Feature Article on Child Obesity

Obesity is the leading preventable cause of death in Australia with increasing prevalence in adults and children, and it is also the most serious public health problem. The only way to reduce the numbers of obese people is by informing the future generation of our country, our children. Most children do not know or care what is contained in the food they eat; they eat it because they just know that they like it and that’s that. The intention of this article is to discuss ways in which we can educate children about the food that they eat and the possible consequences of eating it.

Obesity is a medical condition in which excess body fat has accumulated to the extent that it may have an adverse effect on health. The most common way to tell if someone is obese is for them to find out their Body Mass Index or their BMI. It is a measurement which compares weight and height. The formula for the Body Mass Index is the square of your height in meters divided by your weight in kilograms. The resulting numbers will determine if someone is underweight (<18.5), normal weight (18.5-24.9), overweight (25.0-29.9), obese (30.0-34.9), severely obese (35.0-39.9), morbidly obese (40.0-49.9), or super obese (>50.0).

In simple terms obesity is caused when you consume too many calories for the amount of physical exercise you do. You do not burn off the excess energy and your body then converts it into fat. It doesn’t really matter if this happens every now and again, but if it is happening more than once a week it could result in you putting on a lot of excess weight. Few cases of obesity are caused primarily by genes, endocrine disorders, slow metabolism, medications or psychiatric illness. These are some of the reasons often given by overweight people to explain their weight.

The levels of child obesity in Australia are similar to that of the rest of the western world as can be seen in these figures: In Australia between the mid 80’s to the mid 90’s the number of obese children tripled and the number of overweight children doubled. In the United States of America the number of overweight children has doubled and the number of obese children has tripled since the 80’s. In Thailand the number of obese children aged 5 to 12 years old rose from 12.2% to 15.6% in just two years. It is estimated that over twenty two million children under the age of 5 are obese throughout the world. More than one hundred and fifty five million of the world’s children are either obese or overweight, that is close to 10% of the world’s children.

When you are obese it can do many things to you and your body. It can reduce your life expectancy and/or can give you an increased chance of getting health problems such as: heart disease, type 2 diabetes, breathing difficulties during sleep, certain types of cancer, and osteoarthritis. The main treatment for obesity is dieting and physical exercise. If that doesn’t work, anti obesity drugs may be taken to reduce appetite or inhibit fat absorption. In severe cases surgery may be performed.
In Australia more than 25% of the children are overweight or obese. It is proven that 50% of all children who are overweight or obese will continue to be overweight or obese as adults. The cost of treatment of the long term obese is very high. It is proven that 2-6% of total health care costs in several developed countries such as ours are spent on obese people. Some countries figures are as high as 7%. The true costs are undoubtedly higher than this as not all obesity related conditions/problems are included in the calculations. Obviously reducing the number of obese people frees up these funds for use in a whole range of more positive ways that benefit the community as a whole. How might we go about reducing the numbers of overweight and obese people?

Long term the only way to reduce the number of obese and overweight children in Australia is to educate those children. History has proven that ‘HELP’, ‘QUIT’ and ‘STOP’ campaigns are very effective in the areas where dangerous habits are concerned. Children need to be told what being obese and overweight is going to do to them in the short and the long run. Just as important as educating children, parents also need to have a better understanding of just exactly what it is that they are giving their children to eat.

Many children and their parents won’t even know that what they eat is unhealthy. You might not be surprised to know that the average chocolate bar has the same number of calories as five apples, or that having one serving of pancakes has the same number of calories as 13 apples. But did you know that a muesli bar has about as much sugar in it as a chocolate bar, and a drink of apple juice has just about as much sugar in it as a soft drink? Most parents would consider apple juice and a muesli bar to be a healthy snack! Young children do not really care about what is good for them, all they care about is whether it tastes good and how often they can have it! So it is up to parents and the broader community to teach them what is good and what is bad before they get too old and the habits become a lot harder for them to get rid of later on in life.

Education is vital if we as a society hope to have a positive impact on long term health issues. Excess weight has an adverse effect on so many aspects of a child’s life from general mobility to self image, confidence and mental health. The government can help with this by reducing junk food advertising and requiring clear nutritional information on food packaging. School communities can help with this by offering healthy alternatives in canteens and tuck shops. Individually we can take responsibility for ourselves and our friends by making sure that we make informed and healthy choices when we eat.

Language choices may not consistently reflect the persuasive demands of the task.

Grade Commentary

Ricky has demonstrated an adequate understanding of composing a persuasive text, a feature article, to raise public awareness. A clear sense of purpose is evident as a substantial number of facts have been provided with some use of persuasive devices to challenge the audience. At times, the language choices are more appropriate to a factual report or informative brochure.

Ricky’s response demonstrates characteristics of work typically produced by a student performing at a grade C standard midway through Stage 5.