes drawn from staff interviews for the 2007 Healthy Spines program. One is from a 'first-time school' in Victoria while the other is from a 'repeat school' in NSW. All questions and responses cannot be included due to space, but I hope you enjoy their reflections.

1. What was your opinion of the classroom program?

First time school: It was very well prepared, well structured, well organised. It didn't place too many time demands on the school staff, producing maximum results with minimised preparation. It fits in well and complements other topics in the school curriculum, like the dietary series run by the local health service.

Repeat school: It was just as good as last year. The school really values the program and how it fits into the curriculum.

2. What impact has the program had on the students in your class?

First time school: The students are more knowledgeable and confidently able to recite several healthy and non-healthy spinal habits. They clearly enjoyed the program, and I noticed one student in particular, correcting their sibling in the corridor for having poor posture! The class as a whole have shown initiative when it comes to sitting correctly and having regular breaks. There is a greater awareness amongst the students, seen as they prompt one another with the information they obtained during the visits. The computers in the classroom are the site of most evidence.

Repeat school: The ways they are sitting in their chairs and on the floor have improved. Some of the kids have told each other to turn their chairs around to face the board so as not to sit with twisted necks.

3. What impact has the program had on you as a teacher?

First time school: Overall, the program and its content are very important, with knowledge and skills taught that impacts on health as adults. The school does incorporate a lot of health topics in its curriculum already, and the addition of the Healthy Spines content complements this, and broadens our focus. I certainly gained knowledge and sit up straighter – especially when I know you are paying attention to my posture! Overall it is a great program that empowers teachers and students to look after their spines. I have enjoyed telling other teachers about the program and they are hoping to have the same opportunities at a later date. I am honoured that our school was approached for the program.

Repeat school: I am more conscious, more aware of how the children's spines can be affected. We have become a bit fussier with telling the children to turn their chairs and sitting up tall. We've also started having less floor time and more time in chairs. We have sourced a bigger table and chair for a taller girl in the class.

4. What changes have taken place in the school as a result of your class being involved in Healthy Spines?

First time school: Unfortunately, our good intentions at the beginning of the program fell by the wayside with a sudden unexpected change of staff in term 3. This meant consistency with the extension activities was not possible with the new teacher. Next year, hopefully, it will run again and we will be able to provide consistent support of the program and hold the assembly presentation for the whole school, (which failed to go ahead this year during the change of staff).

Repeat school: The sports shed has been cleaned up and equipment rearranged so that it is at an easy level for the children to get to and put back. This has followed on in the classroom, with some rearranging of furniture and storage areas there.

5. Have there been any barriers to change? If so, what have they been?

First time school: Aside from the change of staff, and the resultant lack of continuity, the students' ideas of things to improve, such as rubber mats under the play equipment, are difficult to put into action due to budget issues, as we are a small school.

Repeat school: Big changes can be hard due to the school having so many things on and in the curriculum.

(NOTE: Over time, schools increasingly make larger changes once they can access resources – Healthy Spines helps increase the priority to act on spinal health matters.)

6. What else do you want to share about the program or your experience?

First time school: The person who presented the program to us was EXCELLENT – very professional. She made it

all so easy and enjoyable and had good rapport with the students and teachers. It was presented in such a caring and controlled manner. We look forward to having her back next year.

Repeat school: We are really happy with the program and like to think the school and the children are getting a lot from it, particularly the longer the program goes on and the more the message goes throughout the whole school.

For information on how to get involved in the Healthy Spines Program contact the CAA National Office at 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 2007 Evaluation Report from the Healthy Spines Research section, which outlines the collective picture for all staff.