

Insight driving innovation and impact

# Healthy Movers Dorset Case Study: St John's Pre-School

Linking Healthy Movers activities with storytelling and supporting physical activity

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# Introduction

St John's Pre-School is a pack-away<sup>1</sup> early years setting located in Wimborne in Dorset. They are a term-time only church pre-school – operating three mornings a week and two days from 9AM-3PM, catering for 38 children.

St John's joined the Healthy Movers programme in 2021. Healthy Movers is delivered by the Youth Sport Trust (YST), in partnership with Public Health Dorset. The programme is designed to support two to five year olds' physical literacy, self-esteem and wellbeing, helping them gain a better start in life.

# Background



Prior to the Healthy Movers programme, St John's encouraged their children to be as active and physical as possible. They mainly use an outdoor space with a climbing frame and a playground for physical activity. However, as they are a pack-away setting, they do not have permanent access to this space. In the time they are not able to use the space, they do a session called 'special focus'. This can be an active story, involving music and movement.

The children at the setting are described as active by the manager, riding bikes and scooters to pre-school, and the families are generally very active in the area too. However, the manager highlighted that they live in a deprived area, so she was motivated to provide them with the additional support and ideas that Healthy Movers can provide in terms of getting active at home as a family.

# Activities

The pre-school manager enjoyed the Healthy Movers training, in particular she enjoyed the tutor's delivery and the face-to-face, practical nature of it. The manager then cascaded the knowledge to her staff members; now four practitioners will deliver Healthy Movers themselves and come up with their own ideas and are keen to deliver activities. However, the manager believes it is beneficial for the whole team of practitioners to attend the training as this would ignite everyone's drive to get involved and to get something great out of it.

St John's focuses on school readiness and so they have been able incorporate Healthy Movers into these sessions and in their 'special focus' session. St John's focuses on three cards every half term. As it is a pack-away setting and they are not able to have a dedicated space for Healthy Movers, the manager created bags containing: a Healthy Movers card, a book that matches the card, a song, the resources such as bean bags, and then on a tag it says the outcome. The aim is to allow practitioners to quickly pick up a bag and have all the necessary information and resources in one location, ready for delivery. These bags have worked well for the setting.

## Adapting and linking Healthy Movers activities

The manager at St John's highlighted the value of Healthy Movers being adaptable so they can easily link it with other activities and topics they are currently focusing on, or that the children are currently interested in.

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<sup>1</sup> A pack-away setting is one where everything needs to be packed away at the end of each day so the space can be used by someone else.

**“I try and link it to children’s interests with a story and then find a way of putting the card in that way.”**

**LOUISE COLL, PRE-SCHOOL MANAGER AT ST JOHN’S**

There are some Healthy Movers activities that they were able to leave out all day as they do not require adult intervention. For example, the children particularly like the “Peg Challenge”, which is set out with just a dice and a bucket of pegs. With other Healthy Movers activities, the setting links them to stories through songs and books – these are often done during ‘special focus’ sessions. This aspect of storytelling, and theming activities around a story, has proven very successful at St John’s. They like to make a whole process out of it. For example, when the setting focused on the Healthy Movers activity “Deep Blue Sea”, they did the submarine activity, and the children went off and found their space and chose who they wanted to be, e.g. a sea animal. Then they came back together and sang songs about the sea. The children at the setting also really enjoyed “Hot Hot Hot Treasure”, where they set up a pirate chest with treasure in it. Then they read pirate stories so they could pretend to be a pirate, get their treasure and then share. Finally, they came together and sang to finish the activity. For the train activity “Choo Choo”, they got the climbing frame out, and used that as a tunnel and station.

**“I feel the children engage more if they can pretend to be a character.”**

**LOUISE COLL, PRE-SCHOOL MANAGER AT ST JOHN’S**

## **Engaging parents**

Every Thursday, St John’s uploads a photo of a Healthy Movers card on the online learning system, and the children take the resource to go home. The pre-school manager took the cards out of the backpacks as they did not want to hand them out all at once in order to avoid parents feeling overwhelmed; instead they present the card as a weekly “homework” task. The manager highlighted that the parents fed back that they would like the physical copy of the card, so she is planning on giving them copies of the cards starting in September.

St John’s also uses their social media by posting the Healthy Movers card that goes home that week on their Facebook page, alongside the YouTube link of the Healthy Movers tutor doing it, and then asks parents to send photos of their children doing the activity at home.

**“We’ve got some parents that are really keen and some that never quite know what to share. So if I set a challenge on Healthy Movers, then it gives them something that they can achieve and send back and they’re not worried that it’s going to be the wrong thing.”**

**LOUISE COLL, PRE-SCHOOL MANAGER AT ST JOHN’S**

# Benefits

## Increasing knowledge and understanding among practitioners



The pre-school manager reports that Healthy Movers has helped their knowledge of how physical literacy links with other areas of development, such as literacy, reading and writing. This made them feel more confident in explaining the benefits of being active and healthy with other staff members, children and parents.

The manager reported that the staff members appeared a bit apprehensive at first but by emphasizing the simplicity of the activities, the staff were reassured. As a result, the manager observed an increase in confidence and competence when it comes to their staff members leading Healthy Movers activities. The team at St John's has weekly meetings where they give each other ideas for Healthy Movers and keep each other up-to-date. The manager also recalled that another setting in the area contacted her – asking specifically about how to delivery Healthy Movers best in a pack-away setting. St John's was able to share advice with them and enhance understanding among local practitioners.

The manager also highlighted that while doing Healthy Movers activities, she noticed one boy particularly struggling with his coordination, unable to reach the next stage. Observing Healthy Movers outcomes along with professional support has helped to diagnose an additional need, in this case dyspraxia.

## Enhancing children's physical development and literacy



The pre-school manager has noticed the programme helped to develop the children's core fine motor skills and gross motor skills. The children enjoy the physical activities and are happy to engage with the resources and going outside. They ask for more now. It has also improved their literacy as they show more interest in the books that are left out after the activity.

Healthy Movers also had an impact on the delivery of physical activity sessions at the setting. They now have targets to kick balls through and generally provide more of an outcome and a purpose to activities. Due to their success, the manager brought more resources in, such as Velcro spots and arrows to scatter around the room, and a bubble machine as the children loved the bubbles linked to the "Pop the Bubble" card. This has been a highlight for all of the children at the setting.

## Enhancing social skills among children



The pre-school manager highlighted that the programme improved sharing among children, especially with activities like "Hot Hot Hot Treasure". This allowed them to broaden their social skills and they now help each other.

As St John's delivered Healthy Movers through storytelling, this has enhanced the children's role playing as well because they carried it on afterwards. For example, after "Hot Hot Hot Treasure" the children asked if the practitioners could leave the treasure basket out because they wanted to continue playing with it. For the boys, in particular, who just love to kick balls, they have spent more time becoming characters and

learning to track with their eyes, which helps with their reading, and actually understand that there's a reason behind activities.

## Future

St John's is continuing to incorporate Healthy Movers into their daily routines in September and linking it to their curriculum. They will continue going through three activities every six weeks as this has worked well in their setting. In addition, the pre-school manager aims to organise a Stay and Play session, particularly for the parents of the 23 new children starting in September. The manager hopes to invite a couple of parents each day for a week just to have a fun session with their children.

**“You can actually put Healthy Movers in absolutely everything. We've been doing lots of school readiness bits, and there's so many parts you can take from it. It's just kind of become part of our normal curriculum now.”**

**LOUISE COLL, PRE-SCHOOL MANAGER AT ST JOHN'S**

## Top Tips

- ✓ Try and make it fit for your own setting, feel free to take bits of a card and adapt it. Especially when there are bigger nurseries with younger rooms and children in different developmental stages.
- ✓ Incorporate Healthy Movers into your daily routine by linking it to other activities that you are already doing as a setting. Try not to be too fixated on the outcome and focus on children's interests.
- ✓ Try and link the Healthy Movers activity cards to a story from a book and/or song and engage children through the power of storytelling.
- ✓ Collaborate and network with other settings in the area to give and receive support, in particular to discuss good practice when the set-up is similar, e.g. pack-away settings.
- ✓ Try and catch up regularly with other practitioners in your setting who deliver Healthy Movers to give ideas on delivery, update on questionnaires and generally keeping the team up-to-date with the programme.



Youth Sport Trust  
SportPark  
Loughborough University  
3 Oakwood Drive  
Loughborough  
Leicestershire  
LE11 3QF

01509 226600  
[research@youthsporttrust.org](mailto:research@youthsporttrust.org)  
[www.youthsporttrust.org](http://www.youthsporttrust.org)



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