

National Action Against Childhood Obesity: Connecting the University with Schools and the Community. The Case of the University of Thessaly

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The protection of children's right to health needs to be one of the priorities of the state, while cooperation between the academic community, schools and the wider society is a necessary condition for positive results. The National Action against Childhood Obesity, implemented by the Ministry of Health with the support of UNICEF, provides the necessary framework for the promotion of prevention for children's health and in particular for the fight against childhood obesity, a disease which is highly prevalent in the case of Greece. The Department of Nutrition and Dietetics of the University of Thessaly, in collaboration with the Center for the Rights of the Child of the same University, proceeded to implement innovative training activities for school counselors, teachers and parents/guardians with the aim of adopting scientifically documented practices in everyday school and family life that ensure children's right to health. The central core of the training and other actions are the educational toolkits of the "Food for Action" program. Through experiential, collaborative and interactive activities, the above educational material raises awareness among students, teachers and parents/guardians on key dimensions of childhood obesity prevention, such as consumption of water and healthy breakfast/snacks, increase of physical activity and interruption/decrease of sedentary time. At the same time, the above educational material suggests guidelines for the organization of actions such as 'Health Festivals' and others where community participation is promoted in collaboration with members of the academic community. The implementation of the program so far has shown that cooperation between the University, school bodies and the community can be a decisive factor in protecting the right to health of children and especially in the issue of combating childhood obesity.

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