**Introduction**

- The *Bring Back Healthy Sideline Snacks* initiative was a three-year project in Middlesex County aimed at mobilizing minor sport teams to "give junk food the boot" in favour of vegetables and fruit when snacks are offered during or after games and practices.
- There is evidence that children involved in sports are more likely to eat sugary snacks and drinks than children not involved in sports. One reason is that team sideline snacks have become overrun with sugary and salty snacks.
- In the Spring of 2016, Healthy Kids Community Challenge Steering Committee expressed interest in supporting a 'Minor Sport Project' as part of the Theme 2 ("Water Does Wonders") Action Plan.
- The pilot project would help assess the following:
  1. Is there interest among coaches and parents to see their players enjoying healthier sideline snacks?
  2. If so, how can we make it easier to lead this change?

**Project Objectives**

1. To educate, motivate and influence teams to lead the change in creating healthier supportive environments.
2. To award and publicly recognize teams & associations for leading the change and to provide incentives for doing so.

**Supporting Research**


**Conclusions & Significance**

Our experience demonstrates that sports teams and associations are willing to reconsider their sideline snack practices and that players and parents are accepting of the change. As well, the project spearheaded the adoption of association wide guidelines by Strathroy United Football Club, one of the largest sports clubs in Middlesex County.

Connecting the proposed environmental change to a larger effort can help to facilitate participation. The 'group' mentality approach can provide comfort that individual stakeholders are taking action as part of a larger cause and limits perceived risks that they are working in isolation.

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**Year 1 (2016)**

**Step 1: Recruitment**

- In May 2016, an email was sent to association executive-level contacts in baseball and soccer and a recruitment flyer posted on social media. Promotion was supported by municipal recreation partners.
- 16 soccer teams registered, 4 associations.

**Step 2: Provide Incentives**

- Water bottles for players.
- Gift card to support healthy snacks.
- Letter for the parents with snack ideas.
- Plaque for the coach and certificates for each of the players.

**Step 3: Public Recognition**

- Invited sharing of pictures of teams enjoying their healthy snacks and provided individual team spotlight on social media.
- Intent was to garner wider-community support and influence social acceptability of healthier snack provision.

**Step 4: Evaluate**

- Invited all the parents, coaches and association leaders to participate in an online survey.
- Prize incentive to help increase participation.

**Evaluation Highlights from Year 1**

- **N = 33**
- Limited concerns with compliance & minimal barriers.
  - "It actually was because in the past I found snack was becoming a competition with who would bring the best snack" and the snack became bigger and less nutritious." Parent
  - 75% of associations leaders (N=6) were unsure or would consider a policy in the future possibly.
  - Reported concerns: monitoring and enforcing, potential burden on coaches, opposition from parents and coaches.

**Top Reasons Teams Chose to Participate**

1. Want to have their team enjoying healthier sideline snacks instead of sugary treats.
2. Already wanted to initiate the idea but were thankful for the extra support.
3. The project provided an incentive to get children and parents on board with providing healthy sideline snacks.

*We need to lead by example." Coach*

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**Year 2 (2017)**

**Earlier start with promotions**

- Started promotions with associations in April and online promotions in April – May.

**Branding of materials**

- Tied in Theme 3 slogan "Choose to Boost Veggies & Fruit" and use of superhero characters.
- Incorporated 2016 results & pictures to highlight benefits & demonstrate community support.
- Produced a "simpler" snack card.

**Continued with incentives**

- Water bottles for players.
- Teams entered into draw for a gift certificate.
- Incorporated a association and parent incentive for "taking the pledge".

**Field Visits**

- Visited 6 fields in 3 communities, reaching over 250 players with healthier snacks.
- Visits aimed to increase profile of the sideline snack project and encourage parents to "take the pledge".

**Evaluation Highlights from Year 2**

- **N = 60**
- 89% reported the project was successful in increasing the offering of healthier snacks & drinks.
- 96% reported the project was successful in increasing the offering of sugary snacks & drinks.
- 95% reported a willingness to continue to offer healthy snacks in future seasons.
- 89% are interested in their association adopting healthy snack guidelines.

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**Year 3 (2018)**

- Encouraged associations to adopt policy/guidelines.
- One association (Strathroy United FC) adopted association wide guidelines recommending preference to the provision of vegetables and/or fruit and water when snacks are offered during or after games and practices.