Note From the Director

I want to devote this Director’s Note to thanking our sponsors and donors for facilitating great progress at GoKids-Boston in the past year. Significant support for our programs came from research grants as well as from our marathon team and all the individual donors who supported it, the New Balance Foundation, and the Richard J. Fasenmyer Foundation. Our supporters are vital to keeping the center open. With their help, we ran eight different programs last year that served 266 participants who made a total of over 3,000 visits to GoKids. This year, we focus on expanding our reach and impact through creative outreach programs and continued research into fitness-based obesity treatment models. The kids in our programs have told us we need to get out more, so this year we’re in the community, on the radio, and on the web with programming, tips, and ideas for youth fitness that kids can try at home. And we just got great news that we will once again host a Boston Marathon fundraising team thanks to John Hancock. So here’s to the new academic year—stay tuned (check out our fitness tips on 91.9 FM WUMB) and read on!

– Jean Wiecha

Kids Helping Kids to Find A New Balance

This summer, Teens in Balance (TIB) and Fit2Lead came together for the first time to help kids learn to lead a healthy life. Teens in Balance, sponsored by the New Balance Foundation, was a new GoKids program for teens 13–17 years old. For four intensive weeks, 12 teenagers referred for weight management, were mentored by 12 older peers from the Fit2Lead group. Members learned basic anatomy and physiology, nutrition, and fitness. Fit2Lead participants (sponsored by a grant from UMass Medical School) were teens from Dorchester Academy trained in fitness and mentoring skills. Various fitness classes, group activities, and fitness challenges were held throughout the program as staff and mentors focused on helping participants to be active in daily life and to use gym equipment effectively. The Fit2Lead participants helped GoKids staff members facilitate exercise at the center and motivated their TIB peers to work out hard. For more continuity of care, the members of the Teens in Balance group received full membership scholarships to GoKids for four months this fall. Preliminary data analysis from both programs indicates improvements in fitness and body composition among a majority of participants.

“We had fun with the kids and got healthy,” says Brian, age 16, a Fit2Lead participant. “Advice I’d give to a kid coming to GoKids would be if you want to lose weight just go hard and don’t stop.”
Current Programs

Community Membership and Clinical Referrals Program. All members and referrals have been getting into the GoKids routine after the summer! Programs run from 4–6, Monday through Thursday, and include a ½ hour of homework time and 1 ½ hours of physical activity, including cardio and strength training sessions, free time with the equipment, and group activities and games.

Teens in Balance and the New Balance Program. Participants fully sponsored by the New Balance Foundation come to GoKids from 3:30–6, Monday through Thursday, for physical activity, including strength and cardio workouts, use of the exercise and Xergaming equipment, and participation in group fitness activity or games. Progress is individualized and closely monitored.

Quincy Pilot Program. GoKids has partnered with Quincy Public Schools to provide adapted physical education sessions for elementary students with autism. In this pilot program, GoKids and Quincy Public Schools staff help eight K-5 students with autism increase their physical activity while working on their own individual cognitive goals. GoKids plans to grow this program to reach up to 35 students this spring.

New Projects

Kids in Balance. Kids in Balance is now recruiting for an after-school program for children who need to work toward a healthy weight. We are working with Dever-McCormack School and other local partners to fill this program.

New partnership. GoKids has recently partnered with the Harbor Point Community Action Committee and their Healthy Living subcommittee to serve more area youth and provide more family-oriented programs for Harbor Point residents. GoKids is currently the only organization within the committees to offer a strong physical activity component.

On the radio... Throughout the year, WUMB (91.9 FM) is airing GoKids Wellness Tips, created by College of Nursing and Health Sciences students.

The Beacon-Panther Club. GoKids, with UMass Athletics and the Dever-McCormick School, has developed the Beacon-Panther Club. This new incentivized program provides Dever-McCormick students with free passes to GoKids and UMass Boston sporting events if students have excellent attendance, turn in all of their homework, obtain honor-roll, or exhibit great behavior throughout the year.

Undergraduate and Graduate Student Involvement

Where can students get hands-on experience learning youth health promotion skills? GoKids of course! GoKids currently has 12 students, mainly from College of Nursing and Health Sciences (CNHS), working at the center. In addition to returning students Iris, Leigha, Montel, and Svenja, we would like to welcome newcomers from the Department of Exercise and Health Sciences including intern Vanessa Peabody, and volunteers Davis Engelnd, Zachary Couch, and Jordan Joyce. We’d also like to welcome Katie Adams from the CNHS graduate nursing program. GoKids is also currently a teaching site for two classes, EHS 380: Exercise Physiology 1 and EHS 300: Health Fitness Assessment.

GoKids High-5!

During his first day at the Teens in Balance program, Bobby explained that he loved soda and video games. Bobby also explained that while he was playing video games he often had unhealthy snacks and drinks. Soon after joining the Teens in Balance program, he found a mentor whom he admired and who spoke with him about the benefits of working out and eating right. By working closely with his mentor, Bobby learned how to stretch appropriately, lift weights, and eat right. On the last day of the Teens in Balance program, Bobby was running on the treadmill, practicing his push ups, talking about the importance of eating whole wheat, and expressing how excited he is to start working out at home.