

Afterschool and Childhood Obesity:

Three Case Studies

COMBATING THE CHILDHOOD OBESITY CRISIS

AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS, THE SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL MODEL
AND THE HEALTHY BEHAVIORS INITIATIVE:

THREE CASE STUDIES

Andria J. Fletcher, PhD

A WORLD FIT FOR KIDS!

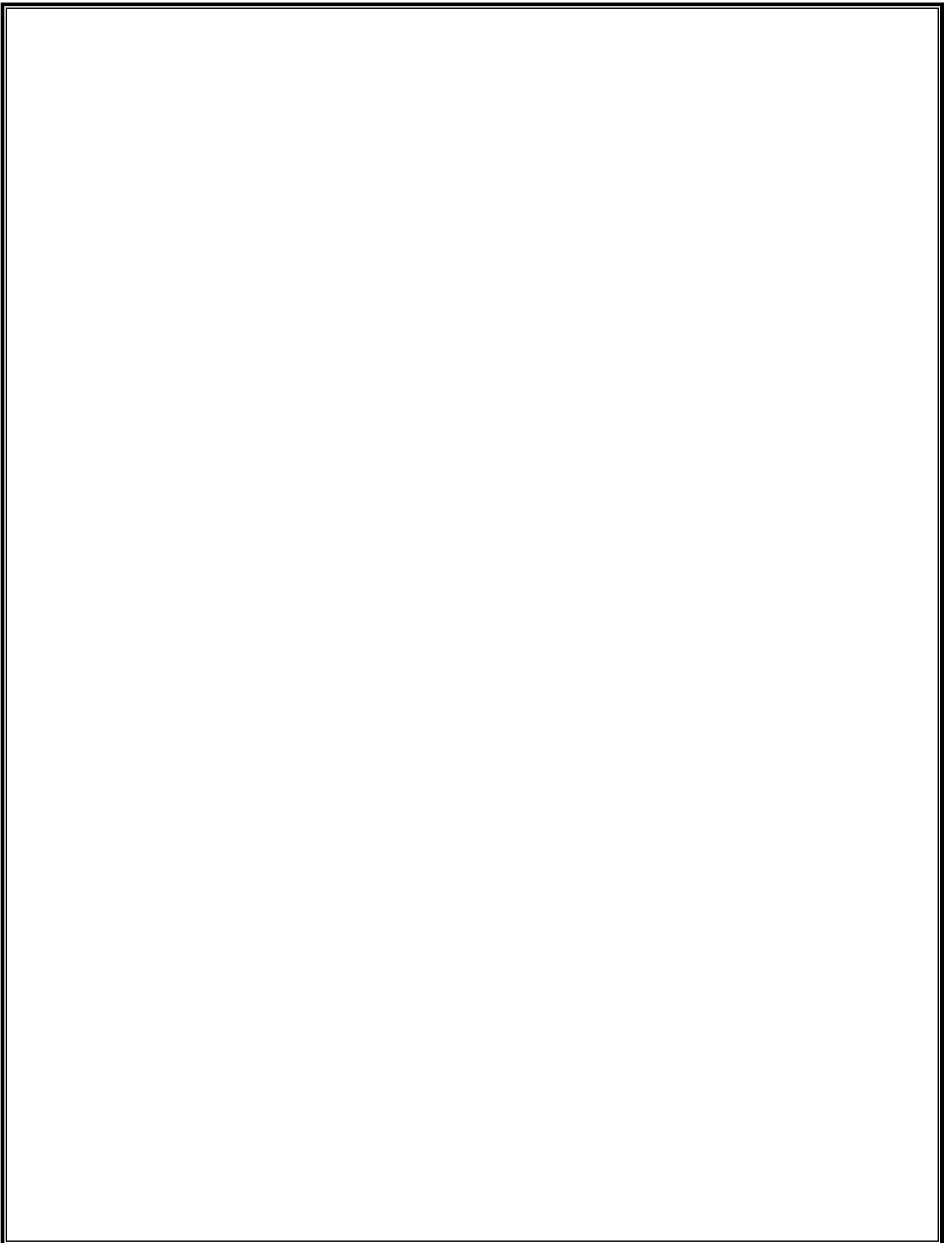
Inner City, Los Angeles

CLUB Y.E.S. MADERA COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION
Rural Central Valley

THE YMCA OF SILICON VALLEY
Metropolitan San Jose



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COMBATING THE CHILDHOOD OBESITY CRISIS AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS, THE SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL MODEL AND THE HEALTHY BEHAVIORS INITIATIVE: THREE CASE STUDIES

Andria J. Fletcher, PhD

Among the millions of children and young people in our communities, poor nutrition and sedentary lifestyles cause serious health issues, lower self-esteem, lead to social and psychological problems and contribute to poor academic performance. Overweight is the most common health problem facing children today, and it has reached epidemic proportions. It ranks as the public's #1 concern for children in the United States, ahead of drugs, alcohol and gangs, and is the focus of First Lady Michelle Obama's recently announced *Let's Move!* campaign.

Although childhood obesity crosses all socioeconomic lines, children living in poverty are disproportionately affected. It is all too common for families with limited financial resources to sacrifice the quality of food for quantity and to consume large amounts of food when it is available to compensate for times when it is not. Easy access to high concentrations of fast food chains and corner markets compounds the problem. And, unsafe neighborhoods make it difficult, if not impossible, for children to get the exercise they need to be healthy. All of this contributes to the likelihood that they will become overweight.

If these patterns continue into adulthood, one in every three children born in 2000 and one in every two children of color is likely to develop type 2 diabetes in his or her lifetime. This, and other medical issues, will lead to an unprecedented rate of premature death and disability, diminished workplace productivity and staggering financial repercussions for families, insurers, healthcare providers and our society.

As devastating as this is, we know that children who develop healthy eating habits and are physically active at an early age are much more likely to be well and stay well. We also know that barriers to this happening are shared among

the community as a whole – and that when these barriers are lowered or removed, changes in individual behavior become more achievable and sustainable. The socio-ecological model makes a compelling case that the most effective route to healthy behaviors comes through a combination of efforts at all levels – individual, interpersonal, organizational, community and public policy.

There is a growing body of evidence that comprehensive afterschool programs are uniquely well-positioned to be a driving force in this effort. Through a combination of federal, state and local funding, these programs already reach almost a million low-income children in California and many more across the nation. Building on this platform makes sense. It can be done at minimal cost to taxpayers and pay huge dividends.

Comprehensive afterschool programs are uniquely well-positioned to combat childhood obesity in ways that are fiscally prudent, socially responsible and politically appealing.

California's Healthy Behaviors Initiative offers a prime example of how this can happen. Funded by the *Network for a Healthy California* (a division of the California Department of Public Health), the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and The California Endowment, the Center for Collaborative Solutions has spent the last five years developing exemplary practices in nutrition and physical activity, vetting them with experts and field testing them in 10 multi-site afterschool programs serving over 75,000 elementary and middle school students. Located in inner cities, metropolitan areas and rural communities throughout the state, these programs now offer regional Healthy Behaviors Learning Centers and provide support to many other programs. Three of these programs are included in these case studies. They offer

examples of the approaches that are being used, the changes that are taking place in children's eating habits and physical fitness levels, and the

impact that this initiative is capable of having throughout the United States.

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A WORLD FIT FOR KIDS! Inner City, Los Angeles

Over the past 16 years, A World Fit For Kids! (WFIT) has provided health-enhancing opportunities for more than 150,000 children and young people in some of the most economically challenged inner city neighborhoods in Los Angeles. With the

elimination of nutrition and physical education in many schools, the program has filled the gap by taking a strategic approach that is changing students' eating habits, improving their physical fitness levels and surrounding them with positive environmental support systems.

Promoting Positive Individual Behaviors

Like most high quality afterschool programs, WFIT offers a wide variety of academic and enrichment activities that are exciting, engaging and appropriately challenging to students. What distinguishes this program is its powerful vision and high level of intentionality. Each program component is designed with a specific purpose in mind: helping youngsters become healthy, fit and ready to learn.

Children regularly participate in nutrition education classes and learn about the Food Pyramid and the importance of healthy eating habits. They apply what they learn in cooking classes, where they have access to mobile kitchens and develop healthy recipes. They visit local grocery stores and learn how to read labels and comparison shop for the highest nutritional quality and best prices. They take field trips to farmers' markets and try new fruits and vegetables. And, they set personal nutrition goals and record their progress in daily journals. These experiences reinforce what children are learning and make it easier for them to make better choices about the foods they eat and the beverages they drink. As evidenced in recent evaluations, the level of intentionality demonstrated in this program is paying off:

- Soft drink consumption has dramatically declined. At the Norwood Healthy Behaviors Learning Center, the number of students who regularly drank three or

more sodas a day fell to just three percent.

- At Norwood, close to three-quarters of those attending reported drinking water three or more times a day during the spring of 2009, compared with 60 percent in the fall of 2008.
- Kids increasingly chose fruits and vegetables over chips and fast food, with the majority reporting an increase in their preference for healthy foods.

WFIT approaches its efforts to improve youngsters' physical fitness with the same intentionality. Students engage in at least 40 minutes of moderate to strenuous physical activity every day in a variety of traditional and nontraditional sports, dance classes, circuit training, rock wall climbing, exercises and yoga. They are given pedometers and trained in how to track their fun, formal and functional walking both in the program and at home. And, they learn how to monitor their heart rates. Although California only mandates physical fitness testing for 5th, 7th and 9th grade students, WFIT monitors student progress from the 4th grade through the 12th grade. The results are well-documented and impressive.

- Ninety percent of all students reported that the program helped them become more physically active.

- Sixty percent of all 5th grade students passed the state mandated Fitnessgram test (which sets standards in aerobic capacity, body composition, abdominal strength, trunk extensor strength, upper body strength and flexibility) during the 2008–2009 school year, as compared to 51 percent in 2007–2008 and 36 percent in 2006–2007.
- Students who were in the healthy fitness zone for abdominal strength in the fall of 2008 increased from 28 percent to 74 percent in the spring of 2009.
- Eight out of ten children increased the number of laps they were able to complete and decreased the time it took them to run a mile by at least one full minute.
- Half of all students lowered their Body Mass Index, with overweight children losing an average of five pounds.

WFIT’s approach not only improves children’s health and well-being, it has an added bonus that directly contributes to their success in school. Students were absent less often, and their academic performance improved more than expected. Those who regularly attended the program raised their standardized test scores in math, and eight out of ten reported improvement in their grades.

High school students who worked in the program were more likely to pass the math exit exam test (CAHSEE) than their peers, and 94 percent who participated in the Teen Fit for SuccessSM training and internship program graduated from high school, primarily from a high school with a 49.5 percent graduation rate. In recognition of the difference it is making, WFIT received the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports Gold Medal Award, presented by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Promoting Positive Interpersonal Relationships

Beyond the opportunities WFIT provides for individual students, the program recognizes the importance of surrounding children with positive role models. The organization makes sure that job applicants are aware of the program’s commitment to everyone’s health and well-being, its zero tolerance policy for unhealthy food on its campuses and its determination to help children overcome the challenges they face. Only those candidates who enthusiastically support the program’s goals and policies are hired.

The program’s approach to staff development reflects the same values. Each staff member participates in ongoing nutrition and physical activity training and is familiar with the exemplary practices developed in the Healthy Behaviors Initiative. The nutrition director, a full-time member of the leadership team, trains staff to ensure that they have an appropriate knowledge base for the activities they offer and the approaches they take when working with children. Goals are set, weekly action plans are developed and progress is measured quarterly.

Coaches (those working directly with students) who oversee physical activities receive intensive and ongoing training delivered through WFIT’s *Mentors in Motion*SM, helping them gain new insights and perspectives about planning and facilitating quality physical activity sessions for students. The approach integrates opportunities

To improve their own health and well-being, staff members are given stipends to offset the cost of joining health and fitness clubs, and each employee has the opportunity to work with a personal fitness trainer and nutrition counselor.

for self-empowerment, leadership and experiential learning and creates powerful results for students and the teens and adults who work with them. Every staff member has access to program-wide and site-based coaching to ensure that they are able to transfer what they learn into real-life settings. And, they have the opportunity to work with experts to develop personal nutrition and fitness plans of their own.

As WFIT has become more intentional about surrounding students with positive interpersonal influences during the afterschool hours, the staff has also become more sensitive to the issues children face at home. They are keenly aware of the importance of parents as partners in children's efforts to become healthier. Families participate in nutrition education classes and are encouraged to become more physically active. Parent newsletters are sent home periodically, and include sections on nutrition (including recipes for preparing healthy meals) and physical activity.

In addition, families are made aware of a variety of resources, including the Food Stamp Program and local food banks – a critical factor in improving their food security (having enough to eat). As a result, they report that they are making better choices about the meals they cook at home. They are preparing meals in healthier ways. And, they are acquiring the knowledge they need to select healthy foods and beverages that are within their budgets.

Promoting Positive Organizational Environments

WFIT recognizes the importance of developing authentic partnerships with schools. A number of program coaches are instructional assistants during the school day. In one case, a physical education teacher is also the primary physical activity coach/trainer for the afterschool staff. This ensures alignment between WFIT and the schools where its programs are located and positions the program to influence school policies and environments.

Positive relationships with certificated and classified staff, including food service managers and parent outreach directors, have made it possible to create and sustain healthier school environments.

Through WFIT's outreach strategies, more students are taking advantage of the school-based free and reduced price breakfast and lunch programs.

The messages they are receiving before, during and afterschool are increasingly consistent. And largely through the leadership team's efforts, schools that had fallen behind on their timetables have moved forward at a faster rate in implementing their Wellness Plans and have included the afterschool program in their strategies.

Promoting Positive Community Environments

WFIT goes beyond the role most afterschool programs play by collaborating with schools and community agencies to coordinate efforts to bring about change. The program recognizes that what happens just beyond the immediate campus is part of the environment that either supports or detracts from what it is trying to accomplish. Until recently, vendors selling candy, chips, ice cream and sodas positioned their carts outside entrances 15 minutes before the end of the school day. By working in partnership with principals, the staff has been successful in enforcing local ordinances that prohibit vendors from being closer than 300 feet from schools. While this hasn't eliminated the problem, it has greatly reduced it.

Working with a variety of local organizations to maximize the use of available resources has also become a high priority. The Salvation Army Los Angeles Red Shield Youth and Community Center offers access to its recreational facilities for trainings and encourages staff, students and families who live in the vicinity to take advantage of the opportunity for evening and weekend physical activity at little or no cost. Through a partnership with the local food bank, children have access to more fruits and vegetables during the program, and their parents are taking advantage of this service as well.

Connecting students with professional sports teams has also played an important role in reinforcing the importance of being physically

fit and nutritionally smart. The Clippers (basketball), Kings (ice hockey), Dodgers (baseball), Sparks (women's basketball), Riptide (Lacrosse) and the University of Southern California Athletic Department donate tickets to professional sports events and provide access to equipment.

Support from professional sports teams and high profile corporations reinforces the importance of physical activity.

Promoting Positive Policy Changes

WFIT's executive director, Normandie Nigh, is a nationally recognized expert in physical fitness and afterschool program development and an international speaker and trainer. She has been the executive director of the program since 1994. She serves on numerous local, state and national advisory boards and regularly advocates for changes in public policy that remove barriers and support healthy life-styles, both in Sacramento and Washington, DC. And, in addition to briefing Congressional members and Senators, she recently participated in a White House Executive Staff meeting advocating for changes in federal policy.

WFIT student appeared before the Institute of Medicine's Standing Committee on Childhood Obesity Prevention. And, MTV aired a documentary focusing on combating the childhood obesity crisis and highlighting the exceptional work the program is doing, bringing greater attention to the issue, raising its visibility and making it real to decision makers at all levels.

National and international television personality Kevin Sorbo is the program's national spokesperson and a leading advocate for children's health and well-being.

As part of its teen outreach program, a former

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CLUB Y.E.S. MADERA COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION Rural Central Valley

Over the past ten years, the Madera County Office of Education has responded to the need for comprehensive afterschool programs in rural Central California by quadrupling program services in low-income communities, bringing \$21 million in state and federal dollars into the county and providing life-changing opportunities for 19,000 children and their

families – 80 percent of whom live below the poverty line and many of whom are migrant farm workers. By embedding nutrition and physical activity in everything it does, from staff development to creating exciting and innovative approaches to learning to partnering with parents and schools, the program has achieved remarkable results.

Promoting Positive Individual Behaviors

Club Y.E.S. doesn't just provide activities for students, it creates a culture that fosters youth development, changes children's eating habits and increases their enthusiasm for physical activity. Students spend 30 to 40 minutes a day in moderate to strenuous physical activities that would otherwise be prohibitively expensive for their families, including tennis; dance clubs;

bicycling; mobile rock climbing; Wii Sports; Dance, Dance Revolution (DDR); SPARK and fit-sticks. Through smart investments, every site has a mobile kitchen and will have a fully operational greenhouse by the end of the year.

Under close staff supervision, students build their upper and lower body strength and develop

their muscles by rotating through six different sets of exercise equipment in on-site mini-gyms. They improve their coordination, balance and agility on mini-trampolines. They increase their endurance and aerobic capacity by running laps. And, they take monthly field trips that expose them to outdoor adventures, including ropes courses, laser tag and roller skating.

Beyond structured physical activities, Club Y.E.S. creatively integrates movement into all of its academic and enrichment program components. Younger students learn site words and improve their vocabularies through the use of play cubes. Older students strengthen their math skills through competitions that include relay races. And this year the program will hold its first annual triathlon, which includes academic events, biking and running.

By taking a project-based approach, children become increasingly responsible for their own learning and empowered to make changes in their own lives.

As a way to help students make daily physical activity a way of life, a portion of the program's budget goes toward purchasing pedometers for every child so that they can monitor their activity both in and out the program. Students establish personal goals, track their daily activity and measure their progress. They stay motivated and engaged by taking part in grade-level challenges and celebrations of their improvement every Friday.

Promoting Positive Interpersonal Relationships

Club Y.E.S. approaches staff development strategically with the goal that every employee will become a positive role model. The program director and leadership team work closely with other Madera County Office of Education staff to design, develop and implement training in nutrition and physical activity. Hands-on workshops for program leaders (those who work directly with children) emphasize content and approaches that can be immediately applied in their work. Movement is integrated into training in ways that help staff members increase their

Students have learned what's healthy and what's not, and they apply what they've learned in their everyday lives. Youngsters who used to ask for cookies, candy and soft drinks as incentives and for holiday celebrations now request fruits, vegetables, juice and water. They know the importance of good nutrition, not just because they've been taught it in classes but because what they learn through the Healthy Lifestyle Choices curriculum and Harvest of the Month materials becomes personal, meaningful and relevant in their cooking and gardening classes.

One of the practices that sets Club Y.E.S. apart from a lot of other programs is its innovative approach to expanding students' knowledge, increasing their excitement about learning and helping them master new skills. Among the many examples, one stands out. Each year students spend several months engaged in project-based learning. This year, the subject is whether King Tutankhamen was killed or died accidentally. Students conduct research on the internet and in magazines, including National Geographic. They learn about ancient Egyptian history and culture, including farming practices, canal systems, food preferences and sports, and compare and contrast these with those they are familiar with in their own environments. As they uncover clues, test hypotheses and do investigative reporting, every child takes on greater responsibility for his or her own learning and is empowered to take control of his or her own life.

enthusiasm for physical activity and connect it with their personal health and well-being. The program's policy of replacing soft drinks with water, and candy with fresh fruits and vegetables during staff meetings and program hours reinforces positive messages.

Staff members are trained in understanding connections between healthy behaviors and medical problems, and are knowledgeable about the symptoms of childhood diabetes (which is increasingly prevalent among upper elementary

and middle school students). They know what to do in an emergency if a child has an asthma attack or allergic reaction to particular foods. They pay close attention to keeping youngsters' medical records and contact information up to date by staying in regular communication with parents and family members. And, when symptoms that may suggest Type 2 diabetes or other health problems appear, they immediately notify healthcare consultants.

The impact of the program's presence in the Central Valley extends to families in other ways as well. By offering programs free of charge, Club Y.E.S. has saved families more than \$7 million in childcare costs and made it possible for many single parents, and especially women, to enter and remain in the workforce. This has made a real difference for them and for two-parent working families who are struggling to make financial ends meet.

As families have become more financially self-sufficient, their food security has improved and their ability to purchase healthier foods has increased.

Over 90 percent of parents report that they have been more productive at work since their children have been enrolled and that their job security has increased as a result. With more job stability and increased discretionary income,

families have been able to purchase food items that were previously beyond their financial means.

As a key component of its strategies for reaching out to families, Club Y.E.S. holds a series of family nights that feature healthy meals and promote healthy lifestyles. Activities include encouraging enrollment of low-income families in the Food Stamp and Women, Infants and Children (WIC) programs for those who are eligible, which many are. Information about local resources such as farmers' markets and food banks is made available. And, healthy, inexpensive recipes that families can use at home are distributed. Over the last two years, the participation rate at these events has soared, and it has made a difference in food preparation styles and food preferences.

The same is true for annual events. Over 500 parents, children and family members attend Club Y.E.S.'s annual *Lights On!* events which highlight health, nutrition and physical activity. While youngsters demonstrate their dance, fit-sticks, cooking and other skills, parents have a chance to use the program's exercise machines and equipment and join in Dance, Dance Revolution. The focus is simple, and so is the message: Movement is fun!

Promoting Positive Organizational Environments

Largely through the program's efforts, school day lunches now include salads, and students have been successful in advocating for having more fresh fruits and vegetables as part of the district-provided snacks during the afternoon hours.

Club Y.E.S. has established strong, authentic partnerships with the 27 schools in the four districts where its programs are located. The leadership team and site staff work closely with principals, teachers and classified staff to encourage students to participate in free and reduced price school breakfast and lunch programs and to strengthen school-wide

commitments to nutrition and physical activity, including opening all school kitchens for use during after school.

Part of the explanation for the program's success in influencing school environments lies in the fact that the overwhelming majority of participating students are becoming healthier and doing better in school. Attendance during the school day is up. Test scores and grades are better than they've been in the past, and children and young people are making decisions that enhance rather than diminish their health and well-being.

- Three-quarters of all participating students have missed seven or fewer

days of school during the year, by comparison with a much higher figure for their peers.

- Eighty-five percent of parents and teachers report significant improvement in students' grades and standardized test scores.

- Eighty-seven percent of all students report that they are making better choices when it comes to drugs, alcohol, tobacco and gang involvement.

Promoting Positive Community Environments

Located in a region where the unemployment rate is disproportionately high and getting worse, jobs have been provided for more than 1,200 local residents. The employment needs of a diverse group of people, including those entering the workforce for the first time, college students who are looking for part-time positions, and parents and retirees who need extra income, are being met. In addition to the benefits of employment, each of these individuals has been intimately involved in the campaign to improve everyone's health.

unnecessary in California's Central Valley (which is a prime agricultural area serving much of the country), the unfortunate fact is that all too many families can't afford to buy fresh produce themselves. It is a lot less expensive to buy rice and beans in large quantities than broccoli or other fresh vegetables in even small quantities. Club Y.E.S. is helping to make produce more available and accessible.

The program partners with farmers markets and the Farm-to-School Program to provide additional fresh fruits and vegetables to students and their families. While this might seem

Ironically, families with children in this program live in agricultural communities and are often farm workers, but have limited access to fresh fruits and vegetables. Club Y.E.S. helps compensate for this.

Promoting Positive Policy Changes

Lorie Werner, the program's director, works closely with school districts, cities, counties and health departments to advocate for the elimination of policies that work against children and young people becoming healthier and for those that encourage and reinforce positive behaviors. And, as part of its commitment to ensuring that students are an integral part of Club Y.E.S.'s inclusion of children in its approach, elementary students recently prepared and served hors d'oeuvres during a school board meeting and were well equipped to tell the board why what they were eating was healthy and why

it mattered. Students also frequently join the leadership team, staff members and parents in making presentations at city council meetings. At all levels, the program is having an impact on children, families and communities in the Central Valley. As a result, other neighboring school district districts are beginning to request support in their efforts to integrate similar strategies into their own afterschool programs and are participating in trainings with County Office of Education teachers and Club Y.E.S. staff.

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THE YMCA OF SILICON VALLEY Metropolitan San Jose

The YMCA of Silicon Valley has increased its afterschool program services in diverse, low-income neighborhoods by close to one thousand percent since 2000, bringing \$30 million into high poverty communities, providing unique opportunities for more than 20,000 children and leveraging state and federal dollars to ensure balanced, diversified and sustainable funding for the long-term. Developed in partnership with the Santa Clara County Office of Education and funded by Kaiser Permanente, the program's signature component, *Fit for Learning for*

Afterschool, is a multi-faceted project that increases physical activity and encourages healthy nutrition among elementary school students by addressing the environment at every level. It is based on and coordinated with the school-based *Fit for Learning* Initiative. The program's comprehensive approach clearly demonstrates the potential afterschool programs can have when they use the socio-ecological model as a framework and integrate exemplary practices into their approaches.

Promoting Positive Changes in Individuals

Students regularly engage in a wide variety of activities that are organized around monthly *Fit for Learning* themes. For example, in September the *Fruits and Veggies Matter* theme is designed to increase student awareness about agriculture, farming and food production and encourages students to consume more fruits and vegetables each day. In October, the theme changes to *Let's Move!* Students are encouraged to be physically active as many days of the week as possible in order to burn calories, improve their cardiovascular health and strengthen their muscles, bones and joints. And, in November students learn about *My Pyramid*, with the objective of getting them to eat a variety of foods from all food groups.

The YMCA of Silicon Valley encourages students to make healthy meal and snack choices, and reinforces this by participating in the USDA Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), both of which provide federal reimbursements. Second Harvest Food Bank gives children supplemental snacks as well as an assortment of healthy, ready-to-eat foods that they take home on Fridays. A combination of formal teaching and hands-on learning

- Helps students learn how to choose healthier foods and appropriate serving sizes,

- Focuses on the importance of eating a breakfast that contains three food groups and foods high in calcium and encourages students to participate in school breakfast programs where they are available,
- Teaches children about the importance of resisting advertisements that promote unhealthy foods,
- Provides them with opportunities to use critical thinking skills to explore different drink options and make choices about what is best for their bodies for optimal health and performance, and
- Educates them about physical activities that promote heart health.

In addition to tracking changes in food preferences and physical activity levels, the program assesses changes in students' health and physical well-being through individual student and family surveys, small group discussions and observations. FITNESSGRAM® data are used to measure aerobic capacity, upper body strength, endurance, abdominal strength and flexibility among kindergarten-eighth grade students. The staff takes care to ensure that children understand why they are taking the tests and how these relate to their own personal goals. Personal Best Day awards are given to students for their continued success in the areas of

nutrition and physical activity. The results are impressive. A striking 81 percent of the children and young people who could not previously pass

a portion of the healthy fitness tests administered by schools at the beginning of year passed all five elements by the end of the year!

Promoting Positive Interpersonal Relationships

The YMCA of Silicon Valley works closely with the Health and Nutrition Division within the Santa Clara County Public Health Department to provide training for its entire staff. Healthy lifestyle choices are promoted through wellness lectures and staff newsletters that include recipes and incentive programs for employees to increase their consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables and become more physically active. All staff members are given memberships to local YMCAs and encouraged to use the facilities to become more physically fit. Employees are becoming healthier and, in turn, even more positive role models for children.

Unlike most afterschool programs, the YMCA not only focuses on food security as a priority, it takes a multi-faceted approach to addressing the issue. Staff are trained in ways that help them understand how the environments in which children and young people live both influence and limit what food is available and affordable and what choices they have or do not have. The staff also helps families learn how they can maximize their limited budgets to provide healthier meals.

Families come together for a variety of special events that focus on improving nutrition and physical activity and providing families with the information and resources they need to make good choices. Potlucks, including an annual Cinco de Mayo celebration, feature healthy meals, fun physical activities and piñatas filled with sugar-free candy, stickers and erasers.

Promoting Positive Organizational Environments

By working with, aligning and reinforcing what happens during the school day, the YMCA ensures that children and young people receive consistent messages about the importance of

To ensure that current information on a variety of types of assistance is easily accessible, brochures identifying local community resources such as food banks, food stamps, WIC and free medical clinics are provided at these events and posted at sign-out locations when parents pick up their children every day. In a recent study:

- Forty-six percent of the families of children attending the program reported that their shopping preferences had changed since their children had been enrolled, and
- Just over a third of parents stated that they were preparing healthier meals with the recipes their children brought home from their cooking classes and those they were given at special events.

Staff training goes beyond ensuring that employees know how to deliver effective program components to increasing their awareness of the devastating problem of children not having enough to eat – and what they can do to make a difference.

Encouraging families to become more physically active, and supporting their efforts, is also an integral part of the program's approach to increasing the positive interpersonal influences that surround students. In partnership with the County Trail System, the program makes it possible for parents and siblings to participate in hiking and other outdoor activities at no cost. And, students and their families have access to YMCA facilities at a reduced rate.

good nutrition and physical activity. The careful alignment with schools and community organizations through *Fit for Learning* monthly themes is a stunning example of this.

In addition, each year the program invites the entire school community to be part of a Healthy Kids Day – a free event at local YMCAs that encourages families and children to engage in creative activities that promote wellness and healthy living. It also partners with schools to provide walk-a-thon events to help raise

awareness about *America on the Move*, a national YMCA initiative designed to help families lead healthier life styles by increasing the number of steps they take each day. Water bottles and pedometers are donated to all participants, children and adults alike.

Promoting Positive Community Environments

The YMCA's close relationship with the Santa Clara County Office of Education goes a long way toward changing the community environments in which children and young people live. Social marketing campaigns also extend into the broader community through partnerships with healthcare providers and agencies. The program regularly collaborates with Kaiser Permanente and the Santa Clara County Public Health Department, and through its community outreach efforts a local pediatrician in the Santa Clara County Hospital System now routinely recommends the program to overweight children and adolescent patients.

Having employer-provided healthcare benefits has made it possible for children to have regular check-ups – a critical factor in addressing childhood obesity and other preventable health issues.

The program's job opportunities and employment practices have also had a significant impact on the broader community. The number of jobs provided has increased ten-fold in the last ten years, providing meaningful

jobs for more than 1,600 community members. What is especially important is that with the high cost of living in Santa Clara County, many people must work two or more jobs, often without benefits, to make ends meet. Unlike most employers, the YMCA provides healthcare benefits for both full- and part-time work.

The program has also been highly successful in bringing in more than \$8.5 million in funding to the community, in addition to the core grants it receives annually through California's Afterschool Education and Safety Program and federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers – money that would not otherwise be available to support the program and its community-wide efforts. Funding through the Carol M. White Physical Education Program (PEP), the Centers for Disease Control REACH program and Kaiser Permanente have made it possible to strengthen the quality of program *and* document and evaluate the impact it is having on children, families and communities – evidence that is capable of going a long way toward influencing even greater changes in the larger environment.

Promoting Positive Policy Changes

As Vice President of Program and Community Development, Mary Hoshiko is an active and influential advocate for policy changes at the local, state and national levels. She serves as the California YMCA Child Care Public Policy Committee Chairperson and in this capacity works with YMCAs throughout the state on public policy issues. She leads two initiatives: the YMCA Diversity Initiative and the Activate America Pioneering Healthy Communities Initiative. She is an After School Ambassador with the Afterschool Alliance, a national

advocacy organization based in Washington, D.C., and works closely with the Centers for Disease Control.

The program joins Kaiser Permanente, state legislators, the Santa Clara Unified School District and others each year in a high level media event that focuses on the difference its making in the lives of tens of thousands of children. A voice for middle and high school students is made available through the *Youth Health Advocate* Program that gives young

people opportunities to meet with their local school board members and other community leaders to present health topics and discuss local health policies.

In collaboration with Kaiser Permanente and the Santa Clara County Public Health Department, the YMCA's *Projecto Movimiento* youth participants are co-producing a *Voice of Youth*

documentary focusing on the childhood obesity crisis and what's being done about it. And, Latino children wrote and starred in a series of public service announcements (PSAs) that were recently aired on cable television. Through a combination of strategies, the YMCA of Silicon Valley is reaching, and influencing, large numbers of community members and policy makers, and it is making a difference.

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CONCLUSION

The impact that these programs are having on children's lives provides strong evidence that comprehensive afterschool programs are well-positioned to become part of the urgently needed solution to the childhood obesity crisis. In California alone, nearly \$1 billion in annual funding is available through the state's *After School Education and Safety Programs*, federal *21st Century Community Learning Centers* dollars and local investments. More than \$3.4 billion has already been funded nationally, with programs operating in every state. The platform for reaching millions of children and influencing their eating patterns and physical activity levels clearly exists.

Building on this is smart – and cost-effective. As the programs in the Healthy Behaviors Initiative have demonstrated, a lot can be done at very little additional expense.

“With data showing us that every \$1 spent on prevention strategies yields us a savings of more than \$5 in healthcare costs, we have no choice but to direct our limited dollars into programs that work.”
—Tom Harkin, Chairman, U.S. Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee.

By capitalizing on practices that have already been developed and adopting approaches that have already proven to lead to positive results, the return on investments is likely to exceed 1,000 percent or more. The key, as these programs and the others in this Initiative have shown, is to approach this work with a strong sense of purpose and a high level of intentionality. Children can't wait, and neither can we!

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For more information about California's Healthy Behaviors Initiative, please contact the Center for Collaborative Solutions at 916-567-9911 or visit its web site at www.afterschoolsolutions.org