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BC Almanac Open Line: Childhood Obesity

Susan MacNamee: Tis the season to overindulge! But just what we eat year round is the centre of a new program targeting childhood obesity and a newly released government report says that the number of dangerously overweight children is on the rise in BC. In fact, one in four kids in Canada is dangerously overweight or obese. We'd like to hear your thoughts on this issue, what efforts do you make to limit the sweets and high-calorie foods for your children this time of year and beyond? Why do you think childhood obesity has become such a health issue for our communities? Give us a call... (Call in numbers). To tell us more, we have reached Glenda Newsted, She is the SCOPE Community Coordinator. Now SCOPE stands for Sustainable Childhood Obesity Prevention through community

Engagement, and there's some new research out as well in BC on childhood obesity. Hi Glenda!

Glenda Newsted: Hi!

SM: How are you today?

GN: I'm great.

SM: Good. How would you define "obese?"

GN: I think with the SCOPE project, it is a pilot project funded by CHBC, and what we're looking at is a variety of issues that are creating situations of children where they are overweight, so we recognize with our project that there are a variety of body types out there. So with our project we don't necessarily have a definition of obesity. But what we're looking at is inactivity by children and youth, the food that we're eating,

the amount of time we're spending looking at screens, so television time, computer time, game time, and also consumption of sugar sweetened drinks.

SM: So we're going to get to talk to the provincial health officer about the scope of the problem but can you tell me what you're doing in your community in Prince George to counter it?

GN: Sure, the SCOPE project is a pilot project; and there's two communities that are taking part, so Prince George is one and Abbotsford is the other, and we're both taking a community-based approach to childhood obesity in our communities. So what that looks like is connecting with the community about where we're at, where are the gaps, and what can we do about it. What we're



finding is that childhood obesity, it impacts all of us. And so we're taking a macro view of that, looking at things like the built environment, access to physical activity programs, access to healthy food. So we're connecting with different community members from schools and parent advisory councils, the business community, to working with the health authorities such as Northern Health and the Public Health Agency of Canada, to identify key areas where we can address those gaps. So for example it's working with the parent advisory councils here, in our community, and really trying to increase active transportation for children and youth in our community. We know that nationally, less than a third of children and youth actively transport themselves, so that's walking, cycling, using scooters and whatnot. We are a winter community in Prince George so that does create some challenges but also we celebrate being a winter community that means that we can also really be active in the winter. And so it's working with the community to move those things forward.

Glenda, I'm going to let you go and we're going to move on to the provincial health officer, but just

one last question: where does that responsibility lie, where does the buck stop when we're talking about kids.

GN: I think when we're talking about children and youth, it really lies with in community. What we're recognizing with Prince George and also the organization of the city of Prince George, it's that's exactly it: it's about the community, it's about equity and inclusion, how do we ensure that programs and services are accessible to everyone in the community, and so we recognize that we all play a part in that.

SM: Well congratulations for taking action in your community, and we appreciate you joining us today.

GN: Bye.

SM: Okay, Bye Glenda! That is Glenda Newsted, she is the SCOPE Community Coordinator in Prince George. SCOPE stands for Sustainable Childhood Obesity Prevention through community Engagement.

We want to hear your thoughts about this topic; what are you doing within your family or your community to get a handle on this problem?

(Call in Numbers, Station ID)

SM: To talk more about the issue, we've reached Perry Kendall, he is BC's Provincial Health Officer. Good afternoon, Dr. Kendall!

Dr. Perry Kendall: Oh, Good afternoon!

SM: Does it surprise you that the numbers have gone up so significantly in the last 20 years, a doubling of childhood obesity?

PK: Well, we've actually been watching this for a number of years, so, no it hasn't come as a surprise, it's obvious that this has been the trend for quite awhile. What we're now at, I think, is the stage of really starting to mobilize against this in industrialized countries.

SM: What happens when it starts at such a young age? What are the consequences through the youth years and beyond?

PK: Well, sort of in the short term, children who are overweight tend, I think, to get picked on, [are] susceptible to more bullying. They are less likely to have a good self-image or be happy. Their connections at school [...] is bad. They can, sometimes, be more vulnerable to depression, also these children are more likely to grow up to be a more obese adolescent or overweight and obese grownups, adults, and that

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is linked with a whole range of problems: diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, joint problems in later life.

SM: We're talking about childhood obesity, and we are looking for you to call us, to give us your thoughts, it is a difficult season to try to keep a handle on the sweets; and all the buffets and

basically grazing at Christmastime. Give us a call (Call In Numbers, Station ID).

(Open line follows.)

For more information on SCOPE, visit our website at www.scopebc.ca
Or contact us at info@scopebc.ca or 604-875-2000 ext 5519

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