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Directoraat-generaal Gezondheid en Consumentenbescherming
Eenheid C4-Gezondheidsdeterminanten
L 2920
Luxemburg

subject	reference	place and date
Sentinel Site Zwolle	EC-mth	Zwolle, March 14 2006

Dear Sir or Madam,

The following information about our centre is in reply to your request to enter initiatives that can contribute to promoting healthy diets and physical exercise in Europe.

Introduction

The Research Centre for the Prevention of Overweight in Zwolle, The Netherlands is a joint venture between the Free University of Amsterdam and the University of Professional Education in Zwolle. The centre aims to use research to contribute to a healthy lifestyle for 0-19 year-olds in the region of Zwolle. Together with the Zwolle town council, it has the ambition to develop a model region, a sentinel site, in which the activities of primary, secondary and tertiary prevention are geared to one another. Our aim is to focus resources into the area and to achieve an integral cooperation between local authorities, professional care institutions, welfare, education and sport and commercial companies in the food, sport and environment sectors. The centre coordinates the programme and supports institutions and companies with scientific research, monitoring, development of methodology and evaluation of effects.

The research centre carries out research into the determinants of unhealthy behaviour which result in overweight and it develops effective interventions which promote healthy behaviour. Behavioural factors aimed at nutrition and exercise, the psycho-social factors and determinants from the (social and physical) living environment are important factors in this. Interventions take place at town, neighbourhood, school and family level. It is a community-based approach aiming at a permanent lifestyle. Different stakeholders will be the participants.

In this way a long-term perspective is developed in mutual harmony and cohesion; an example of a healthy region for 0–19 year-olds. There are 110,000 young people in this age group in the Zwolle region. In 2005, the city of Zwolle has been the greenest city of the Netherlands. For the future, they like to become one of the healthiest cities.

Programme

The research centre has its own programme but also does research initiated by partners in the region. The centre works on the principle of disease-management i.e. a certain disorder is tackled starting with the determinants of its origin to the disorder itself and its consequences.

According to the principles of disease-management the following steps can be distinguished for children:

- Health maintenance and promotion
- Prevention of diseases
- Recognition: diagnosis
- Treatment: care
- After care and recuperation

1. Monitoring research

This autumn, to get an up-to-date picture of the prevalence of overweight and obesity in 4 to 13 year-olds, research will be carried out among 10,000 children in this age group in cooperation with the regional health services in Zwolle. The data will be entered into an Electronic (a Digital) Child File. This research will afford insight into the eating, exercise and inactivity behaviour of the children concerned and into the determinants of this behaviour such as the physical, economic and social environment. In this way attainable goals can be formulated for an intervention, areas of risk can be charted and a local long-term policy can be agreed.

2. Chain of care

Prevention of overweight and obesity is a multi-disciplinary task for health care. It is a relatively young discipline, so there is very little liaison between the providers of primary, secondary and tertiary prevention.

The investigation into the chain of care hopes to gain insight into the tasks and responsibilities of the various providers of prevention in the Zwolle region. We will look into the possibilities gearing the activities of the primary, secondary and tertiary prevention to one another and promoting mutual cooperation. We are striving towards a single integrated model, in which it is clear to each professional involved what can be done for each individual child. In the meantime, we will start a longitudinal research.

Instrument

Lifestyle effect report

To promote coherence between and provide insight into the various indicators of healthy behaviour we are developing a Lifestyle Effect Report .

Effect reports are an important instrument forming policy. The E.U. Treaty of Amsterdam states that "when determining and executing any policy and every action of the Union a high level of protection of human health is guaranteed".

When promoting a sustainable healthy lifestyle judging behaviour in relation to living environment is a logical instrument in making sure this obligation in the Treaty is lived up to.

The aim of the lifestyle effect screening is to get a picture of the quality of the living environment in relation to healthy behaviour, so that health aspects can be taken into account when organizing the living environment.

Furthermore, the lifestyle effect report aims to cancel out socio-economic health differences. The influences of blue (water) and green (fields) on neighbourhood, play and sports facilities, safety and traffic and the presence and quality of shops and restaurants will be investigated.

The research centre defines a lifestyle effect report as a “combination of procedures, methods and instruments with which a policy, programme or project can be judged on its potential effects on and propagation of a sustainable healthy lifestyle in the living environment”.

Partners

The Zwolle town council is the most important local partner with its responsibility for the young, health care, welfare, sport, environmental planning, education and transport. The centre works together with institutions for the provision of housing, care, welfare and education and maintains contacts with health promotion institutions such as the Kenniscentrum Overgewicht (Knowledge Centre Overweight) Amsterdam, the Voedingscentrum (the Nutrition Centre), the Nederlandse Hartstichting (the Netherlands Heart Foundation), NISB (Dutch Institute for Sports and Human Movement), GGD (Health Services)-Netherlands and the TNO (Institute for Applied Natural Scientific Research). The centre’s research coordinators work in cooperation with the Rijksinstituut voor Volksgezondheid en Milieu (RIVM National Institute for Public Health and the Environment), Academische Werkplaats Jeugdgezondheidszorg (Academic Workplace for Youth Healthcare) and the various universities committed to the NHS-NRG, the Dutch Research Programme for Weight Management.

Importance of the research centre for the Commission

- The centre carries out research into the effectiveness of programmes that could also be implemented in other countries. Research and interventions are mainly carried out in neighbourhoods with a low socio-economic status.
- The centre does integral and multi-disciplinary research aimed at nutrition, exercise and the living environment.
- The centre carries out the research and interventions in the direct living environment of the 0-19 year-olds. School and family play an emphatic role. It is about integrating a healthy lifestyle into the daily living habits.
- Longitudinal research – group studies – also offer the possibility of comparing national trends.

Management and Organisation

The scientific head of the Research Centre for the Prevention of Overweight in Zwolle is prof. dr, ir Jacob C. Seidell, the manager is drs. Saskia van Helden.

Dr. Tommy Visscher and dr. Carry Renders are research coordinators.

The centre is scientifically embedded in the Instituut voor Gezondheidswetenschappen (Institute for Health Sciences) of the Faculteit Aard en Levenswetenschappen (Faculty of Earth and Life Sciences) of the Vrije Universiteit (Free University) and forms part of the interfaculty programme Diabetes and Overweight. The research is carried out by AIO's (assistants in training), by teachers at Windesheim and by employees of institutions.

If you require any further information do not hesitate to get in touch with us.

Yours sincerely,

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