

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

# The GORILLA approach for inclusive child and youth health

## A global challenge

Globally, there is a need to enhance the health of young people by encouraging lifelong habits that support physical activity, mental well-being and environmentally friendly behaviour.<sup>1</sup> Socio-economically disadvantaged groups often lack access to physical activity and healthy foods, leading to a higher risk of obesity and poor health outcomes.<sup>2</sup>

## An identified need

Cities for Better Health partnered with GORILLA in Germany where



**16.2%**

of girls are living with overweight by the time they are 17 years old<sup>3</sup>



**18.5%**

of boys are living with overweight by the time they are 17 years old<sup>3</sup>



**82%**

of 3–17-year-olds do not get enough physical exercise<sup>3</sup>



**70%**

of 12–17-year-olds do not eat enough fruit and vegetables<sup>4</sup>

**x4**

Girls and boys aged 12–17 from low socio-economic backgrounds are four times more likely to be affected by obesity<sup>3</sup>



## NUREMBERG

GORILLA is a holistic programme that improves health equity by reaching young people through a novel mix of freestyle physical activity, nutrition, environmental and mental health education.

## Partners

- SBK Siemens-Betriebskrankenkasse
- Novo Nordisk Germany
- GORILLA

### TIME



### SKILLS



### RESOURCES



**“Very cool initiative! The kids were absolutely motivated. As a teacher, it was very interesting to watch my class and observe otherwise very quiet, introverted kids suddenly trying out breakdancing moves.”**

– Michael Gundel, Teacher, Sperberschule (Mittelschule), Nuremberg, GORILLA school programme 2021–2023

**The GORILLA programme aspires to enable children to take responsibility for their well-being through four core themes**



Conveying the joy of movement through freestyle sports



Raising awareness of a healthy and seasonal diet



Learning how to thrive with sustainable lifestyle lessons



Being mindful of mental and physical health and well-being

## The GORILLA approach

To address the core challenges of health inequity, poor nutrition and inadequate physical activity for young people, a health promotion and education programme called GORILLA was launched in Switzerland in 2010. The programme has since expanded to neighbouring countries such as Austria and Germany, where it has partnered with Cities for Better Health in Nuremberg.

GORILLA utilises freestyle sports like breakdance or skateboarding to reach young people in school and leisure time. Such sports and their athletes enjoy a 'cool' image and are deeply anchored in youth culture. The project handpicks some of the best athletes in the world from all sorts of backgrounds to work as coaches and ambassadors for its agenda. Through their authenticity, these athletes are readily accepted as role models who inspire the long-term adoption of healthy behaviours, particularly amongst otherwise difficult-to-reach groups.

## GORILLA in action

Cities for Better Health partners introduced GORILLA at the Paul-Ehrlich School in Nuremberg. Children have been able to try new activities and sports, including introductions to skateboarding, street dance, street soccer and freestyle frisbee. The activity sessions are complemented by lessons with the GORILLA ambassadors about the importance of healthy nutrition, mental awareness and eco-friendliness. Follow-up engagements are planned over two years.

### GORILLA in numbers

## 165+ ambassadors

act as credible role models and coaches, including freestyle sports professionals and champions.

## 14,390 students

reached directly with workshops in a two year period.

## 18,375 students

reached indirectly with campaigns in a two year period.

## 4 countries

Health promotion programmes have been conducted in Switzerland, the Principality of Liechtenstein, Germany and Austria.

## 600+ schools

reached directly since 2010.

## 100,000 students

excited for freestyle physical activity since 2010.

## Action areas

At the heart of the project is the GORILLA school programme, a 2-year intervention plan of in-presence workshops and accompanying materials for both students and teachers. The impulses sparked off at these workshops are picked up by the cross-media education materials and extended.

All kinds of schools can take part, but GORILLA puts special emphasis on the enrolment of schools in socially disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

The aim is to empower children and adolescents to have more active lifestyles and foster a closer relationship with the environment and themselves through healthier eating, mindfulness and physical activity. About 165 freestyle athletes, activists or foodies act as role models, ambassadors or coaches to convey GORILLA's four core themes and competencies.

**"It was a fantastic experience for everyone to watch the two coaches and be introduced to breakdancing."**

- Daniela Schellinger, Teacher, Balthasar-Neumann-Realschule, Munich, GORILLA school programme 2020-2024

## Learn more

Discover more about the creative ways GORILLA addresses health equity through engaging and fun approaches to healthy food and physical activity here (In German).

[Go to website →](#)

## Following children's involvement in the GORILLA programme<sup>5</sup>



82%

expressed a desire to increase their physical activity levels.



79%

committed to embracing healthier eating habits.



66%

wanted more water than sugary drinks and juices.



38%

took up a new sport due to their participation.



## References

1. World Health Organization. Global status report on physical activity 2022. Hämtad; 2022. 2. Vilar-Compte M, Burrola-Méndez S, Lozano-Marrufo A, et al. Urban poverty and nutrition challenges associated with accessibility to a healthy diet: a global systematic literature review. *International journal for equity in health*. 2021;20(1):1-19. 3. Schienkiewitz A, Brettschneider A-K, Damerow S, Rosario AS. Overweight and obesity among children and adolescents in Germany. Results of the cross-sectional KiGGS Wave 2 study and trends. *Journal of Health Monitoring*. 2018;3(1):15. 4. Brettschneider A-K, Barbosa CL, Haftenberger M, Lehmann F, Mensink GB. Adherence to food-based dietary guidelines among adolescents in Germany according to socio-economic status and region: Results from Eating Study as a KiGGS Module (EsKiMo) II. *Public Health Nutrition*. 2021;24(6):1216-1228. 5. Nürnberg V: Evaluation GORILLA Schulprogramm. 2021, URL: <https://www.letsogorilla.de/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/evaluation-2021-1.pdf>.