Effectiveness of a Walking Program for Children and Their Families

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PURPOSE: To implement and assess the effectiveness of a 10-week walking program on physical activity levels for 9-11 year old children and their families. **METHODS:** Eighteen children, aged 9-11, and their families (guardians and siblings) (n=34) were recruited through an open invitation within the Butler YMCA membership (Butler, PA). Participants were provided a free pedometer and family walking log to record steps; they were instructed to use these tools as motivation to increase physical activity over a 10-week period. Free, guided exercise classes were offered 5 days per week exclusively for the research participants and their family members. **RESULTS*:*** Eleven children, aged 9-11, and their families (n=23) completed the 10-week walking program (61% retention). Participants' steps significantly increased between week 1 (44,251±32,592) and week 10 (64,913±22,887) ($p<0.001$). Step counts were then further analyzed for children aged 9-11, their guardians, and their siblings. Children aged 9-11 had a non-significant increase in steps between week 1 (52,295±46,646) and week 10 (65,253±27,747) ($p=.435$). Conversely, parents had a significant increase between week 1 (40,195±27,568) and week 10 (63,481±23,265) ($p<.001$). Siblings also had a significant increase between week 1 (40,795±15,124) and week 10 (67,129±16,643) ($p<.001$). A One-Way ANOVA revealed that there were no statistical differences between the 3 groups at week 1 ($p=.623$), nor week 10 ($p=.938$). **CONCLUSION:** A 10-week walking program is a feasible option for increasing physical activity levels among family members. Even though the target population, children aged 9-11 years, did not significantly increase step counts, they improved by 25% from week 1 to week 10. It should be noted that the children's family members increased physical activity as a result of participating in this program and further investigation is warranted to determine the impact of familial support on physical activity levels.