

Fitness Authority helps Atlanta youth learn healthy habits

By Brooke Turbyfill
Southern Spirit staff

Through a Kaiser Permanente grant in 2005, four Atlanta Boys and Girls Clubs have implemented the Fitness Authority program for young people ages 6 to 12. Bellwood, Fuqua, Peachcrest and West End clubs are using the program to teach healthy lifestyle habits.

Taught by the clubs' health and physical education instructors, the 12-week program consists of a pre-assessment, 10 weeks of classes on topics such as healthy eating and exercise, and a post-assessment.

Andy Copassaki, executive director of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Atlanta, said, "The kids love it. We've seen great progress with it."

Although the program is no longer funded through the Kaiser Permanente grant, it will continue at all four clubs, said Marvin Bennett, director of operations at the Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Atlanta.

Broken into two groups, ages 6-8 and ages 9-12, kids are assessed during the first week with tests to measure how high they can jump, how fast they can run a 50-yard dash and how many push-ups and sit-ups they can do. Then, after 10 weeks of classes such as "Frisbee Golf" and "Celebrity Soccer," they're re-evaluated to help them understand the impact that a healthy lifestyle can have on their wellbeing.

One class gives youth a chance to play an Italian ball game called Bocce and learn how to make fruit salad. Another class teaches self-esteem through partner basketball.

Twelve-year-old India Oliver enjoyed all the games and learned about healthy habits at the same time. "In Fitness Authority, we talked about fitness and how we should exercise on a regular basis. Eating too much sugar and not exercising can cause you not to be healthy and to gain a lot of weight. I enjoyed it when we played tug of war, relay races, bowling and kickball Olympics," she said.



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