Healthy Habits Catching On
Schoolwide Events Demonstrate Impact of Fitness, Nutrition Program

It was the first jog-a-thon ever held at Arlington Heights Elementary School, and the students came prepared. Many wore running shoes and carried water bottles, and they had lined up sponsors for their laps to raise funds for school field trips and equipment.

Meanwhile, a couple of miles away, the playground at Marvin Avenue Elementary School was filled with children enjoying a nutrition fair that included fitness-oriented activities such as soccer and rock climbing.

Teachers organized both of these schoolwide events, and Carolyn Buenaflor, MPH, administrator of Cedars-Sinai’s Healthy Habits™ program, sees this as a strong sign that the program is paying off.

“These events are great examples of the changes we’re looking to make,” said Buenaflor.

A World in Focus for Teens
Free Vision Screenings for Students Lead to Improved Eye Care

Some of the students who squinted at vision charts at Animo Jackie Robinson Charter High School in South Los Angeles last July had never been to an eye doctor. One 14-year-old girl was legally blind, and her twin sister’s vision was almost as bad. Both had long struggled to do their schoolwork without glasses.

Other students wore glasses that hadn’t been replaced for years, though their vision had changed dramatically.

But the world would soon come into focus for a number of these teens from low-income families, thanks to the Cedars-Sinai nurses who performed free vision screenings last summer.

COACH for Kids and Their Families®, a program of the Cedars-Sinai Maxine Dunitz Children’s Health Center, provided free vision tests over the summer for 412 students at five Green Dot Public Schools — four charter high schools and one middle school. The schools are in disadvantaged Los Angeles neighborhoods and focus on improving graduation rates and college preparation among students.
Healthy Habits Catching On

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seeing in our partner schools’ environment,” she said. “Our goal is to inspire schools to do more to encourage healthy eating and exercise, and it’s exciting to see this happening.”

Through the Healthy Habits program, Cedars-Sinai sends health educators into more than 100 classrooms at 16 elementary schools and one middle school in low-income Mid-City neighborhoods and surrounding areas. They teach 10-week workshops on nutrition and fitness for second graders and offer refresher courses for children in third and fourth grades. The program, which includes summer workshops, also provides teacher training and engages parents in health education and fitness activities.

Arlington Heights and Marvin Elementary have long participated in the program, and teachers at both schools asked Cedars-Sinai health educators to participate in their special events, held a few weeks before the summer break. Buenafior handed out water at the finish line at Arlington Heights, while Cedars-Sinai educators at the Marvin Avenue school led a fitness activity and offered tips on healthy eating.

**Arlington Heights Elementary School Jog-a-thon**

“Good job guys. Keep it up,” a teacher yelled as a group of second graders rounded the track.

Throughout the morning, one grade level after another followed their teachers onto the playground in an orderly procession, then warmed up with stretches before beginning a half hour of running and walking.

One heavyset second grader in glasses caught the attention of Principal Zoe Jefferson, who was among the adults lining the track to cheer the students on. She was startled to see this boy running hard and smiling with his head held high. “He's really engaged today,” she said, noting that she often finds him standing alone on the sidelines during recess, with the hood of his jacket pulled over his head. On this day, he wore running shoes, completed 13 laps and then joined his classmates at the finish line, where they received high fives from their principal, teachers and parents and compared how many laps they had run.

Jefferson was thrilled to see the students enjoying a fitness activity. “The important thing is having a good time while getting exercise in,” she said.

And her teaching staff are determined to create a healthier school environment.

She said the Healthy Habits program has had a positive influence on teachers as well as students, and she’s grateful to the program for
Antoinette Barrett, RN, NP, (with student Lizbeth Herrera) and other nurses helped some families gain access to vision care or provided vouchers from vision programs.

A World in Focus for Teens
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motivating her to exercise more, eat healthier and lose weight. “I’ve stopped drinking sodas for good,” she said.

Marvin Avenue Elementary School Nutrition Fair

Chad Monk, a Healthy Habits educator, huddled with a group of second-graders. “Drink water,” he yelled. “First for thirst!” they responded. He held up a jar filled with 7.37 pounds of sugar and explained that this is how much they would consume if they had one soda a week for a year.

“Do you think soda is a healthy food?” he asked.

“No!” they shouted.

Next he held up a bright yellow blob of gelatinous “body fat” that the students were eager to touch. “If you’re not active, fat grows in your body,” he said. “OK, let’s get some physical activity.”

He led the group to a large parachute. They formed a circle and each student held onto the edge of the multicolored material. They worked together to raise it high, took turns running underneath it, and then lowered it to the ground – and back up again.

“We’re teaching them that health can be fun. It can be part of everyday life,” Monk explained as the group moved on to the next activity.

While teachers watched their students interact with Monk, some talked about how much they appreciate the Healthy Habits program.

Francisco Gonzales, who teaches fifth grade, said Cedars-Sinai’s educators have inspired students to read food labels and bring water and fruit to school rather than high-sugar drinks and junk food.

“The people who teach the program are wonderful. We hope they keep coming. The kids love them,” he said.

Carrie Cohen, a second grade teacher, noted that there’s peer pressure to eat healthier as a result of the program. “The students look forward to the weekly lessons,” she added. “And they remember what they learn.”

low-income, high-risk students. The vision tests showed abnormal results for 101 students.

This meant the nurses left the screenings with a long to-do list. With help from COACH social workers, they contacted parents and were able to help a number of families gain access to vision care through Medi-Cal. For others, they provided vouchers from programs for low-income, uninsured children such as the Sight for Students VSP Vision Care Program and the COACH for Kids Gift of Sight Program.

Cecilia Leyva helped line up students for the COACH vision screenings at Animo Jackie Robinson. A parent coordinator for the school, she’s seen what happens when students who don’t see well try to get along without glasses or muddle through with outdated prescription lenses.

She recalled one student who made multiple visits to the nurse’s office for headaches that stopped as soon as she got glasses. “When they can’t see, they don’t do their schoolwork,” Leyva said. “Sometimes they goof off and distract the rest of the class. They can’t follow along, and they get bored. Some don’t let anyone know they’re having vision problems because they think it’s not cool to wear glasses.”

Among students grateful to start the current school year with new glasses was a 14-year-old at Animo Ralph Bunche Charter High School. “I like how my glasses look, and it’s easier for me to learn in class now,” she said. “In sports, I wasn’t able to see the ball, but now I can.”

In addition to offering the vision screenings at Green Dot schools over the summer, COACH provides free vision tests along with many other healthcare and social services throughout the year for children of all ages on two mobile medical vans that visit schools, shelters, public housing developments and neighborhood facilities in low-income communities across Los Angeles.
25 Years of Men’s Health

Standing in line for free prostate cancer screening was a big step for some of the 89 men who came to Cedars-Sinai on a recent Saturday morning.

Gregory Russell, 52, faces a higher risk because he is African-American, yet he had never before been screened for prostate cancer. He had to overcome embarrassment about having a digital rectal exam and “fear of what they will find” to attend Cedars-Sinai’s annual Prostate Cancer Education and Screening Program.

Four Cedars-Sinai physicians were on hand to put Russell and others at ease. Providing clinical exams at the event were Mark Vogel, MD, a board-certified urologist and member of the faculty for the Urology Residency Program; Edwin M. Posadas, MD, medical director of the Urologic Oncology Program; Chief of Staff Christopher Ng, MD, a laparoscopic and robotic urologic surgeon; and Tom Feng, MD, a medical resident in Surgery/Urology.

Participants were greeted by Logan Williams, associate director of Cedars-Sinai Community Health and Education, who has organized this event for 25 years. Vogel holds the record for physician involvement, having participated in the program every year since its creation. He and the other physicians worked nonstop for four hours along with Cedars-Sinai nurses and other staff members.

Vogel noted that over the years, the event’s focus has expanded from offering prostate cancer screenings to a more comprehensive look at men’s health. Participants were guided through three busy areas of the Ambulatory Care Center: a lab where blood was drawn to check their prostate-specific antigen, cholesterol, blood glucose and testosterone levels; an area where Cedars-Sinai nurses took their blood pressure; and a hallway lined with private rooms for prostate exams.

Five of the participants had dangerously high blood pressure and were referred to urgent care. Some had run out of their blood pressure medication, while others didn’t know they had hypertension. “I am grateful to the concerned staff, and to find out my condition existed,” one man in his 50s said. “Their swift action probably saved me from great medical harm.”

Williams said event participants are notified about all their test results within about four weeks and receive referrals if they need follow-up care.

Vogel added: “When we go over the test results, we find as many general medical conditions — high blood pressure, high cholesterol, low testosterone — as we do prostate issues. Some men come to this event every year because they don’t have access to medical care on a regular basis.”

He finds it very satisfying to be among those who “come out on a Saturday morning to provide much-needed healthcare. It’s part of a larger mission of the hospital to reach out to the community and screen people...
for important health issues.”
  
Williams recruited event participants during health fairs in areas around Los Angeles where Cedars-Sinai provides free education and health screenings throughout the year.
  
Some of the participants had learned about the event five months earlier at City of Refuge Church in Gardena, an African-American church where Posadas spoke from the pulpit about the importance of early detection and prevention of prostate cancer. He told a congregation of several thousand that this disease affects one in six men overall and one in five African-American men.
  
Among those who heard the physician’s sermon and signed up for the screening event — and showed up — was LaMar Rucker. He is 58, the age his father was when he died of prostate cancer. Rucker has been getting annual screenings for 17 years, and he urges others to do the same.
  
“A lot of men are not comfortable with doctors, period,” Rucker said. “And I’ve seen men who learned they have an elevated PSA or enlarged prostate go into denial and elect to not take any action out of fear, ignorance or lack of trust in the medical system. This type of response makes no sense to me.”
  
Posadas was pleased to see men from City of Refuge following through. “These talks in the community make a difference,” he said. “And I’m really struck by the devotion of Logan Williams and Mark Vogel, who have made this event happen for 25 years.”
  
He said there were a number of “important findings,” and “many of those I saw were high risk with family history or racial/genetic dispositions. Many men felt very empowered by coming to see us.”
  
Among those who walked away with that feeling was Gregory Russell. “I want to be the best me I can be, whatever it takes, so I know I need this testing,” he said.

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A Fruitful Combination

Gardening and Art Therapy Help Boost Children’s Self-Esteem

Valerie and Alpha Briones, fourth-grade students at Cienega Elementary School in Los Angeles, made a surprising discovery through Cedars-Sinai’s Share and Care art therapy program: They like to pull weeds.
  
Doing some gardening at school with their Share and Care counselor was so much fun for the twins that they now spend time tidying up the flower beds at home.
  
“I like it because it makes me feel calm,” Valerie said.
  
“My parents are happy about it, because I used to watch TV all the time, and now I go outside more,” Alpha added.
  
Davina Cohen, the Share and Care counselor at Cienega Elementary, is thrilled to hear these words, and to see the bright colors and abundance of sunshine in the drawings students created based on their experiences in the garden.
  
Cohen decided to add this activity to her sessions with students at all grade levels during the past school year to support Cienega Elementary’s effort to build students’ self-esteem. She alternated between her usual weekly art therapy sessions in the classroom and outings to a small garden on campus that needed attention.
  
As the garden began to look better, the students seemed to feel better. “They were releasing anger and frustration as they pulled weeds. It was a very productive way to let out these feelings. And they felt good about themselves,” she said. “I would find them bringing other kids by the garden to show them what they had accomplished, and they were thrilled when the principal recognized them at a school assembly.”
  
The main focus of the Share and Care program — offered by the Cedars-Sinai Psychological Trauma Center in 28 schools across Los Angeles — continues to be art therapy that helps children cope with emotional distress resulting from causes such as bullying, problems at home and traumatic events. But working in the garden has turned out to be a successful offshoot of the program at Cienega Elementary, and Cohen said that during this school year, students will have a chance to plant some flowers and watch them grow.
  
Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, “The earth laughs in flowers.” Cohen has seen her students laugh more as an outdoor activity that beautifies their school lifts their spirits. As one third-grader wrote on her drawing about her gardening experience: “When I work in the garden, I feel happy.”
Seventeen-year-old Natalia Gonzalez will no doubt tell this story to her grandchildren someday.

Just a few days after she started her first job, assisting at the reception desk at Cedars-Sinai’s S. Mark Taper Foundation Imaging Center, she found herself unexpectedly in the limelight — with Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti and City Council member Paul Koretz at her side.

As they stood in front of the Imaging reception desk in the midst of a small crowd, a Channel 7 reporter who was interviewing the city leaders about the Hire L.A.’s Youth Summer Employment Program turned the microphone to Gonzalez. She talked about how excited she is to be working at Cedars-Sinai as if she had prepared for this moment.

The mayor had just come from Harvey Morse Auditorium, where he kicked off the Hire L.A.’s Youth program in a room filled with employers who provide jobs for low-income people ages 14 to 24. After the one-hour program, which featured remarks from city and Chamber of Commerce leaders, a number of people followed Garcetti to the Imaging reception desk to visit with some of the students who work there.

Someone nudged Gonzalez forward to meet the mayor, and the Channel 7 camera zoomed in on her. She was a bit nervous but rose to the occasion, saying: “The people here are kind and caring. They all knew my name even before I was introduced to them. By working here, I not only get the opportunity to learn more about healthcare, but also how to talk to patients who are going through a tough time and make them feel a bit better.”

Among those on hand to greet the visitors in Imaging was the department’s area manager, Mariella Compton. A strong supporter of job programs like this, Compton has mentored a number of students from Cedars-Sinai’s Youth Employment Development Program, which partners with the Los Angeles Mayor’s Office, the city’s Economic and Workforce Development Department and the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce to bring students to Cedars-Sinai for summer employment through Hire L.A’s Youth.

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For the past year, Arciniega has provided support for nurses who care for transplant patients. She told the audience: “Working on 6 North has given me the opportunity to see the different roles nurses have and exposed me to other careers in a hospital. I realize there are different components to maintain a hospital at its best.”

Arciniega wants to become an oncology nurse at Cedars-Sinai. As Garcetti introduced her, he said, “The idea of being able to come to work for one of the best hospitals in the world at that age is life-changing. We want her to be able to learn and to expand her horizons and to feel that she, as much as all of us, owns this city.”

Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti and Natalia Gonzalez talk with television reporters about Hire L.A.’s Youth Summer Employment Program. Gonzalez was recently hired at Cedars-Sinai after completing the program.
Embracing Our Community  |  PAGE 7

The invitation from the American Samoan community was a first for Cedars-Sinai. About 400 women were gathering at an international conference of Samoan women, and community leaders wanted to offer much-needed health information and screenings at no cost.

Michele Rigsby Pauley, RN, MSN, CPNP, knew it was important to bring one of Cedars-Sinai’s two mobile medical vans and help out, though it meant her team members would have to set their alarms for 4:30 a.m. to get to the United Samoan Church on time.

“This event was a great opportunity to provide health education and screenings for an underserved population that faces major health challenges,” said Rigsby Pauley, director of COACH for Kids and Their Families®, a program of the Cedars-Sinai Maxine Dunitz Children’s Health Center.

Kawen Young, the event’s planning committee adviser and executive director of the Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders Alliance in Gardena, said there’s growing awareness in her community of the need to be proactive about preventing diabetes, heart disease, breast cancer and other diseases prevalent in a population with the highest obesity rate in the world (75 percent).

During the event, the COACH staff provided nutrition counseling and blood pressure screenings, and another team from Cedars-Sinai offered breast health education and breast cancer risk assessments.

A number of women told nurse practitioner Sylvia Estrada, DNP, clinical program coordinator for the Wasserman Breast Cancer Risk Reduction Program, they had never had a mammogram. “They’re afraid it will hurt, and they’re afraid of being told they have cancer. We’re letting them know that a few seconds of discomfort will provide them with important information that could be lifesaving,” Estrada said.

Doris Tofaeono, a 45-year-old resident of Las Vegas, was grateful to be reminded of the importance of breast cancer screening, and to receive nutrition tips from the COACH team.

“Obesity is a problem in my culture because having big festivals and feasts is our way of celebrating, and we have not received enough education about what types of foods are healthy,” she said.

Patricia Mailo, one of the event organizers, was raised in American Samoa and has lived in the U.S. for two decades. She said it was rare to eat salads when she was growing up, and foods such as pork chops, sausage and bacon were staples in her diet.

“I think our people know you have to eat better, but it’s hard to get used to the foods that are healthy for you,” she said. “We want to educate ourselves and do a better job of prevention because, by the time people find out they have a disease like diabetes, it’s out of control.”

Event organizers expressed their gratitude for Cedars-Sinai’s assistance in an email to Rigsby Pauley. Louisa Young, chair of the planning committee, wrote: “Fa’afetai tele ma ia manua tele (sincere appreciation and be blessed) for your commitment and support and for your willingness to make a difference in the lives of Samoan women.”

In Midst of Obesity Crisis, Samoans Seek Aid

Cedars-Sinai Offers Free Health Education and Screenings at Gathering of 400 American Samoan Women
Cedars-Sinai Grant Helps LAFD Buy Wildfire Helmets

A $50,000 grant from Cedars-Sinai helped the Los Angeles Fire Department Foundation purchase 3,200 special helmets for use in fighting brushfires and wildfires, which has become especially important during the area’s multiyear drought. Joining LAFD and foundation officials at a news conference about the helmets were Daniel R. Margulies, MD, section chief for Cedars-Sinai Trauma and Acute Care Services, (left) and Larry Colvin, Cedars-Sinai’s vice president of Facilities Planning, Design and Construction (third from left). The special helmets weigh less than a pound — 2 pounds less than standard helmets — and are designed to protect firefighters from flying embers. The total cost of the helmets was $80,000.

Cedars-Sinai Grant Helps LAFD Buy Wildfire Helmets

It’s in our DNA. For more than a century, Cedars-Sinai has demonstrated a deep commitment to improving the community’s health.

As a not-for-profit academic medical center, we provide access to care for those in greatest need, including the uninsured and those with limited means; empower communities to become healthier through hundreds of free prevention programs and services in local schools, homeless shelters and community centers; expand medical knowledge and treatment options through innovative research; and educate the next generation of healthcare professionals.

The driving force behind all these efforts and more is a passion for helping others that extends far beyond the borders of our campus.

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