

about a healthy lifestyle be entertaining? It would be easy just to tell the message, but no one would ever watch it. The second challenge was that children don't really understand health in the long term. You can't say to them, "If you eat this apple, you can be healthy when you are 21."

So I visited every nursery school in Iceland and spoke to parents, then I spoke to thousands more in 52 countries. I found that children are exactly the same wherever you go. From birth to age 7, I call this the golden years. This is when kids look up to you as a parent, where they imitate you and they're like a sponge. This is the most important time to teach your child healthy eating.

I found parents are the same too. They want their children to be safe and educated, to be healthy, to learn moderation and how to follow rules but still break them. The bonus one is



to learn to clean their room! So those are the *LazyTown* characters and when people look at the show, they recognise these characters in themselves. No one wants to be a superhero all day long, so maybe you are Sportacus on your best day and the next day you're like Robbie Rotten. *LazyTown* is a tool for parents to raise healthy children.

What are some of the practical things parents can do to encourage their children to be more active?

I don't believe children should exercise at all. I think parents should turn it into a game. Put fruit and veg around the house and call it Sports Candy. Get a picture of an animal and then go on a scavenger hunt around the garden finding things that start with the same letter as that animal, because then you're moving at the same time as learning and playing.

In my household one year, I got a bowl and said to my children, "We're going to draw pictures of 52 activities that we've never done before and put them in the bowl." Then we picked one each Saturday and we did it. They loved it.

You went to the White House in 2010 and met the First Lady, Michelle Obama. What was that all about?

I wrote a book called *Let's Move* 16 years ago, so when she started her Let's Move campaign [to encourage American children to get healthier], I thought, "That's great, I have already done it and can go and show her what we have done". She can shine the light on the issues because she's the First Lady and will get an enormous amount of press.

We did a commercial together to try to get kids moving. I went into the White House in my Sportacus costume and she came in with her dog and we had children with us in a

fantastic room with crystal lights – I was really afraid that I would break them by jumping around! It was an amazing, unforgettable experience.

We don't have anyone fronting a campaign like that in the UK – do you think we're doing enough to educate parents?

It's a tricky one. The British are different [to Americans], they're a little like Icelanders – they don't want to be told what to do, they just want to do it themselves. You have to motivate them without explicitly telling them. I think it's possible to do much more. If you travel around the country, some cities are not that good from a health perspective.

What's next for the *LazyTown* franchise? We heard that there were plans to open restaurants...

Everyone is looking forward to the new series, as we haven't done one since 2006. Then we have a live show, and we are working on a *LazyTown* lifestyle club, to make your children healthier in one year. We give them 365 superhero tasks, such as brushing their teeth, eating vegetables and cooking, and they need to do one every day. We'll have it as a pack and you can sign up to be a member. We're going to take it worldwide. I've been working on the club for five years. I think it's really important to give parents those tools. They want to do a good job and they want help. But it's not telling them what to do – it's just giving them ideas. We have a restaurant concept and mini-movies too. PPP

Robbie Rotten in a suitably villainous pose



Series 3 of *LazyTown* will air on Cartoonito (Sky 619, Virgin Media 706) in April. Find out more at cartoonito.co.uk

Clean-living Stephanie (above) inspires the residents of *LazyTown* (below)

