



social media

staff health & wellbeing: part 6



## PICTURE THIS!

Advice from **Nicola Read** on how to use Facebook groups and community pages to get your business seen by a new audience

Your Facebook page is up and running and being posted to regularly, but you don't seem to be seeing many new followers. If this applies to you then we've got three top tips:

### Like pages and join groups.

If you are an admin on your nursery's page, 'liking' pages as your nursery will get your setting page seen by the page owner and can lead to some great collaborations. When you join a group you can sometimes do this as your page instead of personal account too. This means when you post or respond to a post you will give your business more exposure.

### Find local groups with your ideal customers in them and be social.

Search Facebook for groups for parents in the area you are based. Join them and get chatty, but don't be overly promotional – people can be put off by the hard sell. Answer questions when you can, give guidance and, of course, if someone asks for childcare recommendations then go for it.

### Find local promotional groups.

There are some groups on Facebook that are there purely to help local businesses thrive. These are usually really supportive places to post, and most of the posts are promotional so it's fine to sell yourself a bit on there. If you have a graphic or flyer you can use with the post, a special offer you want to share, a free trial day you want to push, then go for it. If you can't find one locally then set one up!

All of the above are great ways to build relationships in your community. Does your local butcher deliver your meat? Could the local baby yoga class come in once a fortnight? Relationships and collaborations lead to word-of-mouth recommendations, and those are the best kind!

→ **Nicola Read is owner of social media management company Babbl, [www.babbl.co.uk](http://www.babbl.co.uk)**

# Weighty issue

What is being done nationally and at individual nursery level to tackle staff obesity? **Charlotte Goddard** reports



ILLUSTRATION AMANDA HUTT

**A**round two-thirds (63 per cent) of adults are above a healthy weight, and of these, half are obese. 'We are at crisis level with obesity,' says Linda Baston-Pitt, chief executive of PurpleBee Learning, which delivers training on health and wellbeing. Obesity is linked to serious and life-threatening conditions such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease, cancer and strokes.

### Role models

Some professions can find themselves under the spotlight when it comes to their own diet and nutrition because it is expected that they should be a role model to others. Last year, Conservative peer Lord Robathan singled out teachers and health workers for criticism, saying 'for too long there has been, I regret to say, a large number of very overweight people in the NHS and in our schools setting a very bad example to children and people in hospital.'

However, while some US studies have found high levels of obesity among early years practitioners – one report found 72 per cent of early education teachers said they weighed too much compared with other adults of the same height – other studies suggest that this is merely a reflection of the population as a whole. Childcare is a badly paid profession and NHS figures show that 30 per cent of men and 39 per cent of women in the lowest

income group are obese, compared with 22 per cent of the highest earners.

'Obesity is an issue in the early years, but it's a nationwide public health issue that is affecting all workplaces,' says Baston-Pitt, who developed the PANCo programme. The scheme trains early years workers as physical activity and nutrition co-ordinators, and their role includes supporting staff with their own wellbeing. She found that 60 per cent of staff in settings involved in the scheme felt that they were not doing as well as they could in role-modelling healthy eating and exercise.

### National strategies

There have been a number of strategies and programmes aiming to tackle obesity in recent years. A two-part childhood obesity strategy launched in 2016 and 2018, and last year the Government unveiled a new strategy: 'Tackling obesity: empowering adults and children to live healthier lives.' Measures include the expansion of NHS services aiming to support people to lose weight, new laws banning the advertising of food high in fat, sugar or salt before 9pm, and a 12-week weight-loss app.

All this activity, however, has had little impact so far. 'It is great to see the Government's commitment to improving the population's health, but its solutions tend to be a quick fix and don't really

address the root causes of obesity, considering the enormous complexity of the issue,' says Baston-Pitt.

### Barriers

The reasons why people develop obesity are complex, and are not simply due to lack of willpower. Poorer areas often have fewer places to buy healthy food, and more fast food outlets, affecting nursery staff if they live or work in such areas. Tired people who work long hours may have little time or motivation to make healthy food choices, skipping breakfast and relying on processed food and sugary snacks to get through the day.

'If you have got a busy day at nursery, you are going to be exhausted, the last thing you want to do is start cooking when you get home,' says Jane Harrison, director of Red Hen Nursery, which has won awards for the quality of its food.

Alison Fisher is nursery manager at Townhouse Nursery in Stoke-on-Trent, which won a *Nursery World* award for its food. She found that some of her team were accessing food banks, and responded by stocking the staff room with healthy food for breakfast and lunch, accessible to all. The setting also provides the team with 'power shots' in the morning – drinks made of orange, lemon and ginger to energise without the need for sugar.

Some early years practitioners may not have the skills to make healthy food from scratch. 'We have had staff joining us with no experience of cooking, not just the younger ones,' says Harrison. Making meal times pleasurable and eating with others has been shown to contribute to healthy eating, while 'mindless eating' while engaged in another activity can lead to unhealthy choices. 'We encourage staff to help in the kitchen, and to eat with the children,' Harrison says. 'We make meal time a nice, relaxed, pleasurable time.'

## case study: Katie Draper, pre-school practitioner at Duxford Preschool in Cambridgeshire

Katie Draper completed her PANCo qualification at the end of August. 'We found in our setting that drinking fluids was the main issue,' she says. 'If you are dehydrated, your brain is not working properly, you feel very tired, and you are not as adaptable to children saying "Can we do this?"'

While children had water bottles, the staff team were not drinking enough water. 'Now we all have named water bottles; the first person through the door in the morning fills them up, and they go in the pocket of our pinnies all day,' she says.

## positive habits

Supporting wellbeing doesn't have to be an expensive or complex exercise, says Linda Baston-Pitt, chief executive of PurpleBee Learning. 'One of the keys to developing positive habits is to start small, start simple and keep it constant by building small habits into the day,' she says. 'In the same way we work towards maintaining a consistent approach to wellbeing practice with children, we need to also apply the same principle to staff wellbeing.'

Ideas that settings have incorporated include:

- Changing energy-sapping end-of-day meetings, when people are tempted to share comfort food as a treat, to breakfast meetings including a healthy breakfast.
- Offering healthy snacks such as a fruit bowl at team meetings and as lunch options – and explaining the benefits.
- Creating a wellbeing board. Settings can use the board as a positive learning opportunity, sharing

interesting facts like kiwi fruit can improve sleep, says Baston-Pitt. Make the board interactive by inviting staff to post a note or a photo to share what they tried, how it helped them and how it made them feel.

- Give staff control by enabling them to reflect on and assess their wellbeing. 'Many settings use this as part of planned regular wellbeing catch-ups with staff to discuss what's working well, and where they are struggling,' says Baston-Pitt. 'They can decide upon some simple steps that they can commit to trying out that will improve that area.' Red Hen Nursery's Jane Harrison adds, 'We make sure we are talking to staff about whether they are able to eat sensibly. We can't tell them what to do, but we can ask if there is anything that can be done to help – maybe if they don't have time to cook when they get home, they can get a slow cooker or batch cook so they have something in the freezer.'

### Resources

England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have issued their own healthy-eating guidance for young children, to enable practitioners to meet the standards of their early years frameworks. Public Health England has published professional guidance for consistent messaging around healthy weight for children and young people, the PANCo programme offers its own Start Life Well standards, and Action for Children has published guidance called Eat Better, Start Better.

'There is no shortage of information and guidance about nutrition for early years professionals, but I think there is a gap around having the practical skills and

confidence to put the guidance into practice,' says Baston-Pitt.

### Support for staff

Settings can support practitioners to make healthy choices, but it is important that this support is not stigmatising. 'As leaders, we can't dictate what staff should or should not eat,' says Harrison. 'The ethos needs to trickle down through the settings' own food culture.'

In the end, messages about nutrition should always have a positive rather than a negative slant, focusing on the benefits of a healthy diet rather than the evils of weight gain, says Baston-Pitt. 'Negative messages can be stigmatising, and adults are less likely to engage.' ■

Any work around staff diet and nutrition must be undertaken with sensitivity, says Draper. 'It is important to make sure you are not targeting anyone,' she says. 'You don't want someone sitting there thinking "I am the biggest one, is this because of me?". You need to make clear that the underlying reasons behind changes are so everyone can work to their best capacity.'

Long hours can encourage early years workers to make unhealthy choices, she says. 'People turn to sugary snacks to get through the day, then their energy crashes. Healthy eating is not about

losing weight or having a slim workforce, it is more about making sure everyone is feeling their best and able to do their job to their best capacity. We are all good at being so busy all day we might neglect ourselves – a lot of early years workers are mothers who are not looking after themselves.'

The setting policy requires staff to eat healthily in front of the children, acting as role models. Draper has shared her knowledge and learning around nutrition with the team. 'Ideas are coming from them, so it is not just someone telling them what to do,' she says.