

CRANK IT DOWN COLORADO KIDS

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ABSTRACT

This presentation will provide an overview of an innovative grassroots effort to provide hearing loss prevention education in Colorado elementary schools. Specifically the program implemented with approximately 1600 third grade students in the St. Vrain alley School District will be highlighted. This program was specifically designed to minimize the classroom instruction time required to reach the students, teachers and parents with critical information regarding hazardous noise, how the ear works and hearing loss prevention strategies. Issues related to program implementation, financial resources and program impact will be discussed. Hearing conservation resources and materials for children will be illustrated which may facilitate the implementation in other local schools, audiology practices, 4-H clubs, farm safety camps, scouts and other children's organizations. The model may prove advantageous for other school settings and age groups, especially as dedicated classroom time becomes more restrictive.

PROJECT HISTORY

In spring 1999 efforts were begun to collaborate with educational audiologists in Colorado regarding a National Hearing Conservation Association (NHCA) noise induced hearing loss awareness campaign for grade school children. The campaign initially began as an effort to solicit posters for the annual Children's poster contest held in conjunction with the NHCA annual conference in the Host City (Denver 2000). Educational presentations on noise induced hearing loss in children and adolescents were presented by local NHCA members to school audiologists at their monthly continuing education meetings. The poster contest was subsequently implemented through the voluntary efforts of educational audiologists in the Front Range communities of Colorado.

An outgrowth of this awareness was a committee effort to identify a means to best educate grade school children regarding noise induced hearing loss in Colorado. Committee members were composed of NHCA members, Colorado Academy of Audiology (CAA), Colorado Educational Audiology Group and representatives of the Colorado Department of Education and Colorado Department of Health. It became readily apparent that "curriculum" based models would not be feasible on a large scale since each Colorado school district defines their own curriculum and the administrative focus on academics in the classroom. Consequently, the "Crank It Down Colorado Kids" model was developed for voluntary implementation by educational audiologists targeting third graders at the time of their annual hearing screening. The program for St. Vrain Valley School District is profiled.

SCHOOL DISTRICT PROFILE

St. Vrain Valley School District RE-1J is in Longmont Colorado. There are 38 schools; 21 of which are elementary schools serving 19,000 students. The project targeted 1584 third grade students. Spanish is spoken by 11.5% of these third graders. One full-time and one part-time educational audiologist serve the school district.

APPROVAL & FUNDING

The third place NHCA poster contest winner was from the St. Vrain school district which enabled the educational audiologists to attend the local school board meeting to promote recognition for the winner and seek funding and approval for the Crank It Down Colorado Kids campaign. The school board embraced the concept of educating the third graders at the time of their annual hearing screening, but did not authorize any additional funding for the project.

The local newspaper (Daily Times Call-Longmont, Colorado) was notified about the poster winner and the audiologists were able to meet Joe Southern, a reporter, with a

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presumptive noise-induced hearing loss and tinnitus. He subsequently published an editorial on the issue and embraced the project for the local children. Further contact between the reporter and the school audiologists resulted in newspaper funding support for promoting the Crank It Down Colorado Kids campaign in the local schools.

Further serendipitous relationships developed between Connie Coffield, the newspaper director of promotions, community services and newspapers in education and the local educational audiologists. Ms. Coffield's brother is hearing impaired and again the motivation was strong to support this campaign by the newspaper. A funding proposal was made to the Daily Times Call and the newspaper agreed to printing the give-away materials for the children and promoting the effort in the newspaper.

MATERIALS USED

- Crank It Down Colorado Kids brochures (English and Spanish)
- NASA Activity Sheet
- NIDCD Bookmarks
- Parent Letter
- Earplugs

The newspaper provided the printing of 3000 brochures and activity sheets at a cost of \$2560.00. The cover letter expenses were \$60 and were covered by the school district. Four newspaper advertisements were produced monthly in the Times Daily Call. The advertisements featured promotion of the Crank It Down Colorado Kids campaign and were subsidized by the newspapers in education and local audiology practice advertisements. This amounted to \$3200 worth of advertising. The audiology practices paid \$240 for each monthly ad. AEARO Company and Dalloz Safety donated the earplugs, which were distributed to students. The extra brochures were requested by the newspaper for community use. The local hospital nursery has requested them for parents of newborns and local pediatrician offices have also requested them.

IMPLEMENTATION

1. **Principals Notified:** Emails were sent to the principals at all the elementary schools alerting them to the Crank It Down Colorado Kids campaign for Fall 2000.
2. **Timing:** Materials were provided for the classroom teacher to coincide with the annual hearing screening in their school.
3. **Packets:** The educational audiologist's secretary called each elementary school prior to their scheduled hearing screenings to get the number of third graders in their schools and the Spanish/English counts. The packets were stapled together with the help of administrative staff and audiology student interns.
4. **Delivery:** The educational audiologist would visit the school on the day of the hearing screening and deliver a packet personally to the principal and quantities to the classroom teachers. The teachers received verbal instructions and requested to pass out the packets and review the materials with their students at the end of the day or "Friday Folders".
5. **Follow-Up:** Teachers were subsequently emailed for voluntary comments and suggestions for the program.

FEEDBACK

The children responded with interest and enthusiasm. Children in other grades requested that they be included in the project. Teacher feedback was requested via email by the local audiologists.

Positive Samples:

"I think that the materials were age appropriate and because of the materials we had a discussion in the class that probably wouldn't have occurred otherwise. I think that getting the materials were beneficial.

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The kids commented on how they like the earplugs and thought that it was neat to have something to take home to share with family. It might be improved if someone would give a short presentation to the classes. Thanks".

"My kids seemed to like it. However, they took it home and did the fun stuff there. I didn't hear anything about it after that."

"I thought they were very age appropriate and well done". They should be done again next year".

"The students in my room seem to appreciate hearing the message again. Hearing loss is permanent!"

"My kids were excited about the earplugs and many of them had "noisy" stories to share. I think it was grade appropriate too. I don't know what you can do to improve the project except continue to educate. Maybe come speak to the kids about noise."

"From what I saw, the materials were definitely age appropriate. The kids were excited to get the materials. I don't have any suggestions for improvement".

"I personally thought the Crank It Down materials were very valuable. I think it was particularly effective coming on the day of the vision and hearing testing. I doubt if many children are aware of the dangers to their hearing and having the information at my fingertips enables me to pass along accurate data."

"Thanks so much for providing the great materials and earplugs. I would love to see the program continue. The children were very interested in the subject of noise pollution and the resulting problems in our world. Maybe you could do a short presentation next year."

NEGATIVE?

"I think it would have been helpful if someone explained to the students what the material was. Maybe 10-15 minutes spent going over the materials before they take them home

would have been helpful. I thought the materials themselves were good, age appropriate but nobody seemed to know what to do with them and a lot of parents do not have the time to go over the material at home."

"Kids seemed to enjoy. One used earplugs inappropriately the next day".

"It did seem age appropriate, but more games/puzzles would probably heighten interest".

"We appreciate your thought, but I don't think it really is money well spent. I didn't get feedback from the students, but I did have to ask a student to remove the earplugs from his nostrils. I think they definitely need to go. I don't want to be negative because I know how much time this effort took, but I didn't have the time to adequately go over the sheets. If you were to do it again I would suggest a smaller form and no earplugs."

"The kiddos were excited with your materials. Having earplugs attached; however is a serious liability! When we tour the Daily Times-Call they make us return the earplugs because they are very concerned about kids playing with them in outside or on the way home from school and not hearing traffic."

The audiologists report that there was only one incident with earplugs, which resulted in a student receiving the packet early in the day and subsequently cutting the earplug into pieces and putting it in their ear. School personnel removed it without incident.

IMPROVEMENTS

There are certainly plans to continue the project on an annual basis if funding resources continue. Targeted improvements include;

- Email teachers for advance notice along with principals
- Educational audiologist make classroom appearance prior to class dismissal for

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hearing screenings to explain about the packet of materials and taking them home.

- Need to ask about “family” primary language since some children speak English, but parents may not.
- Shrink activity sheet size to fit into plastic freezer bags and avoid stapling.
- Pursue service club, shelter workshop, boy scouts etc. to help assemble packets.
- Incorporate favorite sound survey of children.
- Re-evaluate inclusion of earplugs in packets. Only two incidents out of over 1500 pair (one in nose, one cut-up in ear)
- Incorporate parent feedback next year. Consider presentation to parent organization.
- Assess knowledge gained by students

CONCLUSION

The Crank It Down Colorado Kids campaign served to reinforce the value of good hearing at the time of annual third grade hearing screenings. Since approximately 95% of the children pass the screening, it seemed especially appropriate to spend some time providing them with resources on the hazardous of loud noise and reinforcing the value of good hearing.

Classroom presentations may enhance the project and hopefully will be incorporated in the future as teacher/school administration receptiveness increases. In the meantime, 1584 children and their parents received valuable information not previously available and the community was reminded monthly in newspaper promotions.

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