

Boosting self-esteem, losing weight

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THE WOODLANDS — At 10 years old, a Woodlands girl wasn't appearing as happy and confident as her mother knew her to be, and both agreed a "diet overhaul" was needed.

But they wanted assistance and found it in an after-school pilot program being conducted by Wellspring Community Programs, in conjunction with The Woodlands Parks and Recreation Department.

Since the program started on March 3, McKenna Christler has lost eight pounds and has regained her self-esteem, said her mother, Christine Christler.



Wellspring Program Director Katherine Howard helps participants buy the healthiest lunch for \$5 at a Kroger's store in The Woodlands.

"She's been on the unhappy side for a year or two and we began looking for a program," Christine Christler said. "She's wanted to do this from the start."

McKenna Christler is one of nine Montgomery County children, ages 10 to 14, participating in the Wellspring program, which will last for a minimum of three months. Some children, such as McKenna Christler, have signed up for six months.

The participants meet twice a week for three-hour sessions, and once a month meet on Saturdays to enjoy activities outside the gym, such as rock climbing and paintballing, said Katherine Howard, program director.

"It's really about the kids' futures," Howard said. "What we do in this program sets them up for a future of healthy habits by giving them long-term weight controllers."

The children journal everything they eat and are asked to keep track of their daily steps, which should be at least 10,000 a day. In addition to working with the children, the program includes a family component every six weeks.

"The problem with obesity is very complex and it requires an intensive approach," Howard said.

Christine Christler said the program requires a commitment from every person in the family. Parents cannot expect their children to eat well if they do not, she said.

This is the first after-school program Wellspring has conducted. Before, its services were limited to two boarding schools and summer camps. Its mission is to help people ages 10 to 22 learn healthy behavioral habits, said Lev Kaye, managing director of Wellspring Community Programs.

“Wellspring overall helps about 1,000 kids per year, but we wanted to reach out to the communities and help tens of thousands of kids,” Kaye said. “We can get kids to change their lifestyles and, also, get the parents to change the environment. ... We enroll kids but we help the whole family.”

Christine Christler said she would recommend the program to any parent looking for a way to help a child overcome weight gain. Wellspring is currently enrolling for its second session which will begin in May.

For more information, visit www.wellspringprograms.com or call Howard at (559) 643-9496 or Kaye at (212) 796-2045.