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Teaming Up with Girl Scouts for Online Nutrition Information

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Abstract

Three librarians at LSU Health Shreveport partnered with staff members at the Shreveport service center staff of the Girl Scouts of Louisiana – Pines to the Gulf to teach girls about nutrition. The librarians provided instruction to the staff on healthelinks, MedlinePlus, and the other National Library of Medicine databases. They worked with the staff to incorporate these online resources into the nutrition curriculum for the Girl Scout leaders to use with their troops. They also provided two laptop computers, promotional items, and teaching aids. The program was repeated in the summer for week-long day camps designed to introduce girls to Scouting. The librarians had the opportunity to work directly with over one hundred girls at these camps to introduce them to authoritative, age-appropriate web sites on nutrition.

Keywords

healthelinks; nutrition; Girl Scouts; Louisiana

Background: The Library and its Healthelinks Database

LSU Health Shreveport is an academic health sciences center that includes Schools of Medicine, Allied Health Professions, and Graduate Studies, as well as a network of hospitals and clinics that serve all of Northwest Louisiana, East Texas, and Southwest Arkansas.¹ The LSU Health Shreveport Library serves as the health information resource for the faculty, staff, and students of LSU Health Shreveport and for the entire community.

As personal computer use became more common in the late 1990's, library faculty recognized the trend among the public to access health information online. They became concerned that people could endanger their health by trusting information that was possibly inaccurate. To meet this need in the community, the librarians created the healthelinks database <www.healthelinks.org> in 2000. The database is a collection of links to web sites that provide reliable health information for consumers, such as the National Library of Medicine (NLM) databases. Before any link is added to healthelinks, it is evaluated according to specific selection criteria including authority, unbiased objectivity, currency, and design.²

As healthelinks continued to grow and develop, the information was organized into four sections:

- Diseases and Conditions – web sites on diseases, disorders, and medical conditions;
- Medicines – web sites on prescription drugs, over-the-counter drugs, and supplements, as well as drug interaction information;
- Procedures and Operations – web sites on screening tests, procedures, and surgeries;
- Lab Tests – a link to Lab Tests Online, a peer-reviewed, non-commercial, patient-centered online reference tool.

Healthelinks has sections targeted to specific audiences: “For Kids,” “Senior Health,” “Women’s Health,” and “Recursos en Espanol” (Resources in Spanish). From the healthelinks home page, users can also link directly to specific information on “Clinical Trials,” “Wellness,” “Finding Health Care,” “Environmental Issues,” “End of Life Issues,” and how to “Be a Smart Patient.” There are also links to “Major Health Sites” and “Dictionaries.”³

The LSU Health Shreveport librarians actively seek opportunities to encourage consumers to use healthelinks as a portal for accessing quality health information. Healthelinks has been promoted throughout the Shreveport area with billboards, funded by awards from the National Network of Libraries of Medicine/South Central Region. In addition, librarians demonstrate healthelinks when conducting outreach activities in the community. These have included projects targeting specific groups such as school librarians and fitness club members, as well as events conducted in collaboration with the public library that are open to all.^{4,5,6}

As another outreach to the community, LSU Health Shreveport librarians contacted the local council of the Girl Scouts to determine interest in online health information, particularly in the area of nutrition. This was met with a very positive response, as the council had recently begun a nutrition initiative.

The Target Audience: The Girl Scouts

Girl Scouts of the USA is the world's largest organization for girls.⁷ The Girl Scouts of Louisiana - Pines to the Gulf is a chartered council with Girl Scouts of the USA, serving all of Louisiana west of the Mississippi River. The council headquarters is in Lafayette, with additional service centers in Shreveport and Monroe and satellite offices in Lake Charles and Alexandria. The service center in Shreveport is staffed by five employees and four volunteers. Membership in Girl Scouts is open to girls in kindergarten through twelfth grade. Currently, there are nearly 12,000 girls registered with Girl Scouts of Louisiana - Pines to the Gulf.⁸

From the medical literature to the popular media, there has been an outcry in recent years regarding the epidemic of childhood obesity. Schools, healthcare facilities, and children's groups are seeking solutions to this crisis.^{9,10,11,12} Thus, it is not surprising that Girl Scouts of the USA would also want to help young girls adopt a healthier lifestyle. Although public perception may connect Girl Scouts with cookies, the organization has actually offered innovative programs in nutrition and healthy living throughout its history.¹³

Girl Scouts of Louisiana - Pines to the Gulf Council leaders wanted to join the national effort to help girls become healthier by implementing a nutrition series to teach their members about good eating habits. Administrators planned four-week sessions for the girls

to learn to create healthy menus and prepare nutritious foods (see Appendix 1). LSU Health Shreveport librarians proposed to the leaders that free online consumer health resources such as healthelinks, MedlinePlus, and the other NLM databases would be a valuable source of information for the girls. Ideally, leaders could take laptop computers to troop meetings to instruct the girls on these resources. Unfortunately, the only types of computer equipment at the Council service center in Shreveport were desktop models at employee workstations. Computers were not available for the volunteer leaders when they were out in the community working with the Girl Scout troops. The librarians began seeking a way to meet this need.

The Girl Scout/Library Collaboration

The LSU Health Shreveport Library is a member of the National Network of Libraries of Medicine, South Central Region (NN/LM SCR). Each year, NN/LM SCR funds awards to encourage outreach activities. In 2011, LSU Health Shreveport received a Technology Improvement Project Award to meet the health information needs of the Shreveport service center of the Girl Scouts of Louisiana - Pines to the Gulf Council.¹⁴ The goals of the project were threefold:

- To provide two laptop computers for the Council service center so that employees and volunteers could use them to find reliable online health information;
- To instruct Council center staff on how to access reliable online health information resources, so that they could train the volunteer leaders;
- To provide promotional items to the local community that would encourage use of healthelinks, MedlinePlus, and other NLM databases.

It was estimated that the library's nutrition project could reach more than seventy-five percent of the Council members in the Shreveport area through instructional sessions. Promotional materials encouraging the use of reliable online health information sources such as healthelinks, MedlinePlus, and other NLM databases would also be available for the girls to take home to family members, providing an additional opportunity to reach out into the community.

Methods

LSU Health Shreveport librarians purchased two laptop computers and installed standard software. These computers will remain with the Girl Scout Council's Shreveport service center. Librarians collaborated with the Development Director of Girl Scouts of Louisiana - Pines to the Gulf to create training sessions for the Girl Scout council employees and volunteers. The curriculum could be used in one large session or several small sessions. (See curriculum in Appendix 2.)

A librarian from LSU Health Shreveport conducted a training session for the Girl Scout Council staff at the Shreveport service center on May 7, 2012. Unfortunately, only three staff members were able to attend. In the session, participants received instruction on using reliable online health information sources such as healthelinks, MedlinePlus, and the other NLM databases. Attendees were given an overview of the structure of healthelinks and shown practical tips for using the healthelinks web site. Special emphasis was given to the "Wellness," "For Kids," and "Women's Health" links because they were considered to be the most relevant and appropriate for girls within the Girl Scout age range. The training session highlighted links to sites on nutrition, exercise, and body image, as well as links to interactive games and printable handouts. At the end of the training session, an evaluation

form was completed by each attendee. The educational session received positive evaluations, including the following comments:

“Facilitator was well prepared & knowledgeable. Made training easy.”

“Thanks for keeping informative and to the point. I wish all classes went this easy. This will be helpful in the future.”

“Very straightforward website. I think it will be a very useful tool for us.”

Because the purpose of the evaluations was to improve the quality of the librarian's teaching rather than for research on the attendees, it was not necessary to obtain approval from the Institutional Review Board.¹⁵

LSU Health Shreveport librarians also ordered promotional items and other health information resources for distribution to the Girl Scouts. These included pedometers, for the girls to count their steps as they learn about exercise, and journals, for the girls to log their food intake. These items were imprinted with the healthelinks logo and URL to serve as regular reminders of this online health information resource. These promotional materials were distributed to troop leaders, so that they could give them to the girls in their troops. Monitoring of the pedometers and food logs would be at the troop leader's discretion.

The Library also purchased handouts, activity charts, and posters to facilitate the teaching of the United States Department of Agriculture's “MyPlate” initiative.¹⁶ These teaching materials were also distributed to the troop leaders. (See Figure 1.)

Extending the Program

In the summer of 2012, the Girl Scouts of Louisiana - Pines to the Gulf Shreveport service center partnered with the Shreveport Public Assembly & Recreation Department to introduce more girls in the community to the Girl Scout program. The Girl Scouts held day camps at community centers throughout the city for three successive afternoons. Girl Scout leadership chose to use the nutrition theme for the day camps. The curriculum, which was originally designed as a four-week unit with one session per week, was adapted into a one-week unit of three daily sessions. The Membership Specialist at the Shreveport service center invited two LSU Health Shreveport librarians to attend some of the camp sessions. The librarians were pleased to see the leaders using many of the resources provided by the Library to teach the girls about nutrition. The leaders wanted to divide the attendees into smaller groups for some activities, but there were not enough leaders for each small group. Therefore, the librarians volunteered for the responsibility of teaching the girls about online resources on healthy eating. They were able to work directly with the girls, introducing them to age-appropriate web sites that contained authoritative, reliable information on nutrition, presented through fun games and activities in easy-to-read language. The librarians attended these sessions throughout the summer, so they had the opportunity to work with a total of over one hundred girls.

Lessons Learned

Librarians planning this project envisioned enthusiastic young Girl Scouts learning about nutrition via the Internet and then helping to prepare healthy meals for their families. Although it has not been possible to know for sure if these outcomes were achieved, one can hope that lessons taught in the “Train the Trainer” class will trickle down to others.

For the librarians engaged in this project, the most rewarding aspect was the interaction with the girls themselves. Other librarians may wish to replicate this project with Girl Scouts in their area, but they are encouraged to become involved at the troop level rather than with administration if they want to be sure that the project impacts the girls.

The LSU Health Shreveport librarians were able to see some of the teaching materials that they had provided in use during the Girl Scout summer program, but sharing information about online resources with the girls proved to be more challenging than originally anticipated. Some of the community centers had computer labs that made it possible for each girl to get hands-on experience accessing the resources; however, all centers did not have such excellent facilities. Although the laptop computers were intended to be used to demonstrate accessing nutritional information online, the librarians found that gathering several girls around one laptop was not an ideal set-up. Furthermore, the online sessions were only possible when additional manpower (the LSU Health Shreveport librarians) was available. Many Girl Scout troops have only one adult leader, with perhaps one assistant. In a typical troop, there may not be an adequate adult-to-child ratio for a leader to spend the time necessary to help the girls navigate the sites.

Hopefully, the introduction to healthelinks, MedlinePlus, and the other NLM databases made the Girl Scout leaders aware of some of the nutritional resources that are available electronically, and they can share this information with the young girls that they lead now and in the future.

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Health Series Outline

Outcomes

Girls gain practical healthy living life skills

Girls develop and explore how to eat, plan, and prepare healthy foods and snacks based on the “healthy plate” concept

Girls develop teamwork skills as they work together in teams to plan a healthy menu and work through team activities.

Girls get involved in a broader cause (Susan G. Komen Walk)

Knowledge is power-Week 1

A. Objectives-

1. Understand the importance of nutrition
2. Understand the importance of exercise
3. Understand overweight and obesity
4. Understand the benefits of physical activity

B. Key Points

1. Nutrition is the utilization of food by the body

2. These nutrients provide fuel the body used to function- blood flow, heartbeat, vision, thinking, and moving
3. Best source of nutrients is good wholesome foods- fruits/veggies, lean meats and poultry, cheese, eggs, milk, and water
4. If food= fuel, the product of that fuel is physical activity. Too much fuel and too little activity can lead to weight gain
 - a. Physical activity improves cardiovascular health, helping blood flow and keeping your heart healthy, and respiratory health, making your lungs strong. It also prevents disease like arthritis and diabetes.
5. Just as important as the right foods you eat the right portions of food you eat. Healthy servings
6. What is healthy weight- introduce BMI (Overweight is defined as an excessive high amount of body fat for the child's build)
7. Relationship between unhealthy weight and disease (high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease, and stroke.)
8. Physical activity burns calories, improves the way you look and feel, reduces stress, strengthens muscles, helps prevent injury

C. FUN-

1. Survey the girls to determine their current knowledge level and eating/ activity habits
2. Girls get pedometers and journal. Explain the 10,000 step goal
3. Girls can decorate their journals and sign the Healthy Pledge poster which will be displayed at council office and return to each meeting.
4. Activity time- 30 Minutes (double dutch, hopscotch, hula hoop, ect.)
5. Log initial entries into journal- height, age, BMI, glue copy of health pledge in journal
6. Girls color and decorate health plate (food pyramid)

D. Closing

1. Remind girls of the 10,000 step goal, to log their food and check the website for their health recipes of the week.
2. Preview next week's Healthy Living meeting, guest speaker
3. Prizes

The Energy Equation- Week 2

A. Objectives

1. Understand weight management based on a balance between food intake and physical activity.

B. Key points

1. When calorie intake is greater that calories expended weight gain occurs.

2. Making smart choices about foods caloric value helps achieve energy balance
3. Sedentary lifestyle verse leading an active lifestyle.

C. FUN

1. My Plate interaction-(group work)
 - a. Fill out menu sheet
 - b. Assign two meal
 - c. Draw food plate
 - d. Use magazines or stickers to paste in their plates
 - e. Have girls explain their plate and the benefit of each food
2. Guest- Introduce guest and activity she will be leading the girls in.

Figuring Out Food Labels- Week 3

A. Objectives

1. Understand the USDA Food Pyramid
2. Be able to compare portion size of foods to serving sizes on food labels
3. Understand how to use food labels to make healthy snack choices

B. Key points

1. Introduce dietary guidelines and explain what the purpose is
2. mypyramid.gov
3. Labels help you determine specific food choices based on things like calories, protein, etc.
4. Pay attention to serving size as there is usually more than one item
5. Layout of grocery store perimeter shopping healthy stuff. Middle aisles fast food, boxed dinners, higher in fat and calories and cost more.
6. How much activity do you need?
7. Physical activity helps improve brain functions because it increased oxygen to the brain and blood flow
8. Family dinners

C. FUN

1. Guest Activity- 30 Mins
2. Games with Labels- Choosing healthier foods
3. Scavenger hunt to take with them. Photos of them shopping and preparing healthy meals or snacks

Shake Your Sedentary Ways- Week 4

A. Objectives

1. Understand ways they can fit physical activity into their daily lives

2. Understand the link between diseases and poor food choices and non active lifestyles
3. Understand the importance of preventive care
4. Bring it all together for impact and change.

B. Key points

1. nutritionandkids.net
2. A healthier dietary intake and daily physical activity help their bodies produces more energy
3. By using the activity pyramid, they can plan weekly activities
4. Objectively assess your current level of activity to see where you can improve
5. Komen walk for a cure project

C. FUN

1. Guest Activity
2. Guest speaker from Komen
3. Games
4. Decorate activity calendar to take home

D. Closing

1. Handouts, registration for walk

Reaching Out to Girl Scouts

Using Healthelinks for Teaching Nutrition to Girls

I. Introduction – Reliable Information via healthelinks.org

- a. **What is healthelinks:** Consumer health information web portal designed by LSU Health Shreveport medical librarians
- b. **Purpose:** To provide a “one-stop-shop” source for consumers wanting to locate reliable information on health topics
- c. **How:** Websites listed here are reviewed and approved by physicians. The librarians include the links into the site and maintain the links to ensure the information is up-to-date.
- d. **Structure:** Information is categorized into major topics and subtopics:
 - i. Major Topics are accessible through the top links
 - ii. Further subtopics are accessible through the links on the side
- e. **Contact Us:** to suggest new links or report broken links

II. Nutrition Topics Covered by healthelinks by link

- a. Wellness link
 - i. “Breakfast is Good for the Heart” from e-health library (print and email options)

- ii. “Fast Food Calorie and Nutrition Information” (from the fast food restaurants themselves, and so may not necessarily be the most reliable)
 - iii. “Menu Planner” and “Aim for a Healthy Weight”, both from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute
 - b. For Kids link (mostly indexes pages from the KidsHealth.org website)
 - i. “Eating Smart” link
 - 1. “Why is Good Nutrition Important”
 - a. “Nutrition & Fitness Center”
 - b. “Go, Slow, Whoa”
 - 2. “Body Weight”
 - a. “What is the Right Weight for Me”
(other topics at the bottom of this article from KidsHealth.org)
 - 3. “Recipes”
 - a. “ChopChop Magazine for Kids”
 - ii. “Games” link
 - 1. “Eating Right”
 - a. “Milk Matters” from the National Institute of Child and Human Development
 - b. “Halloween Candy Game” from KidsHealth.org
 - c. “Dining Decisions” from CDC

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Figure 1. Nutrition and exercise resources purchased for the Girl Scouts