

RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Health Promotion on the Move

Dr Janette Perz, Professor Jane Ussher, Dr Danuta Chessor and Dr Yasmin Hawkins from Gender, Culture & Health Research: PsyHealth within the School of Psychology are exploring the impact of a health and lifestyle promotion program with a grant from Penrith Panthers community development foundation Panthers on the Prowl.

'In 2004, the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs allocated over \$130 million to initiatives designed to strengthen disadvantaged communities through funding of innovative small-scale projects that would develop life skills and support families and children at a local level' says Dr Perz. 'In the Penrith area, four such school-based projects have since been initiated by Panthers on the Prowl, focussing on healthy lifestyles, family skills, classroom activities and teachers' aide mentoring. This research project, supported by a Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA) contract, continues a longer-term systematic assessment of these programs. In this project, we will assess the *Panther Bytes* program which uses both specialised computer software and support from elite athletes to offer physical activities and information on nutrition, and personal development to children, youth and disadvantaged people.'

Working closely with the *Panther Bytes* team and key stakeholders in the local community, including parents, teachers, students and school principals, the research team will conduct an online survey and focus group interviews to assess the attitudes, experiences and expectations of participants and organisers of the intervention. This information will be used to evaluate how successful the program has been in meeting the expected community support outcomes and how the project may have



contributed to improvements in the physical health and personal wellbeing of the participants. Pre- and post-intervention measures of physical fitness, behaviour change, and other health measures such as healthy weight tests will also be analysed.

This research is expected to provide valuable evidence about how well the Penrith-based healthy lifestyle program is currently operating and how these services could be improved to provide families and individuals in the community with effective parenting, teaching and life skills and improved social, physical and mental health outcomes.

Project Title: 'Panther Bytes': An examination of the effects and impact of a mobile healthy lifestyle program

Funding has been set at: \$18,700

Contact Details: j.perz@uws.edu.au,
<http://www.uws.edu.au/psychology>

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