



Kathleen Stacey

# Positive impact on schools

By Kathleen Stacey, National Program Consultant

*This is the last of our three-part series about the outcomes of the evaluation information we have gathered so far on the Healthy Spines Programs. This article focuses on changes made by whole classes of students together with their teachers, and those made by the whole school.*

These changes are vital, as they focus on students' everyday environments, including the policies that govern what happens at school, and involve collective or community action, not just individual action.

You will find a comprehensive summary of outcomes in the Healthy Spines 2007 Evaluation Report (see the link below). To give you a flavour of what classroom and school changes are possible, I will share some anecdotes and quotes from a selection of schools that have been involved over the last four years. These demonstrate changes school staff have made in their classrooms as a result of the Healthy Spines Program, along with those that impact on the whole school.

**School 1:** A teacher explained that “within the classroom and surrounding environment we are conscious of the need to balance sitting with activity, stillness with movement – carry and lift loads effectively – store and arrange resources effectively. As a PE teacher I am conscious of the above principles and try to incorporate them into PE lessons with children and staff – I feel I can positively benefit the children in my care by incorporating expert advice into my teaching procedures.”

**School 2:** According to an involved teacher, “within the classroom [we are] focusing on correct posture when sitting, moving the computer monitors so they are lower. We have rearranged the classroom to make it more ergonomically friendly. More students are wearing their backpacks correctly and are thinking more about the weight they carry. [We are] looking into furniture appropriate for spinal health for future purchases. [We have] an overall greater awareness of the importance of spinal health.”

**School 3:** This school was taking decisive action on backpacks for younger/smaller students by purchasing smaller backpacks and making them available in the uniform shop. The staff were also seeking the advice of their Program Team Member (PTM) on new furniture being purchased in 2008. These larger school changes were being accompanied by the re-arrangement of existing classroom furniture and computers.

**School 4:** Students in the two involved classes of this school decided to implement two ‘community action’ strategies. They put up the Healthy Spines posters along with additional posters they had made in all areas of the school. Their teachers helped them organise visits to all classes in the school so all students and teachers heard the spinal health promotion messages they learnt in the program. This was then reinforced with performances of the skits they created during the program to promote spinal health at a school assembly. Teachers from this school also expressed that they “liked the way the program tries to integrate the messages into the wider community. The Education Department is trying to encourage schools to integrate with the wider community much more and this program is a great example of this.”

**School 5:** This school decided to separate the play areas for junior and senior students. They reported that they planned to “purchase new play equipment for the senior playground ie up to \$50,000 is allocated. We are hoping to create a play-safe environment to assist all students to grow and develop in the best possible way. [We want to] create a consistent all round awareness of living a healthy lifestyle, including spinal care.”

Over time some schools are able to upgrade their furniture, but large capital expenses need to be planned in advance. For example, a school that has done Healthy Spines for four years has bought new adjustable library chairs for 2008 as a direct result of what they have learned through Healthy Spines. Another school were in the planning to update their furniture for Year 1 and 2 children, but brought the date of the replacement forward by several months when they ran a Healthy Spines Program in 2006 with older children.

The strength of Healthy Spines lies in its capacity to influence these types of changes at the whole class and school level, as well as foster individual behaviour change. The long-term commitment to evaluating Healthy Spines has enabled us to identify these broader changes, as PTMs stay connected to the schools where they have run programs wherever possible. In 2008 we will conduct case studies with three schools that have been involved with Healthy Spines for several years to gain a clearer picture of why schools appreciate the program and how it contributes to changes in practices, policies and the school environment.

For information on how to get involved in the Healthy Spines Program contact the CAA National Office at [nhq@caa.asn.au](mailto:nhq@caa.asn.au) or 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.