



SPECIAL EU PROGRAMMES BODY

Project Case Study: CHITIN Project - Walking in Schools (WISH) Trial

THEME:

Health & Social Care

FUNDING(ERDF+MATCH)

€10,601,181.20

MATCH FUNDERS:

Department of Health
Northern Ireland

Department of Health
Ireland

LEAD PARTNER:

Public Health Agency,
Northern Ireland

PROJECT PARTNERS

Health Research Board,
Ireland

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[https://
research.hscni.net/chitin](https://research.hscni.net/chitin)



@CHITINProject

The Cross-border Healthcare Intervention Trials In Ireland Network (CHITIN) is a unique partnership between the Public Health Agency in Northern Ireland and the Health Research Board in Ireland, who are working together to deliver 11 Healthcare Intervention Trials (HITs). The HITs will help prevent and cure illness and promote improved health and well-being. The WISH project is just one of such interventions: a peer-led, school based brisk walking intervention for adolescent girls (aged 12-14) which challenges the issue of physical inactivity and aims to overcome barriers to participation.

Regular physical activity is associated with many physiological and mental health benefits for adolescents including a reduced risk of obesity, improved fitness, increased muscle and bone strength. However, globally, many children fail to meet physical activity guidelines. Physical activity levels decline as children move into adolescence and through to adulthood and this decline is most pronounced among adolescent girls. The school environment is an important health-promoting setting, overcoming many health inequalities.



For those left out of sporting activities because of the competitive selection process, additional school-based opportunities for physical activity are required. Walking is a low-cost, effective means of increasing physical activity in adults, and while most post-primary schools do not offer walking as a form of extracurricular physical activity, they are highly supportive of this type of intervention.

In 2014 the WISH pilot study was delivered across 12 school weeks and provided adolescent girls with opportunities to participate in structured peer-led walking sessions during the school-day. The pilot study increased total physical activity and changed physical activity behaviour in the short term. In a bid to upscale the project and deliver on a cross-border basis the research team, led by Prof Marie Murphy and Prof Alison Gallagher (Ulster University); designed a fully powered clustered randomised controlled trial. A distinctive aspect is the role of peer leaders, who can motivate younger pupils to initiate and sustain behaviour change. In this project, training and mentoring opportunities are offered to older pupils (aged 15-16 years) who can become walk leaders and help deliver the walking programme.



The project is ongoing and in Phase 1 of delivery, with 281 girls recruited from nine cross-border schools. 72 older pupils have been trained as walk leaders and are delivering the walking programme within their schools. Data collection continues, with Phase 2 due to begin in September 2020.

The WISH Study is a collaborative project between researchers at Ulster University, Letterkenny Institute of Technology, University of Bristol & University of Wolverhampton.