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By ASHLEY THOMAS

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As First Lady Michelle Obama continues to promote her Let's Move! national campaign to help children become healthier, a Volusia County woman is taking a more local approach impacting dozens of youth and their families through her My Best Self campaign.

Program launched at Boys & Girls Club

After looking at the long-term consequences and prevalence of heart disease, diabetes and high blood pressure, Erma Forbes embarked on a project in her Deltona community, set on encouraging youngsters to make healthier decisions.

Her non-profit organization provides residents with information and guidance in making those nutritional and lifestyle choices that will counter obesity and enhance their health.

Following the receipt of grant funding for informational material and supplies, Forbes launched her after-school empowerment program at the Boys and Girls Club, teaching youngsters how eating healthy can be fun.

“In the evenings from 4 to 5:30, we teach the kids nutrition and show them how to prepare food that is healthy for them,” Forbes told the Times. “I teach the children the importance of eating vegetables, fruits and unprocessed foods.”

A hit with mom, kids

Phyllis Jones, a parent of three children who have all attended the My Best Self program, is pleased with the outcome.

“As far as my children, what they learn here they have begun to incorporate to home,” said Jones, who has a 14 year-old and 10 year-old twins. ”They have broadened their choices of eating.”

Cecil Walker, unit director of the Boys and Girls Club Deltona agreed, with Jones.

“The kids love it. She teaches them how to eat better, she walks them through the park, gets them to exercise. We even have a couple of kids who have lost weight because of the program,” Walker said.

Having fun with food

Forbes recently assembled various community partners to educate the children and their families on obesity as well as to taste nutrient rich, low-fat snacks.

“We try to make it fun,” said Forbes, pointing to a vegetable display. “We have ornaments from the bell pepper and make a little bird with the potato.”

Referring to a pitcher of cloudy, freshly squeezed liquid made up of passion fruit and grapefruit, Cynthia Clarke, Forbes partner and registered nurse added: “Also natural foods and juices. We show them how to prepare it, introduce them to new foods.”

Doctor: Eat what you need

Dr. Keny Bastien was on hand recently to further inform those in attendance about metabolism.

“The corrupted metabolism is when we eat what we like, and when we eat what we like we have less energy. But when we eat what we need, we have proper energy,’’ he explained.

Bastein continued with a tip he recommends for a healthier body, which may not have an optimal taste but is beneficial to the body’s needs.

“Fix yourself a glass of green juice in the morning. That should include romaine lettuce, string beans and cucumbers in the juicer. Put (them) in the juicer and drink it. You do not care about the taste, but you give your body what your body needs.

“For example when you eat cookies, your body breaks it down in anaerobic phase without oxygen and your body produces ethanol, triglycerides, cholesterol and fat. Toxins,’’ he noted. “We become sluggish.

“When you eat greens, there is no ethanol, no triglycerides, no cholesterol… you end up with a lot of energy. It’s powerful.”

Program director plans to expand

As the children scurried from table to table sampling various foods and fruits then eventually heading outside for physical activity before heading home, Forbes told the Times that the program has struggled with funding.

It has been a success thus far and will continue to grow in the future, she stated. Forbes has plans to expand the scope of her services and the amount of children she can reach.

For more information about the My Best Self program, contact Forbes at 407-416-2824.