

CASE STORY

Health 4 Schools: A schools and community partnership programme for Gloucestershire*

N. Rees and A. Shepherd

Health 4 Schools supports school communities in Gloucestershire in developing opportunities for pupils to increase knowledge, understanding and participation in activities that contribute to a healthy lifestyle and sense of wellness. Launched in September 2004 with 24 schools, the programme is currently under way in 50 Gloucestershire schools and will extend to 100 schools in future years. The programme promotes a holistic approach focusing upon learning about food, health and active play and the links between them.

The schools chosen create clusters made up of secondary, primary and special needs schools in Gloucestershire: in the Cheltenham and Tewkesbury, Gloucester, Stroud, Forest of Dean and Cotswold districts of the county. The programme, funded by Kraft Cares, was developed in partnership with the Local Education Authority and Business in the Community, and is governed by an independent steering group consisting of representatives from the private, public and voluntary sector, in the fields of education, health promotion and physical activity. The diversity and broad knowledge base of the independent steering group also helped drive the acceptance of the programme among the schools and community, encouraging participation.

The programme encourages schools to undertake four steps and focus upon four strands of activity which link diet, activity and health. The four steps are: **Get thinking; Get planning; Get doing; and Get reviewing.** By following these steps, the schools introduce changes that are supported and enjoyed by the whole school community, providing a long-term benefit to those involved. This four-step model is based on feedback from schools over many years, and is an approach that has helped to bring about real benefits to whole school communities. The programme uses this process to take the schools and children through discussing and assessing the opportunities available in school for each of the four strands of activity: Growing and learning about food; Learning to cook; Eating breakfast, and Active play.



Left. *Active play. Activity session: field hockey.*
Right. *Learning about food. Get doing: girl watering vegetable garden.*

* REES and SHEPHERD, 2005: Programme evaluation.



Examples of specific projects that resulted from participation in Health 4 Schools:

- **King's Stanley Junior School** embraced all aspects of the Health 4 Schools programme enthusiastically, developing a productive vegetable allotment and introducing regular cookery sessions for pupils. The children have been involved in planning as well as participating in the activities. The school allocated approximately £380 of its Health 4 Schools budget to the provision of new playground equipment, which was chosen by the pupils through the School Council. The pupils enjoy making use of the new hoppers, skipping ropes and other selected equipment, which keeps them active and occupied during break-times. A significant whole school approach to fitness, requiring just a little reorganisation of the timetable, has been adopted. Activity sessions, lasting twenty minutes, are scheduled at the end of the school afternoon, three times a week. All pupils and staff participate in the exercise, which varies from aerobics in the hall to playground circuits or field walking/running. The school is planning to invite parents to join the pupils and staff in their activities before collecting their children at the end of the school day.
- **Pittville School**, which is designated as a Specialist Arts College, decided within the Health 4 Schools programme to look at ways of engaging pupils who are not attracted to mainstream sports in more physical activity. Pupils focused upon performing arts and established a dance club specifically aimed at Year 10 and 11 pupils. A small part of the budget was set aside to provide a CD player and CDs to support the lunchtime dance activity, which has proved very popular with Year 10 girls. The school also invited pupils to participate in an Irish dancing session, run by external experts, which was enthusiastically received. The school now extends access to these activities to other year groups. The school also budgeted for new activity equipment, selected by the School Council, which is available, on a loan system, for pupils' use at break and lunchtimes.

