

Drinking water fountains in New Plymouth District – using the voice of children to guide decision making

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Background and Objective

Taranaki children have the second highest prevalence of childhood obesity in New Zealand. The high consumption of sweet beverages among children contributes to this issue. A recent survey of council owned parks, play grounds and major walkways in Taranaki found that less than one in five had drinking water fountains. Subsequently the New Plymouth District Council (NPDC) offered to install more drinking water fountains in public places. The Taranaki Public Health Unit decided to gain the voice of children to inform the Council about the preferred type of drinking water fountains and suggest locations for new drinking water fountains.

Methods

Children aged 9 years to 11 years in seven primary schools in the New Plymouth District were surveyed. Mainly schools in lower socio-economic areas were selected. Children were shown a photo of the most recent drinking fountain installed by NPDC. The students were asked if they liked this design and if it needed improvements. The student was then asked where they think new fountains should be put.

Findings

70 students were individually interviewed. Students from each school tended to think about areas in their own neighbourhood. The majority of students were happy with the design of the water fountain that they were shown.

Discussion

This easy to do project using the voice of children provided useful information on the best locations of drinking water fountains for primary school aged children in New Plymouth district. Territorial authorities are encouraged to consider using “co-design” more often (particularly with services that affect children) as it benefits both the customer and the service provider.