

Keeping kids active

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The kids jumped in line at Western Kentucky University's Track and Field Complex on Wednesday as they prepared to do their next drill.

"Who wants to count this time?" asked **Light of Chance** Inc. volunteer Stephen Wilson as several hands flew up in the air.

"Me! Me! Me!" several young voices shouted.

About 10 children were preparing to skip backward during the Get Set Go Wellness Program, which is designed to promote healthier lifestyles in children. The free four-week program – a collaboration between the nonprofit organization **Light of Chance** and Western's track and field team and coach Erik A. Jenkins – incorporates physical activity, nutrition education and healthy snacks. The group will meet from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. Wednesday and May 26 and from 4 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. June 2.

"The program is really interactive," said Eric Logan, **Light of Chance** executive director. "We want them to learn about physical activity, to get out and play and not sit in front of the TV or video games." Although children don't always have choices about what they eat, they can still learn healthier ways of eating, Logan said.

"We're not just trying to target overweight kids. In society, everything is fast. Parents are multitasking, so they may go to a fast-food restaurant," he said. "We want to teach the kids how to identify some of the healthier choices on the menu. Instead of getting fries, get the sliced apples."

Logan said Jenkins first brought the idea for this type of program to his attention. Logan researched childhood obesity and found startling statistics. According to a 2007 report by the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention, Kentucky has the third-highest rate of overweight youth in the nation.

"It's just once a week, but we're trying to jump-start some healthy habits," he said of Get Set Go. "If the kids are already doing it, we'll say good job and keep doing what you're doing."

The program starts with checking the children's height, weight and body mass index.

"We want to keep progress from the first week to the last," Logan said. "We want to see if their overall wellness has increased their knowledge."

After about an hour of various types of physical activity and several water breaks, the kids settled down to learn about the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Pyramid. Jennifer Jones of Pennyrite Allied Community Services, which has an outreach nutrition program that participated in Get Set Go, explained the different food groups on the pyramid.

"The pyramid helps you when it comes to good choices in food," she said. "It's called 'My Pyramid' because you can make it unique to you."

Jones showed the children that the space designated for oils was smaller than those for whole grains, vegetables, fruits, dairy and meats and beans.

"It's OK to have these things," she said of sources of oils, such as butter and vegetable oil. "But we don't need a lot."

Jones pointed to something different about the pyramid that the children saw.

“There’s something new on the pyramid – stairs,” she said, pointing to a flight of stairs on one side of the pyramid. “It reminds us to exercise.”

The children then gathered to eat healthy snacks, including carrot and celery sticks, broccoli, hummus and pita chips as they talked about what they got out of the program.

“I thought it was going to be fun,” said 7-year-old Kayla Dunican of why she wanted to participate in Get Set Go.

She and Ebria Bennett, 10, agreed that the program was fun. They both enjoyed running on the track and learning about nutrition. Ebria even got to eat her favorite vegetable.

“I like carrots,” she said.

Logan said the event went with the mission of **Light of Chance**.

“We address problems and issues within the community and provide positive and permanent solutions to them through events, workshops and programs,” he said.

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