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Kids Get Moving toward Good Health

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Kids get moving toward good health

Local youth recently found out health can be all fun and games during an after-school nutrition and physical activity program at Linfield College.

Twice a week, eager young participants sipped fruit smoothies or munched “ants on a log” (peanut butter, raisins and celery) during hands-on nutrition lessons before heading out to play. There were scavenger hunts, slip-and-slides, traditional sports and swimming games.

The program, developed by Janet Peterson, assistant professor of health and human performance and recent winner of the Samuel I. Graf Faculty Achievement Award, focused on helping children live a healthy lifestyle. Participants ranged in age from 7 to 18.

The single most important element to improving kids’ health?

“Get moving,” said Julie O’Neil ’07, this year’s program coordinator. She knows active children are more likely to feel good about themselves and perform better at school.

“Every child should learn the importance of living a healthy lifestyle,” said O’Neil, who will pursue a



master’s in public health promotion at Oregon State University in the fall. “It’s important to get them out playing and enjoying activity.”

But with cutbacks in physical education classes and the growth of the video game industry, today’s youth often don’t get the recommended 60 minutes of daily activity. And, Peterson said, 70 percent of overweight kids are likely to become overweight adults.

“If we can give them tools to make good decisions now, we can also work on adult obesity as well,” she said.

With guidance from Peterson, more than 20 Linfield students ran the program, gaining practical experience outside the classroom in addition to serving the community. They performed fitness evaluations and prescribed an exercise regimen for each child.

Enrollment has nearly doubled from 17 to 32 since Kendra Victor ’05 led the first project in 2005. Although it initially targeted overweight youth in the community, the program is now geared to all kids, stressing a healthy lifestyle.

Two of this year’s most energetic participants were 7-year-old twins Emily and Megan DeYoung, daughters of Bill and Amy (Chan) DeYoung, ’89 and ’87. The twins both play soccer, but their parents know that’s not enough.

“We want to encourage them to choose to be active during the down time instead of watching television or being on the computer,” said Amy, an accounting clerk at Linfield.



Sisters Emily, left, and Megan DeYoung take part in a wheelbarrow race with the help of Janet Peterson, left, and Julie O’Neil ’07.

DeYoung is already teaching her daughters nutrition at home and she was happy to have it reinforced.

“When it comes from fun, young people, it catches their attention and sinks in more,” she said.

— Laura Davis

Tips for healthy families

- Make cooking an activity and eat at the table as a family.
- Make fun snacks, such as trail mix or fruit-kabobs.
- When baking, use applesauce instead of oil or butter and use whole-wheat flour.
- Make homemade pizza with lots of veggies.
- Avoid fast food, or choose a grilled chicken burger or salad.
- Ride a bike or walk to school.
- Join a sports team.

Julie O’Neil ’07, left, and Janet Peterson, assistant professor of health and human performance, stressed the importance of exercise and nutrition during an after-school program for youth. The program culminated with a one-mile Fun Run coordinated by the Order of Omega, Linfield’s Greek honor society, on May 6.