



Where else but the “Y”

YOUTH FIT FOR LIFE™;

Supplementing Physical Education

TARGET POPULATIONS:

Children ages 5 to 12 years.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW:

Youth Fit For Life is a 12-week physical activity program delivered through YMCA of Metropolitan Atlanta after-school sites. The program is effectively administered by non-physical education specialists and is an excellent way for YMCA programming to supplement school-based physical education (which has often been reduced).

After-school counselors directly deliver the Youth Fit For Life program to the boys and girls. YMCA wellness staff members conduct quality assessments. Data collection and further quality assurance is conducted through the Metro YMCA office.

The program consists of cardiovascular exercise 3 times per week in the form of non-competitive activities and cooperative games. Resistance training is administered 2 times per week using resistance bands. Interactive, age-appropriate behavioral skills training (e.g., goal setting, progress feedback, facilitative self-talk) helps to foster the habit of regular physical activity outside of the program. A nutrition and health education component is also provided through collaboration with Children’s Health Care of Atlanta.

The initial trial of Youth Fit For Life™ (2,000 participants) was supported by a Carol M. White Physical Education Program grant from the U.S. Department of Education in 2002-2003. Grants by the U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Atlanta Falcons Youth Foundation, and Healthcare Georgia Foundation support extensions and further testing through 2008.

RESULTS:

Physiological and behavioral assessments were conducted before program initiation and immediately after program completion in the initial trial of 2,000 children who were mostly African American.

Subsequent analyses of other groups of children were also conducted. Youth Fit For Life™ was associated with significant improvements in Body Mass Index, body composition, strength, and endurance. Trends demonstrated a reduction in health risks, and percent of children in the overweight category (i.e., Body Mass Index greater than the 85th percentile for the year 2000). Changes in self-concept and use of behavioral skills were significant, and associated with an increase in moderate-to-vigorous physical activity outside of mandated programming. Feelings of participants’ overall self-confidence, a marker of academic success, increased as well.

ADDITIONS PLANNED:

Increased nutritional and health training to caregivers using a “consistent themes” approach. Extensions of the behavioral skills training component. Consultation with other YMCA associations beginning late 2006.

GRANT REVIEWER COMMENTS FROM CAROL M. WHITE PHYSICAL EDUCATION PROGRAM:

“The proposed Youth Fit For Life™ is comprehensive, developmentally appropriate and a research and evidence-based program.”

“Clearly, a tremendous amount of planning has gone into this project, and its development, clear assessments and evaluation design have proven themselves already and can serve as a model for other similar programs.”



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