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## **CHARTING CONSUMER HEALTH**

### **Teaching Kids About Healthy Lifestyles Through Stories and Games: Partnering With Public Libraries to Reach Local Children**

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*Each year, the Medical Library faculty members of the Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center at Shreveport (LSUHSC-S) focus on an outreach project that moves them beyond the walls of the Library to serve the local community. In the spring of 2009, the librarians embarked on a project to create a kids' health Web portal as part of the Library's consumer health Web site healthelinks. The purpose of the "For Kids" Web portal was to provide health information, games, and activities appropriate for children. Another goal was to feature stories and follow-up activities selected for story hours hosted by LSUHSC-S Library faculty in the Shreve Memorial Public Library System in Shreveport, Louisiana. This article provides an overview of the project, highlighting both successes and lessons learned.*

*KEYWORDS* children, consumer health, health, reading, story hours, wellness

In the spring of 2009, Library faculty at the Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center at Shreveport (LSUHSC-S) submitted an outreach subcontract proposal to the National Network of Libraries of Medicine, South Central Region (NN/LM SCR). The proposal was entitled: "Making the Wellness and Kids' Health Connection in North Louisiana."

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Comments and suggestions should be sent to the Column Editors: Anne Beschnett (besch015@umn.edu) or Donna Timm (dtimm@lsuhsc.edu)

The objectives of the project were as follows:

- To teach children about the positive aspects of being healthy through story time and fun physical activities.
- To create a Web portal where children can access current, authoritative, and free health information as well as health-related activities and games.
- To create educational materials to support the health-related activities.
- To demonstrate the Medical Library's consumer health Web site *healthelinks*: [www.healthelinks.org](http://www.healthelinks.org).

The outreach proposal was accepted by the NN/LM SCR, and the Library faculty began working on this project on May 1, 2009, with the subcontract period ending on April 30, 2010.

## TARGET POPULATION

The number of overweight and obese children is increasing at an alarming rate. The Kaiser Family Foundation reports that 36% of children, ages 10 to 17 in Louisiana, are either overweight or obese (1). As more children become overweight, more children are developing serious weight-related health conditions, once only seen in adults, such as hypertension, type 2 diabetes, obstructive sleep apnea, and nonalcoholic fatty liver disease (2). In an effort to prevent childhood obesity and related diseases in the Shreveport area, Medical Library faculty chose to target young children before they have gained an excessive amount of weight. Furthermore, young people in a lower socioeconomic status are more likely to become overweight due to a lack of access to appropriate resources and reliable consumer health information (3). In Caddo Parish, 37.7% of children younger than the age of 5 are living below the poverty level (4), which is almost twice the national average (5). Therefore, the target population of this project includes preschool and early elementary-aged children in low-income communities in Caddo Parish, Louisiana.

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

### Funding

This project was funded through an outreach subcontract sponsored by the NN/LM SCR for a 1-year period beginning on May 1, 2009, and ending on April 30, 2010.

## Web Portal

Library faculty developed a “For Kids” Web portal, [www.healthelinks.org/kidshealth/](http://www.healthelinks.org/kidshealth/), as another component of the Library’s consumer health Web site *healthelinks*, which links to National Library of Medicine (NLM) resources like MedlinePlus. The “For Kids” section was developed to highlight the story hours sponsored by the Library and to provide authoritative information resources for children (Figure 1).

During the course of the project, the “For Kids” portal was used not only to promote the story hours but also to provide links to reliable information and health-themed games to reinforce ways in which children might pursue a healthy lifestyle. At the story hours, each child also received a *healthelinks* bookmark featuring Web sites on health topics appropriate for children (Figure 2).

## Partners

The most important part of the project was collaborating with the right partner, and the Shreve Memorial Public Library System in Shreveport, Louisiana, was the perfect choice. The Library faculty focused on three public library branches located in low-income communities that offer children’s programming for preschool and early elementary-aged children.

We worked with the Mooretown, North Shreveport, and Wallelte Branch Libraries, coordinating the project with the children’s librarian at each branch. At the Mooretown and Wallelte branches, we averaged 50 to over 100 children per visit, along with their teachers who attended the sessions.

We discovered that the key to working successfully with public library branches is to plan the story hours well in advance and coordinate the selection of topics and books with the children’s librarians. It is also helpful to consult the children’s librarians about follow-up activities to be certain that the activities are appropriate for the age group and for the space in which the activities will occur.

Choose the right partner, plan the story hours well in advance, and coordinate activities with the children’s librarians to create the recipe for success! There is no better validation of success than to be invited back again and again. We are glad to report that the children’s librarians with whom we worked invited us back to work with them on a number of story hours and special projects that we had not previously envisioned.

## Story Hours

Library faculty involved in this project selected health-related children’s stories from the Shreve Memorial Public Library collection. The stories were read by Medical Library faculty during the branches’ scheduled story times to

HOME | ABOUT US | CONTACT US



healthelinks  
for kids

Online Health Information You Can Trust



LSU Health Sciences Center  
SHREVEPORT  
MEDICAL LIBRARY

Your Body & how it works

Feeling Sick?

Stressed Out?

Eating Smart

Staying Active

Play It Safe

Games

## Story Hour at Shreve Memorial Library

**WHERE:** Shreve Memorial Library  
Mooretown Branch Library  
4360 Hollywood Ave  
Shreveport, LA 71109

Shreve Memorial Library  
Wallette Branch Library  
363 North Hearne Avenue  
Shreveport, LA 71103

**WHEN:** Mooretown Branch Library  
April 7, 2010 at 10:00 a.m.

Wallette Branch Library  
April 13, 2010 at 10:00 a.m.

**The Stories:**

**Exercise** by Liz Gogerly

*Exercise* is the positive story of twins Tom and Emily. Like many children their age, Tom and Emily do not get as much exercise as they should. This changes the day their grandmother comes to visit. Soon, Tom and Emily learn all about the benefits of exercise. This story is written for children, ages five to seven.

**Get Up and Go!** by Nancy L. Carlson

This story includes vibrant, fun-filled illustrations and an encouraging text that explain the many great reasons to exercise, from making new friends and going to new places to just because it's good for the body. *Get Up and Go* is written for children in preschool and primary-grade levels.

The stories will be read by Deidra Woodson, a librarian from the LSU Health Sciences Center - Shreveport and will be followed by an activity for the children.

**More Information:**

Diane Bailey  
Children's Librarian  
Walette Branch Library  
(318) 425-3630

Jackqueline Suds  
Children's Librarian  
Mooretown Branch Library  
(318) 636-2267

Donna Timm, MLS  
LSU Health Sciences Center Medical Library  
Head of User Education  
(318) 675-5474




Disclaimer: healthelinks is intended for information purposes only, not to offer medical advice. Please consult your doctor about any personal health concerns.

LSUHSC-S Medical Library | 1501 Kings Highway | Shreveport, LA 71130 | 318-675-5445

**FIGURE 1** *healthelinks* “For Kids” Web portal.

present health and wellness concepts. Following the story, the children took part in an enrichment activity designed to reinforce the concepts presented in the story.

# healthelinks

●●●●●●●●●●

## for kids

<http://www.healthelinks.org/kidshealth>

Medical Librarians at the LSU Health Sciences Center made this website just for kids. Find links to the websites below and much more!

### KidsHealth for Kids

<http://kidshealth.org/kid/>

At this website, you can learn how to stay healthy, how your body works, and about different illnesses. Also, play games and try fun experiments!



### BAM! Body and Mind

<http://www.bam.gov/>

Visit this website to get tips on healthy eating, staying fit, and dealing with stress. Plus, check out the Immune Platoon to learn how your body fights diseases.



### Small Step Kids

<http://www.smallstep.gov/kids/flash/index.html>

At this website, you can learn what healthy foods can do for you. Also, get great ideas for games you can play with your friends.

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The healthelinks website is sponsored by the Medical Library at the LSU Health Sciences Center at Shreveport. <http://www.healthelinks.org>

FIGURE 2 healthelinks “For Kids” bookmark.

## STORY AND ACTIVITY DESCRIPTIONS

Medical Library faculty determined a theme for every story hour, featuring wellness topics such as nutrition, germ prevention, and exercise. Appropriate stories were selected from the Shreve Memorial Library catalog, and an activity was developed to support the theme for each story hour. Descriptions of each story and activity are listed below according to the theme.

### General Wellness

*Oh, The Things You Can Do That Are Good for You!* by Tish Rabe, illustrated by Aristides Ruiz; New York: Random House; 2001.

The Cat in the Hat leads the children on an adventure through the “Feeling Great Clinic,” where they learn about maintaining a healthy lifestyle by eating healthy foods, exercising, washing their hands, and getting plenty of rest. Although not written by Dr. Seuss, this story upholds his classic style of fun characters and melodic rhyme.

### HEART SMART GAME

The Heart Smart game teaches children to distinguish between healthy and unhealthy habits and explains the basic functions of the heart. Medical librarians located this activity on the North Carolina Physical Education Web site (6). In this game, the children were taught about the heart by asking them questions such as “Where is your heart located?” and “What does your heart do?” Then, they were told about activities that strengthen the heart (physical activity and healthy food) and that weaken the heart (inactivity, greasy foods, and smoking). The children were shown cards, developed by Library faculty, that represented a particular activity, such as “Eating Vegetables,” “Eating a Hamburger with Fries,” “Jumping Rope,” and “Watching TV.” If the activity was good for the heart, the kids jumped, but if the activity was bad for the heart, the kids squatted.

### Germ Prevention

*Germs! Germs! Germs!* by Bobbi Katz, illustrated by Steve Björkman; New York: Scholastic; 1996.

In this unique story, the reader learns how germs cause infection from the germs themselves. These colorful germs repeatedly state that they live everywhere, and they describe the ideal conditions that they need to enter



**FIGURE 3** Germ stopper sticker.

the body and establish a foothold. The germs also explain how they do not like sanitary conditions and people who wash their hands often.

#### GERM STOPPER ACTIVITY

An interactive story created by Medical Library faculty was read to the children. The story describes how germs are spread from one child to the next in a basketball game and ends with a message about how to stop germs, utilizing the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) "Germ Stopper" campaign (7). Last, the children were given a small amount of hand sanitizer and a germ stopper sticker, which was designed by Medical Library faculty (Figure 3).

#### Nutrition

*Eating Well* by Liz Gogerly, illustrated by Mike Gordon; New York: Crabtree; 2009.

After getting sick from eating too much junk food at his best friend's house, James learns the consequences of an unhealthy diet. He changes his eating habits and soon realizes that he feels much better after eating nutritious foods. Eventually, he convinces his best friend to change his eating habits, too.

*The Edible Pyramid: Good Eating Every Day* by Loreen Leedy; New York: Holiday House; 2007.

At the "Edible Pyramid" restaurant, a cat waiter explains the menu, which is organized according to the food pyramid, to a group of hungry customers. Healthy foods from each food group are colorfully illustrated in this book.

#### GROCERY BAG GAME

For this activity, designed by the medical librarians, the children were taken on an imaginary adventure to the grocery store. They were shown cards that represented different types of food. If the food featured on the card was

healthy, the children yelled “yay,” and the card was placed in a grocery bag. If the food item was not healthy, they yelled “boo,” and the item was “put back on the shelf.”

## Exercise

*Exercise* by Liz Gogerly, illustrated by Mike Gordon; New York: Crabtree; 2009.

Tom and Emily enjoy watching television and playing video games all day, but they soon learn about the benefits of exercise when their grandmother visits. Grandma is healthy and strong because she stays active everyday. When she visits, she makes them turn off the TV and exercise with her. By the end of the story, Tom and Emily learn that exercise is fun.

*Get Up and Go!* by Nancy L. Carlson; New York: Viking; 2006.

Happy animal characters explain the positive aspects of exercise, as well as describe different ways to stay fit. Images of the characters exercising are vibrantly illustrated in this book.

## EXERCISE ACTIVITY

Rather than leading the children in a boring exercise routine, Medical Library faculty developed an innovative activity involving imaginary sports. First, the librarian took the children rock climbing, in which they stretched their arms and legs. Second, they played baseball by swinging an imaginary bat and running “the bases” in place. Next, they played jump rope by simply jumping in place, which was followed by another stretching exercise, imaginary swimming. Last, the children danced to the Alvin and the Chipmunks’ version of “The Twist” (8).

## PROMOTION

Armed with a great idea, cooperative partners, interesting books, and fun activities, we moved ahead to the next step of promoting our project to a potential audience. Our public library partners had their own proven methods of publicizing events through newsletters, flyers, newspapers, and Web sites. In an effort to expand upon their normal clientele, we used the *healthelinks* “For Kids” portal homepage to reach a different demographic. The location, date, and time of each story hour was advertised, and the stories were featured, as well.

Bookmarks promoting the “For Kids” Web portal were created by Medical Library faculty and distributed to the children who participated in

the story hours. Bookmarks were also given to the teachers and librarians, whereas others were left at each library branch for later distribution.

This visit to each public library was also used as an opportunity to publicize the Library's consumer health Web site, *healthelinks*. Brochures, pens, and notepads were distributed to library patrons as we demonstrated the useful features of this site.

## PUBLICITY

Shreveport is quite fortunate to have local television and newspaper journalists who are committed to publicizing and furthering projects that seek to educate and expand the horizons of the community's school-aged children. A few phone calls resulted in extensive coverage by the local media. The reporters and cameramen of three television stations captured the smiles and laughter of the children who were learning about health and wellness in a fun-filled environment. The newspaper provided coverage both in print and online, with a gallery of photos accessible on their Web site (9). In fact, the newspaper article was featured as the cover story of the *Louisiana State University System Media Sweep*, which is a daily compilation of statewide news articles distributed to all faculty of the LSU System. These events were also publicized in the LSUHSC-S newsletter and on the Medical Library's Web site. The extensive media coverage provided visibility and validity for our outreach efforts in the local community.

## CHALLENGES

No matter how detailed the planning process, there are always lessons to be learned and components of a project to be implemented in a different or better way. Here are some of the challenges we faced:

- Determining the appropriate library branches that serve the target population and have well-developed children's programs.
- Coordinating our schedules with the public library branches' existing calendar of events.
- Predicting the number of participants in order to have an ample number of handouts.
- Selecting stories appropriate to the health-related theme that are also easy to read aloud.
- Developing related activities that reinforce the concepts presented in the story and are also easily implemented with a large number of children in a limited space.
- Maintaining the interest and attention of a large number of children for an extended period of time.

**TABLE 1** Story Hour Participants

Theme	Date	Branch	Number of participants
General wellness	June 24, 2009	Walette	70
	July 14, 2009	Mooretown	30
	September 14, 2009	North Shreveport	6
Germ prevention	January 12, 2010	Walette	150
	January 19, 2010	Mooretown	65
Nutrition	March 3, 2010	Mooretown	175
	March 9, 2010	Walette	33
Exercise	April 7, 2010	Mooretown	150
	April 13, 2010	Walette	121

All of these challenges can be dealt with by librarians who remain flexible. After all, it is impossible to predict exactly how preschoolers will react to a story or participate in follow-up activities. Having a sense of humor goes a long way toward the successful implementation of this type of project.

## RESULTS

We were amazed and gratified by the number of participants in the nine story hours. The fact that nearly 800 students took part in these activities speaks to the need for health information that is both factual and easy-to-understand. The children were engaged in the stories and activities. Based on their responses to questions, it was apparent that they were having fun and learning about health and wellness at the same time. The positive responses from the children's librarians were evidenced by requests for future programs. Due to an overwhelming interest in the topics of these nine story hours, a few preschool groups could not be accommodated due to space limitations and were rescheduled for a later event. See Table 1 for a summary of student participation.

## REWARDS

The results of this project were threefold and provided rewards for all parties involved. The children had an educational, yet fun experience, while learning about the benefits of a healthy lifestyle that includes exercise and good nutrition. The children's librarians were provided with story hour programming that could be replicated for future events. The Medical Library faculty have a timeless, health-related program that can be used as is or as a template for future outreach efforts.

## CONCLUSION

The excitement and enthusiastic participation of the children reinforced our supposition that tedious health information could be presented in a more interesting manner through stories and games. Due to the success of this pilot program, we will continue to develop new features for this project and investigate new partners for future activities.

A new outreach subcontract from the National Network of Libraries of Medicine, South Central Region has been approved for the period of May 1, 2010, to April 30, 2011. This project includes a plan to partner with different branches within the Shreve Memorial Library system and Sci-Port: Louisiana's Science Center, a local museum that provides a fun, educational environment for people of all ages to explore and actively engage in the world of mathematics, science, and technology. The stories and activities at the public libraries will remain the same, but the activities at Sci-Port will include hands-on demonstrations.

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