Reviewer's report

Title: A qualitative evaluation of a family-based walking intervention - Furness Families Walk4Life

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Reviewer: Lindsey Dugdill

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This paper reports on an evaluation of a family-based walking intervention and as such has the potential to add to the growing literature on walking interventions, most of which to date have reported adult-based interventions in various settings. Consequently it was of interest to read a paper/intervention which focused on the family as a unit.

The paper is currently written in a rather vague style in that it lacked methodological detail and critical analysis of approaches taken and the overall limitations of the evaluation. Little detail is given of the programme rationale and design with respect to families and what is already known from the literature with respect to getting children more physically active e.g. NICE guidance/reviews. The sample size is small but this is not necessarily a problem if the authors give a more convincing story regarding the quality and depth of data collection and analysis. The family as a unit did not seem to be a focus of the paper it was more about the practical implementation of the programme and lessons for stakeholders.

Consequently it is recommended that the authors revisit the title of paper and decide on its focus exactly. This may help with the revision process.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. The abstract could be improved substantially. The context/location and delivery mechanism of the walking intervention needs some detail. At present it does not have enough detail of sampling e.g. numbers of focus groups and interviews conducted and with whom, although to some extent they were detailed in the later paper. Were children part of the sampling strategy? The key research questions need to be outlined. The key results did not really say why these factors were important so more examples may be needed. The paper needs to say what it is adding to the literature i.e. what is new learning and what are the implications for getting families walking? I realise that abstracts are limited in words but this abstract lacked sufficient depth of detail to understand what had been undertaken by the authors.

2. Please give detail of the health inequalities of the study area c.f. England p4 and some socio-demographic deatils pertaining to the study population/area catchment.
3. Please be more specific about evaluation/research questions - these seem vague at present.

4. Was there any underpinning theoretical rationale or framework used to guide the content/design of the programme? e.g. what works in engaging parents with respect to PA interventions? Known barriers and facilitators of PA interventions with children for example. Did the programme design take known barriers and facilitators into account e.g. NICE guidance for example.

5. Was delivery of programme aimed at all families or families with children of specific ages? Were walks run in or out of normally working/school hours? These details of delivery and rationale are quite important. Who had the overall responsibility for the programme design?

6. Specify the exact role of the centre staff in promoting walking.

7. Who phoned the families at weeks 5/7? What was said? Were drop-outs from the programme treated any differently?

8. Were instructions given about the use of the resource pack?

10. Clarify who the nine interview were undertaken with. Give some detail of the interviewee characteristics e.g. who were the stakeholders?

11. Explain how the interview guide was constructed, what questions were asked and why. Who conducted the interviews, where were they held, how long did they take, how were they transcribed. All of this detail was missing from the method.

12. Were the participants of the FGs just parents or children and parents? Need to explain sampling strategy. Explain n= for individual interviews and n=? FGs you carried out. What was the gender, age breakdown for participants did you have these details or was it a limitation.

13. Was this inductive as argued. Authors reported using a semi-structured interview guide, so the relative inductive/deductive components need to be explained more thoroughly in the analysis section.

14. The results section needs to be re-written and organised around emergent findings from the parents, stakeholders and programme staff. It currently reads more like a summary from a report. At the moment it is not clear which findings emerge from which groups of participants in the evaluation and if there are areas of consensus or not in the findings. More examples and details need to be given for each emergent theme. Data presented at present is very limited.

15. People are identified by name of their job, e.g page 7 Strategic manager of action for children. Has permission been given for individuals to be quoted in this paper. The ethical issues need to be addressed and discussed. It was not mentioned if this study had received ethical approval from anywhere?
16. There does not appear to be any FG data displayed. I would refer the authors to Kitzinger, Morgan etc for a discussion re the appropriate use of FG data/analysis.

17. The implications for future practice are not appropriately written or in the correct place for a research paper. They need to be removed from results and condensed into a summary in the discussion.

18. I would have liked to see more of a discussion of who participated, who dropped out (i.e. who the intervention did not work for) and if you reached the families really in need of the intervention. Are the families who participated just people who would have walked anyway or were they newly active with their children as a result of the programme.

19. Did you get any data from the children? Discussion of their inclusion/exclusion from sampling strategy.

20. What are the new findings in terms of the evidence to date with respect to walking and family-based interventions. This needs to be clarified. Many of the lessons learned Fig 1 are already known e.g. advertising by word-of-mouth, are known more generally from the health/PA literature. This paper could focus in on the new factors that relate to getting families walking e.g. fun and adventure aspects of walking for children e.g.?????.

The paper took a descriptive rather than critical stance and needs to be re-written with a more critical perspective answering the questions above and highlighting limitations.

Minor Essential Revisions

Please check paper for grammatical accuracy including spelling inaccuracies e.g. in abstract. Apostrophes were missing also e.g. in abstract.

Please check writing tense, it alternates between present/past tense.
Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare I have no competing interests