



Alison Bennett

# My Healthy Spines story

By Alison Bennett, Healthy Spines Team Member

*The thought of reducing the amount of people requiring chiropractic care due to the lack of symptoms or long standing wear and tear from poor posture or preventable injuries, may concern some chiropractors; however that was the furthest thing from my mind when I heard of the Healthy Spines community service program.*

I know that I cringe when I see children – young and old – doing activities that may harm their spine and hence their health, or holding themselves like they have the weight of the world and then some on their shoulders. But imagine a day when everyone thinks that slouching looks dorky and standing up straight is for the cool kids!

A lot of people in all lines of business do things to increase their personal profile, which is understandable. But there is something quite liberating about doing something for the community without focusing on business building. As a Healthy Spines team member you are able to step away from being a chiropractor and focus on educating young people about spinal health. Over time people will realise who you are and the fact that you are there to promote health education and not yourself. So the consequence will be that your personal credibility, as well as our profession's credibility within the community will rise.

So far my experience with Healthy Spines is a great one. I was privileged to do the course in early 2007, where we were given a thorough insight into health promotion as well as the program that we could run within schools, once we graduated as a Healthy Spines Program Team Member. During the course of the program, we were asked to engage with some schools to observe a classroom in action. By establishing contacts early on, I was able to revisit this contact when I was ready to ask a school if they would like to participate in this program. Due to the time of the year and some teacher reshuffling, the chosen school expressed its interest, but said that it would be better if I contacted them in early 2008. From what I understand this is a common scenario – schools are often interested but can't always fit you in straight away as they plan their curriculum ahead of time, maybe even at the end of the year before.

Although there were still changes in staffing in 2008 and my primary contact in 2007 had moved on, I persisted. By mid-June 2008, everything was full steam ahead. I had a diary note to call the school's primary contact, Debbie, on a Monday to discuss where the school was up to in talking to and gaining support from the teachers. However, whilst on the road driving to Sydney the Friday before, Debbie called to set up all the dates. This included a meeting with parents of the Year

4 students so they learned about the purpose and content of the program, and all three classroom sessions for Term 3 with three Year 4 classes. Initially I felt overwhelmed, but soon after those feelings subsided. I felt so elated that I was able to move forward and start educating!

Just prior to writing this article I conducted the teacher and parent presentation. The teachers were really interested in knowing about the pre and post evaluation that is carried out and the follow-up reports provided to the school. They were pleased to see how the program would fit into their curriculum rather than take up their valuable teaching time. I believe the school decided to become involved as they felt that the program added value to the children's learning and filled a gap in the curriculum.

Despite the amount of notice for parents, the freezing cold temperatures in Orange and the fact that the meeting was scheduled on the recent State of Origin night, we had a good turnout at the parent meeting and there was definitely some excitement for what was to come. They were keen to know the general content of the program and were pleased that it was not about self-promotion but focused on the wellbeing of the kids. Even though they did not fully understand all aspects of the program yet, when it came to wellness and prevention of spinal health issues the parents were very interested to know as much as possible about how to look after their precious ones.

As an interested chiropractor, the initial information provided on the Healthy Spines Program indicates that it can be challenging to undertake the program if you have too much on your plate, as it is an involved program that does require a fair commitment, particularly in completing the training and setting up your first program. This is certainly true. But in the last year I bought a clinic, did house renovations, built a new clinic and planned a wedding, so if I can do it then anyone can.

All I can say is thank goodness the CAA has endorsed this program and it's available to chiropractors so we can learn about and do health promotion that helps young Australians avoid some preventable health issues. It is definitely worthwhile looking into this program, as you get the chance to give back to the community and help the future of our society.

For information on how to get involved in the Healthy Spines Program contact Denise Nixon ([nhq@caa.asn.au](mailto:nhq@caa.asn.au)) at the CAA National Office or phone (02) 4731 8011. More information on Healthy Spines is available at [www.healthyspines.com.au](http://www.healthyspines.com.au) where you can download copies of the 2007 Evaluation Report from the Healthy Spines Research section.