Jongeren Op Gezond Gewicht targets overweight among deprived adolescents in the framework of the European OPEN project

The Hague – Jongeren Op Gezond Gewicht in the Netherlands participates in the European OPEN project (Obesity Prevention through European Network – with the support of DG Sanco) Together with 12 other programmes in Europe, they help municipalities organize targeted activities to stimulate adolescents from underprivileged areas to eat better and move more.

Traditional prevention does not reach teenagers
1 in 6 15-year old boys and 1 in 10 15-year old girls are reported overweight or obese. These numbers are higher in the south of Europe, compared to the north1. Overweight and obesity are more common in families with a lower education level, or who live below the poverty line2. Those health inequalities can be more impacting during adolescence, a crucial stage for future (mental and physical) health3. Furthermore, adolescents are less easy to reach through existing obesity prevention programmes for children, as it is not only their family but also mainly their peers who influence them the most4.

The OPEN project aims to enlarge the scope of existing ‘community-based’ programmes to deprived adolescents. “By participating in the OPEN project, we can exchange with and learn from similar programmes in other countries. This way we can improve our approach” says Marjon Bachra, Managing Director of Jongeren Op Gezond Gewicht.

A European network to facilitate the healthy choice
13 obesity prevention programmes in 13 European countries are part of the OPEN project: Belgium, Cyprus5, Germany5, France, Greece, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, the Netherlands and Sweden6. Most of these programmes function according to the EPODE model; a large-scale, coordinated, capacity-building approach for communities to implement effective and sustainable strategies to prevent childhood obesity.

In total, OPEN will mobilize almost 4 million Europeans, among which 975.000 children and adolescents. OPEN gets the supports of the European Commission through DG Sanco, and of the EPODE International Network.

The Dutch JOGG-approach
Jongeren Op Gezond Gewicht is a movement that helps municipalities to encourage all people in a city, town or neighbourhood to make healthy food and exercise an easy and attractive lifestyle option for young people (0-19). It focuses on children and adolescents, along with their parents and direct environment. Currently, 83 municipalities have joined Jongeren Op Gezond Gewicht, and work with the Dutch “JOGG-approach”.

1 Health at a glance. OECD Library 2012.
5 Through the IDEFICS study. For more information, see http://www.ideficsstudy.eu
Within these municipalities the JOGG-approach is implemented in designated JOGG-communities. Municipalities often choose to start with the approach in communities which are socially and financially disadvantaged and which face greater health disparities.

Engaging teenagers
Many JOGG-communities experience difficulties in engaging teenagers. Within the scope of the OPEN project, Jongeren Op Gezond Gewicht has just started with the implementation of a project targeting adolescents living in deprived areas. “The OPEN project gives Jongeren Op Gezond Gewicht the opportunity to evaluate and optimize our future actions towards this target group” says Marjon Bachra. In 3 JOGG-communities adolescents will be challenged to share their best ideas on healthy lifestyles. Via trend workshops and debates, Jongeren Op Gezond Gewicht aims to get more insights in how to target this particular group. Another deliverable focuses on the design of a booklet and video with inspiration about effective ways to approach this group.

For more information:
http://openprogram.eu
http://epode-international-network.com
https://jongerenopgezondgewicht.nl/wat-we-doen/jogg-aanpak/internationaal