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**Evaluation of the Gosnells Women's Health Service
Healthy Lifestyles for Multicultural Women Program**

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Executive Summary

In 2008 the Gosnells Women's Health Service (GWHS) was the recipient of a Healthy Active Australia grant. The aim of the grant was to increase the physical activity levels and healthy eating knowledge and behaviours of migrant women who access the GWHS. To achieve this aim the GWHS implemented learning activities for the target group, with the intention of increasing knowledge and changing behaviours for physical activity and nutrition. The physical activity component of the grant was implemented through swimming lessons and gentle exercise classes. Cooking and nutrition classes were held to teach the women about healthy and affordable foods.

The swimming program attracted 118 participants, and 56 women participated in the gentle exercise sessions. The program increased most participants' physical activity levels by providing an opportunity to be active, as most women in the target group were not able to engage in physical activity for several reasons. The main barriers to physical activity in this group are a lack of affordable culturally appropriate (women's only) venues, and a lack of affordable child care. GWHS overcame these barriers by providing women's only activities and childcare.

Twenty-seven women attended the cooking and nutrition classes. The classes increased women's knowledge of healthy and affordable foods which are available in Australia. The classes also assisted women, for whom English is a second language, with reading recipes. Nearly all participants who participated in evaluation reported cooking healthy meals at home for their families on completion of the sessions, and agreed that the sessions had increased their ability to do so.

As a result of the program, the aquatic centre where the swimming lessons were held has agreed to continue running women's-only classes for those women who can attend the centre and pay for lessons.

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1.0 Introduction

In 2008, the Gosnells Women's Health Service (GWHS) was the recipient of a Healthy Active Australia (HAA) grant (funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing). The aim of the grant was to increase the physical activity levels and healthy eating knowledge and behaviours of migrant women who access the GWHS. GWHS sought the assistance of Curtin University of Technology to formally evaluate the program. The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the success of the activities conducted, and identify barriers and facilitators to physical activity for the target group.

2.0 Program objectives

The original program objectives outlined in the funding application were found to be unrealistic for the budget and scope of the program, and did not correspond to the activities planned. The evaluation team and GWHS revised the original objectives to more accurately reflect the outcomes of the project.

2.1 Physical activity

2.1.1 Physical activity objective

The objective of the physical activity component of the program was to achieve a 20% proportion of GWHS clients in the target group (migrant women) who had engaged in physical activity classes by the end of the intervention.

2.1.2 Physical activity outcomes

The outcomes of this objective were measured by achieving a proportion of 50% of program participants were able to:

- list one sport or recreation activity of interest;
- identify potential health benefits from participating in regular physical activity;
and
- identify places where they could access physical activity in a culturally appropriate manner.

2.2 Nutrition

2.2.1 Nutrition objective

The objective of the nutrition component of this program was to achieve a proportion of 20% of GWHS clients in the target group who had engaged in cooking classes by the end of the program.

2.2.2 Nutrition outcomes

The outcomes of this objective were measured by achieving a proportion of 25% of nutrition program are able to:

- correctly identify healthy and unhealthy foods (as discussed in class);
- list three low cost healthy meals that could be cooked at home; and
- report cooking healthy meals at home for themselves and their families.

3.0 Method

3.1 Summary of program activities

The GWHS implemented learning activities for the target group, with the aim of increasing knowledge and changing physical activity and nutrition behaviours. The physical activity component was implemented through swimming classes and gentle exercise classes. GWHS negotiated the use of a women's only space at an aquatic centre in the metropolitan area. A swimming instructor employed by the aquatic centre conducted the classes. Exercise classes were held in a room hired by GWHS. An instructor was employed to lead the exercise class.

A cooking and nutrition class was devised and run by the program officer on the GWHS premises. A school holiday program for mothers and their children ran between school terms. See Table I for the schedule of activities.

Table 1. Schedule of activities

Activity	2008	2009							
		Term				School Holidays			
	4	1	2	3	4	January	April	July	October
Swimming	●	●	●	●	●				
Exercise Class		●	●	●					
Cooking Class	●	●	●						
Holiday Program						●	●	●	●

3.2 Evaluation

3.2.1 Formative evaluation

Formative evaluation conducted by the GWHS included focus groups to assist with the planning of activities, and identification of issues affecting the target group. Two focus groups were conducted with the themes of 'Nutrition' (conducted in August 2008), and 'Exercise' (conducted in October 2008). A total of 22 women participated in the 'Nutrition' focus group, identifying issues such as recognising healthy foods (including for children and babies), how to cook unfamiliar foods and use unfamiliar utensils, and preparing 'Western' foods. The focus group used food image cards to stimulate discussion. A pre-survey was conducted with the cooking and nutrition group to determine participants' existing nutritional knowledge.

A total of 10 women participated in the 'Exercise' focus group identifying issues such as: the need for culturally appropriate venues; the high cost of gyms; lack of childcare options; a lack of knowledge about sports and how to participate; and also fears about walking alone.

3.2.2 Process evaluation

GWHS collected process information such as enrolment and participation numbers, participant's country of birth, religion and number of children. Some information was also recorded by the cooking and nutrition instructor at the start and end of the terms.

3.2.3 Impact evaluation

To measure the impact of the physical activity sessions conducted by the GWHS, the evaluation staff at Curtin conducted several focus groups with participants. Supplementary information for the physical activity sessions and the cooking and nutrition classes was collected by the GWHS using brief surveys.

3.2.4 Outcome Evaluation

There was insufficient funding to conduct outcome evaluation of the program.

4.0 Results

4.1 Demographics and attendance

4.1.1 Swimming class

A total of 118 women participated in swimming lessons. The lessons were held over five ten-week school terms, starting in October 2008. Participant numbers varied from 7 to 56. Attendance rates varied from 56% to 73% (Table 2). Women were from 18 countries and predominantly Muslim (Table 3).

During GWHS's January School Holiday program, 21 mothers (with 57 daughters) participated in swimming. Eighteen mothers (with 34 daughters) participated in GWHS's April School Holiday swimming program.

Table 2. Swimming lessons attendance

	Participants	Attendance
Term 4 2008	7	65%
Term 1 2009	39	69%
Term 2 2009	65	73%
Term 3 2009	47	56%
Term 4 2009	56	64%
January school holidays	21	-
April school holidays	18	-

Table 3. Swimming lessons demographics

Country of Origin	Religion
Afghanistan	Muslim
Australia	Christian
Burundi	Muslim
Congo	Christian
Egypt	Muslim
Iraq	Muslim
India	None given/Hindu
Indonesia	Muslim
Kenya	Christian
Lebanon	Muslim
Palestine	Muslim
Pakistan	Muslim
Saudi Arabia	Muslim
South Africa	None given
South Korea	Christian
Somalia	Muslim
Sudan	Muslim
Turkey	Muslim

4.1.2 Exercise class

A total of 56 women participated in exercise classes. The classes ran over 3 terms, starting in February of 2009. Participation rates varied from 8 to 29 (Table 4). Women originated from 11 countries, and were mostly Muslim or Christian (Table 5). Two exercise classes were run in July school holidays. Nine mothers (and 45 children) attended the first session, and four mothers (with two children) participated in the second session.

Table 4. Exercise class attendance

	Participants
Term 1 2009	16
Term 2 2009	29
Term 3 2009	8
July school holidays	13

Table 5. Exercise class demographics

Country of Origin	Religion
Afghanistan	Muslim
Burundi	Christian
Congo	Christian
Egypt	Muslim
Germany	Christian
India	Hindu
Indonesia	Muslim
Iraq	Muslim
Japan	Muslim/Christian
Somalia	Muslim
Thailand	Christian

4.1.3 Cooking and nutrition

A total of 27 women participated in cooking and nutrition classes. Classes were held over 3 terms, starting in October 2008. Participation rates were consistent as class size was limited by the size of the kitchen (Table 6). Women were predominantly Muslim or Christian, and originated from 8 countries (Table 7). One cooking and nutrition class was run in July school holidays, with a total of nine mothers (with 17 children) participating.

Table 6. Cooking class attendance

	Participants
Term 4 2008	8
Term 1 2009	9
Term 2 2009	8
July school holidays	9

Table 7. Cooking class demographics

Country of Origin	Religion
Burundi	Christian
Bangladesh	Muslim
Congo	Christian
China	None given
Indonesia	Muslim
Iraq	Muslim
Somalia	Muslim
South Korea	Christian

4.2 Focus groups

4.2.1 Swimming

Five participants from the swimming class took part in the focus group. Overall, the participants enjoyed swimming. All agreed that they felt healthier and more active as a result of the swimming program. They also enjoyed the opportunity to learn a new skill.

The main barriers that prevented this group from engaging in physical activity were money (the costs of child care and the cost of swimming pool entry and classes) and most importantly, the need to access women’s only facilities for cultural reasons. The women agreed that the swimming lessons addressed all of these factors, and expressed a desire for the program to continue. While the program increased their levels of physical activity by providing an opportunity to exercise, none of the participants felt that they would be able to continue swimming on their own if the program was stopped, as they are otherwise unable to access women’s only facilities.

This group experienced difficulty finding and accessing appropriate mainstream exercise, and the only other physical activities the group participated in were also provided by the GWHS. All women in the group expressed a strong interest in participating in an extra session per week. Participants were also interested in other activities such as exercise classes and going to the gym. See Appendix A for a full summary of the swimming focus group.

4.2.2 Exercise

Eight participants from the exercise class took part in the focus group. Six of the eight had participated in both the swimming and the exercise classes, and two participated in exercise only. Participants experienced a number of benefits from participating in the classes, including health benefits, learning a new skill and making friends. Participants also enjoyed having a women's only exercise class.

Participants agreed that the classes had increased their levels of physical activity by providing an opportunity to exercise, and only a few participants engaged in other activities outside of the program. Responses were mixed when asked if they would continue this activity when the program stopped. Most participants indicated that the class was the only time they had available to exercise. Expense and availability of both women's only facilities and child care were nominated as barriers to engaging in other activities. Participants also enjoyed the social aspect of the classes, preferring to exercise as a group and not in isolation.

Participants expressed an interest in increasing class frequency to twice a week so that they could have increased opportunities to exercise. The availability of onsite child care or the option to have children in the room during classes made it easier for participants to attend the sessions. The women wanted to continue participating in this activity with the GWHS. The group also expressed interest in other activities such as swimming, the gym, aerobics and exercise classes.

4.3 Other feedback

The GWHS collected feedback from participants at the end of several terms and holiday classes. Feedback included participants' likes and dislikes regarding the physical activity sessions. The GWHS also conducted quizzes with the cooking and nutrition class to assess their knowledge. Results are summarised below.

4.3.1 Swimming

Table 8. Term I 2009 swimming feedback summary

	Yes	No	Unsure	No Answer
What did you find most useful from the program?				
Learning how to swim with an instructor	100%			
Being with other women/making new friends	30%			
Feeling more confident swimming by myself	40%			
Being more physically active and healthy	50%			
Increasing my understanding of safety around water	40%			
Is there anything you didn't like about the program?		100%		
Is it important that:				
The pool is a women's only venue?	100%			
Transport could be provided to the pool?	12%	88%		
Childcare is provided?	50%	50%		
Interpreters are available?	14%	86%		
Would you like to participate in more physical activity as a result of the program?	100%			
Would you recommend the program to others?	100%			

Table 9. Women's holiday swimming evaluation summary

	Yes	No	Unsure	No Answer
Did you enjoy participating in the program?	28			
What did you find most useful from the program?				
Helped me practice English	3			
Helped to meet other women	16			
Helped me to become more active	21			
Enjoying fun time with the children	13			
Increased my families safety around water	21			
Was enjoyable for my children	10			
Is there anything you didn't like about the program?		27		1
Did providing transport make it easier to come?	19	2		7
Did providing a crèche for the children make it easier to come?	13	2	1	12
Was it helpful to have the interpreters?	7	3		18
Did it make it easier to come because it was free?	24		1	3
Was it easier to come because it was a women's only venue?	27			1
Would you like to participate in more physical activity as a result of the program?	28			
Would you recommend the program to others?	27			1
Would you like more activities like these?	27			1

Total responses = 28

Table 10. Girls holiday swimming evaluation summary

	Yes	No	Unsure	No Answer
Did you like coming to the holiday program? Why?	22			
Helped me with English	4			
I learnt new skills	14			
It was fun	20			
It was nice in the hot weather	13			
Helped me be healthy	10			
Helped me to make new friends	7			
Is there anything you didn't like about coming?		21		1
Would you like more activities like this in the holidays?	18			4
Would you recommend for your sisters and friends to come?	19			3

Total responses = 22

4.3.2 Physical activity

Which physical activity program have you participated in at Gosnells Women's Health Service?	Swimming	Exercise Class	Swimming and Exercise Class
	75%	10%	15%
How do you feel that participation in these classes has helped your health?	Helped with weight loss	Made new friends	Feel happy because of exercise
	40%	25%	60%
Do you participate in any other physical activities apart from the programs provided by GWHS?	Yes	No	Don't know anywhere else to go
	2%	98%	0%
Comments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no where else to go • We cannot exercise anywhere else because there are men there • I tried to go walking but I was too scared • It is too hard with the children ... Who will look after them? • I used to go to the women's gym but it is too expensive • It is important for me. I am over weight • We have fun here, it is where I can relax • Its important for the women you know, I tell them it will help their tummies • I take my son to swim classes in Thornlie, because I don't mind that it is not private for women only • We ask all the time – they tell us there isn't anywhere (to exercise for women) 			

Total responses = 47

4.3.3 Cooking and nutrition

Feedback from the cooking and nutrition sessions showed that participants enjoyed learning how to cook different types of food, and learning about which types of food were healthy and unhealthy. Participants found that learning different ways of cooking, such as using the grill, cooking vegetables in the oven and cooking with less oil were useful. Other useful aspects of the lessons were learning how to cook mushrooms and fish, knowing the difference between healthy and unhealthy foods and learning how to cook their own versions of packaged foods. Most women reported cooking meals at home that they'd learnt about during classes. They reported that going through the recipe in class assisted them in cooking the meals at home.

When quizzed on healthy food options, all participants identified at least 11 out of 13 options for health and unhealthy children's snacks, all got 13 out of 13 correct when identifying healthy options for drinks, and all got at least 8 out of 10 correct when identifying healthy options for meals.

Women agreed that the lessons had increased their ability to cook healthy food for their family, and most women had shared the information they had learnt with other members of their family or with friends.

5.0 Program objectives and outcomes

5.1 Physical activity

The physical activity objective of the program was achieved, with 66% (n=118) of GWHS 178 clients' in the target group attending swimming classes, and 31% (n=56) attending exercise classes.

Focus groups were conducted with women from the swimming and exercise classes. All focus groups participants (n=13) were able to list a sport or recreation of interest. All focus group participants (n=13) were able to identify health benefits associated with participating in regular activity. All participants could identify GWHS as a culturally appropriate place to access physical. In this group, the program met its physical activity outcomes.

5.2 Nutrition

The nutritional outcome of the program was not met, with 17% (n=27) of GWHS 160 clients' in the target group (up to the end of term 2) attending nutrition and cooking classes.

Evaluation of the nutrition outcomes was conducted with one group of seven women. Of those 7, all (100%) were able to correctly identify healthy and unhealthy foods; all (100%) were able to list three low cost healthy meals that can be cooked at home; and 6 of the 7 women (85%) reported cooking healthy meals at home for themselves and their families. In this group, the program met its nutrition outcomes.

While the nutrition objective was not met, this was due to limitations on the class. The main limitation was the size of the kitchen used, which allowed for only eight to nine participants per class. Funding for the cooking and nutrition class ran out after three terms instead of the anticipated four, with the cost of consumables being the main barrier to continuing the classes. If the class had been able to run for another term, it was anticipated that another eight participants would have enrolled, bringing the total number of participants to 35, and meeting the objective of 20% of the target group participating in cooking class. To compensate for the reduced number of cooking classes, an extra swimming class was run in term four of 2009.

6.0 Comparison

Another health service for women in the Perth metro area was also a recipient of a HAA physical activity grant for a similar target group. The other women's health service (OWHS) also ran swimming classes and gentle exercise classes for women. Evaluation was conducted for this group by the Curtin evaluation team, allowing for comparisons between services. Focus groups were conducted for this group with a total of 16 participants.

Participants experienced similar benefits from the program as the GWHS cohort. These included physical and mental health benefits, learning new skills and increased confidence.

It was found that this group experienced the same barriers to physical activity as the women from GWHS. These are primarily the availability and affordability of women's only facilities. The cost of childcare and finding the time to exercise for those with children were also key issues discussed. This group also identified a fear of walking alone in their neighbourhood as a barrier to being more active.

As with the GWHS group, the physical activity levels of the women in this group were increased by having an opportunity to be active. However once the program stops it is likely that this group will also be unable to participate in mainstream exercise.

This group experienced the same barriers to activity that the women from GWHS reported. This group is also unlikely to be able to continue exercising without the program to assist them. Physical activity is important to this group however, with most women expressing a strong interest in having an extra session per week so they could increase their levels of activity.

7.0 Limitations of the evaluation

The major limitation to the effective evaluation of the Healthy Lifestyles for Multicultural Women Program was the lack of funds attributed to the evaluation (2.5% of the total budget). In order to maximise the evaluation of the effectiveness of the program within this very strict budget, the evaluators provided support to the Program Officer in the following ways:

- revised the original program objectives to better measure the activities conducted within the program;
- offered advice on the collection of data and the design of evaluation instruments;
- conducted a series of focus groups with program participants to assess:
 - their experiences of the various aspect of the program;
 - the value of the program to them;
 - what they liked about the program;
 - how the program could be improved; and
 - whether they would like the program to continue.;

- provided a report incorporating the results of all data collected during the evaluation by the evaluators and the Program Officer including suggestions for future programs of this nature that may be run through the GWHS.

8.0 Conclusions

- The program was successful in increasing women's physical activity by providing an opportunity for women to be active. Very few women participated in physical activity outside of the program.
- The target group also experienced benefits such as weight loss, increased confidence in and around water and improved mental health due to increased physical activity, making new friends and learning a new skill.
- Women from Muslim backgrounds experience difficulties participating in physical activity mainly due to a lack of affordable women's only facilities. For cultural reasons it is essential that areas used for swimming and other exercises are accessed by women only. Although there are some women's only gyms in Perth, casual visits are out of the price range of many women in the target group, and the memberships are inflexible for women who may only be able to attend intermittently. Availability and affordability of childcare is also an issue for many women. Fear of walking alone is also prevalent in this group.
- Physical activity was a priority for the women, who wanted increased sessions available to them so they could exercise more frequently.
- The cooking and nutrition sessions introduced the women to Australian foods, and assisted them in learning the difference between healthy and unhealthy foods. The lessons helped women to read recipes written in English, and women sharing the information from the lessons with friends, and cooking healthy meals for their families at home.
- As a result of the program, the aquatic centre where the swimming lessons were held has agreed to continue running women's-only classes for those women who can attend the centre and pay for lessons.

Appendix A Summarised Swimming Class Focus Group

Could you tell us about the activity you have been doing with GWHS?

Participants were asked to talk about the activity they had been doing with the GWHS. The women agreed that swimming was relaxing and good for their health. They felt happy when they swam and also viewed the activity as an opportunity to make new friends. They noted that the privacy offered by the venue was essential to their participation. They enjoyed the swimming, and would like to swim more often, and participate in other physical activity also, such as exercises classes and the gym.

Has the GWHS class increased your levels of physical activity?

All participants agreed that the classes had increased their levels of activity (by providing them with an opportunity to be active), and that they had also improved their swimming skills.

Can you tell me about any benefits you have experienced from participating in the physical activity classes?

All participants agreed that they felt more healthy and active as a result of the swimming program. Other benefits included learning to swim (for those who had never swum) and improved swimming skills and learning new techniques. All participants enjoy the swimming classes.

Had you done this type of activity before coming to GWHS?

Two of the five participants had swum before. One had swum in other parts of Australia, another had done a small amount of swimming in her home country.

Would you like to continue doing this activity with the GWHS?

All participants would like to continue swimming with the GWHS.

Will you still do this activity on your own when the program finishes?

None of the participants felt that they would continue with this activity when the program finished. The cost of child care, the cost of swimming fees and the lack of

women's only swimming areas were highlighted as barriers to continuing this activity without the GWHS program.

Can you tell us any physical activity you are doing apart from your sessions with GWHS?

Four of the participants also attend the GWHS's exercise classes.

Are there any other physical activities available for you to participate in, apart from this program?

Participants are not aware of any physical activities that are available for them to participate in.

If you could choose other types of physical activities you would like to participate in, what would they be?

All participants were interested in exercise classes or gym activities. More women's only classes were nominated as something that would provide more opportunities for the women to be active, while the cost of activities and the cost of/lack of childcare were barriers to participation. When asked if they engaged in any activities in their neighborhood such as walking, several of the women indicated that they did not feel safe walking, and others said that the cold weather was a barrier to walking.

Do you have any other comments about the GWHS physical activity program?

Participants indicated that they would like to come to swimming twice a week, and they would like to see the program continue. They agreed that the GWHS was doing a good job, and felt that Anna was very helpful, and assisted them in engaging in physical activity.

Appendix B Summarised Exercise Class Focus Group

Could you tell us which activities you have been doing with GWHS – swimming, exercise, or cooking class?

Of the eight focus group participants, 6 participated in both activities and 2 participated in exercise classes only.

What did you enjoy most about the activity?

Three women enjoyed the health benefits of both activities, and enjoyed learning a new skill. Three women enjoyed the fact that the classes were women only. Three women preferred the exercise class to the swimming, with one indicating that she was a little bit scared of the water.

What would you change about it to make it more enjoyable for you?

All participants agreed that they would like more sessions. Their preference was for two 1 hour sessions each week.

Can you tell me about any benefits you have experienced from participating in the classes?

Four participants agreed that learning to swim was beneficial for them. All agreed that they had enjoyed health benefits from participating in the program. Another participant had made friends through the program.

Had you done this type of activity before coming to GWHS?

All participants had done some kind of exercise class before. Of the participants who swam, only one had done so before.

Would you like to continue doing this activity with the GWHS?

All participants would like to continue doing this activity with the GWHS.

Will you still do this activity on your own when the program finishes?

Responses were mixed when participants were asked if they would continue doing this activity on their own. While two participants indicated they would continue, others disagreed. Participants indicated that this was the only time they had available to them to exercise, and that with children at home there was no time to exercise. Participants also preferred to exercise together as a group.

Did you experience any difficulties/barriers in attending the classes?

Participants indicated that children could be a barrier to attending classes. One woman suggested that the classes were too early – several participants agreed with her, but after some discussion most agreed that the current time was most suitable.

Did anything make it easier for you to attend the classes?

Having on site child care made it easier for participants to attend the classes. Having children allowed in the hall during exercise also made it easier to attend.

Has the GWHS class increased your levels of physical activity?

All agreed that the classes had increased their levels of physical activity, by providing an opportunity for exercise.

Can you tell us about any physical activity you are doing (apart from sessions with GWHS)?

Only a few participants engaged in other activities apart from the GWHS program, but not regularly and no organised activity. All agreed that the GWHS was their main form of physical activity.

Is anyone doing cooking classes also?

Only one participant had taken part in the cooking classes. The other participants were not aware that a cooking class was running.

Are there any other physical activities available for you to participate in, apart from this program?

Participants were aware of women's only services such as Fernwood, but all agreed that it was too expensive to attend.

If you could choose other types of physical activities you would like to participate in, what would they be?

One participant suggested school holiday activities for the kids. She mentioned that another town had activities for kids, but that it was expensive for mothers with several children. When asked which activities the women would like to participate in, the types of activities which had been discussed earlier in the group were reiterated – swimming, gym, aerobics and exercise classes.

Is there anything in particular that stops you from doing these activities?

When asked what barriers were currently preventing them from engaging in these activities, participants agreed that women's only facilities were essential for them to be able to exercise. Affordability of services was another barrier to participation. Child care (affordability and availability) was also a factor.

Do you have any other comments about the GWHS physical activity programs?

No other comments.