



NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Proven successful in pilot, Buddy program now expanding *Participants learn about healthy living from fellow students*

Vancouver, B.C. – Healthy Buddies, an initiative of BC Children's Hospital, is a unique, child-centred health promotion program targeting attitudes and behaviours about body image, nutrition, and physical activity. Elementary schools across B.C. will soon be asked to participate in this innovative program that incorporates the use of “buddy” teaching between Intermediate and Primary students.

“This program is a great way for children to come together to learn about healthy living from one another. School is a natural place for this type of teaching and learning to occur,” says Dr. Sue Stock, co-founder of the program and a physician with the endocrine and diabetes clinic at Children's.

Healthy Buddies was originally conducted as a pilot study on the Sunshine Coast from 2002 to 2004, which resulted in significant improvements in students' health, such as an overall reduction in body mass index and blood pressure. Based on this success, the program is now expanding into schools in various regions across the province.

Feedback from teachers at West Sechelt Elementary who were involved in the pilot study has been extremely positive. “Our pilot of Healthy Buddies was incredibly exciting! Teachers were enthusiastic. Children were engaged in the activities. Positive relationships were formed. There was just a great energy around buddying for healthier lives throughout the school,” says Valerie Ryden, co-founder and teacher of Healthy Buddies. “Most importantly, children became healthier!”

The 21-week buddy program is comprised of three equally important health themes: “Move Your Body”, “Fuel Your Body”, and “Love Your Body”, or as Healthy Buddies exclaim: “Go Move!”, “Go Fuel!” and “Go Feel Good!” In the first half of the year, students learn how to be positive buddies

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and learn about these three components critical to a healthy life. In the second half of the year, students learn to identify the challenges to living a healthy life and learn strategies to overcome these challenges, increasing the likelihood of healthy living success. Health concerns, such as obesity and eating disorders, are also addressed in the program.

Older students first receive direct instruction. Then, with guidance from teachers, they support the learning of their younger buddies. Throughout Healthy Buddies students deliver presentations, practice relaxation techniques, interview each other, play card games, and create art displays. Classrooms receive comprehensive resource bins containing all lesson materials, games, videos, CDs, and posters. In addition to classroom lessons, there is a physical activity component of Healthy Buddies known as Fitness Loops. Students meet with their buddies twice weekly in the gym to participate in structured activities designed to improve strength, flexibility and endurance.

"The Province commends BC Children's Hospital and the Provincial Health Services Authority on this innovative way to promote healthy living among school children," said Health Minister George Abbott. "Programs like Healthy Buddies will help achieve our goal to lead the way in North America in healthy living and physical fitness."

The Provincial Health Services Authority has provided funding in support of this prevention and health promotion program for three years, totaling \$837,705.00.

To learn more about the Healthy Buddies program, e-mail info@healthybuddies.ca or visit www.healthybuddies.ca.

BC Children's Hospital, an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority, provides expert care for the province's most seriously ill or injured children, including newborns and adolescents. For more information please visit www.bcchildrens.ca.

The Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA) plans, manages and evaluates selected specialty and province-wide health care services across BC, working with the five geographic health authorities to deliver province-wide solutions that improve the health of British Columbians. For more information please visit www.phsa.ca.

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