

HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY (HEPA)
+
SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL)



A World Fit for Kids!

Los Angeles, Calif.

7,500

Average number of students served during the school year

84%

Students from low-income families

Main funding sources:

- ▶ Los Angeles Unified School District
- ▶ After School Education and Safety grants
- ▶ 21st Century Community Learning Centers
- ▶ Foundations
- ▶ Corporations

Training staff to model healthy behaviors to promote healthy eating and physical activity and social and emotional learning

Taking a comprehensive approach to wellness—which includes healthy eating and physical activity and extends to additional aspects of health, such as social and emotional skills and competencies—can provide the necessary supports to help healthy children grow into healthy adults. Afterschool and summer learning programs are well-situated to be a component of solutions that address the whole child. Children in quality programs have access to healthy snacks and meals, take part in physical activities, feel safe and supported by caring mentors, work collaboratively with peers, develop new skills, and gain confidence as they learn to set goals and make responsible decisions for themselves.

Overview

A World Fit for Kids! (WFIT) is an afterschool program with the mission of “preparing young people for fit and fulfilling lives.” Working in underserved communities, WFIT brings programming that purposefully takes a social and emotional learning approach to provide physical activity, nutrition education, academic support, mentoring, and enrichment activities to 14 Los Angeles Unified School District Title I schools. To support students’ overall health, WFIT promotes physical, mental, and emotional wellness, and encourages students to adopt healthy habits and become mentors and role models.

A typical day for students

Although students’ schedules differ depending on their age and club, daily schedules typically incorporate a check in, an “energy break” or warm up, a healthy snack, homework help, and some form of physical activity such as a relay race or sports activity. WFIT trains “coach-mentors” to prepare mentees to succeed in and out of the program, helping them recognize steps to reach their goal, develop a plan, and make modifications based on challenges. Along the way, coach-mentors prime mentees to reflect on the experience and celebrate the skills they used to overcome a challenge, including resilience, optimism, and discipline.

Outcomes

An external evaluation by the Kaiser Group found that WFIT had a positive impact on students’ physical activity, nutritional intake and choices, self-confidence, relationship with peers, and teamwork skills. Students reported

that WFIT helped motivate them to be physically active (77 percent), drink more water (80 percent), and feel more confident (80 percent of high schoolers and 75 percent of middle schoolers). Of teen mentors surveyed who completed the Mentors in Motion training since 2003, 96-100 percent graduated from high school and 76 percent were enrolled in or had completed community college or university degrees.

Program characteristics

WFIT uses a train-the-trainer model, allowing the program to share its expertise incorporating healthy behaviors and a personal empowerment program model in any existing program. Mentors in MotionSM is a research-based training model that prepares high school coach-mentors to work closely with elementary and middle school students, learning how to serve as role models and develop individualized activities that accommodate mentees' interests and special needs. Coach-mentors first identify their personal and health goals and strategies to reach them, using the process to model healthy behaviors and positive social skills as they help mentees achieve their goals.

Students often join WFIT during elementary school as a mentee and continue in the program through high school, where they have an opportunity to apply for an internship as a coach-mentor. Mentees look to coach-mentors as someone they can trust, and who can show them how to manage their emotions, make healthy decisions, and view physical activity and healthy eating as easy and fun. As a coach-mentor, students learn to lead, listen, and serve as role models.

Program history

In 1993, A World Fit for Kids! was founded to bring a physical activity and empowerment program to children and families in underserved communities. Since then, WFIT has trained more than 10,000 classroom teachers and served more than 460,000 children and families.

Recommendations

for training staff to model healthy behaviors:

- ▶ Cultivate an environment that promotes youth leadership opportunities. Train-the-trainer allows high school mentors to develop the skills to be role models. The cycle is self-sustaining and provides the social and physical developmental needs for all ages.
- ▶ Train your team members to intentionally integrate physical activity in a variety of activities and create a positive experience for students. Everything counts!



Challenges

National public health issues among children today are physical, and social, and emotional. The National Survey of Children's Health found that close to 1 in 3 children are overweight or obese, placing them at a higher likelihood for a number of health issues including asthma and high blood pressure. Additionally, 45 percent of children in the U.S. have experienced at least one adverse childhood experience (ACE), which has been linked to negative health outcomes and behaviors.

There are linkages between children's physical and social and emotional health. While one does not automatically lead to the other, research has found that children who are obese are more likely to suffer from low self-esteem, depression, and anxiety, and studies have shown the association between ACEs and a higher likelihood of being overweight and obese.

Issues in childhood have long reaching effects. ACEs have been linked to negative health issues in adulthood, such as a higher likelihood of drug abuse and heart disease, and obesity in childhood has been associated with a higher likelihood of obesity in adulthood. At a national level, the estimated lifetime economic costs of ACEs are \$124 billion and obesity is \$150 billion.

Read [A Big-Picture Approach to Wellness: Afterschool Supporting Strong Bodies and Minds](#) to learn more.