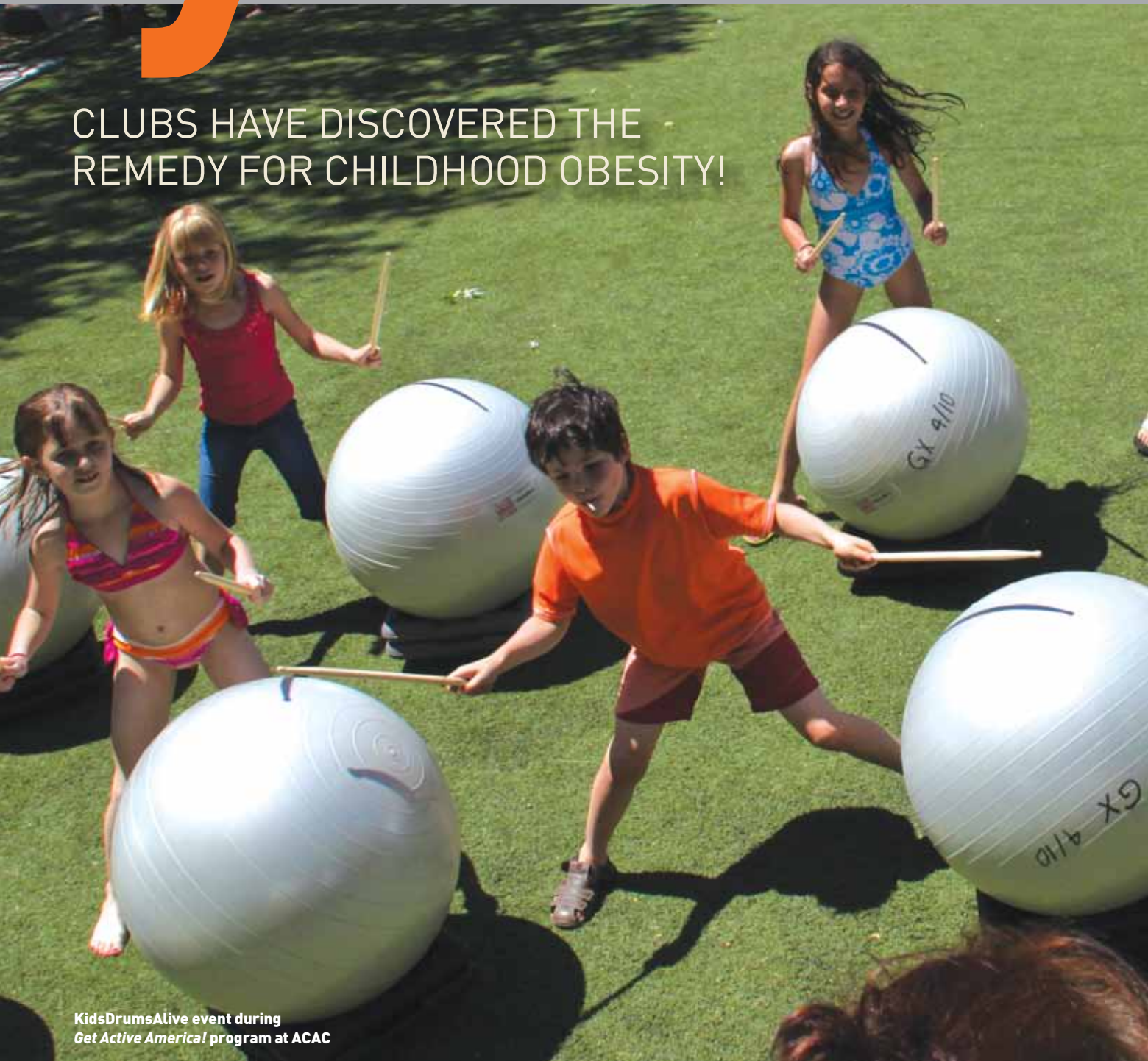


By Julie King

youth

CLUBS HAVE DISCOVERED THE
REMEDY FOR CHILDHOOD OBESITY!



KidsDrumsAlive event during
Get Active America! program at ACAC

fitness findings

The number of children who are overweight or obese is increasing steadily. Childhood obesity has more than tripled over the past 30 years, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Today, 17% of those ages 2–19 are obese, which represents some 12.5 million children and adolescents. In all, more than 23 million American kids are now classified as being either overweight or obese.

The figures are staggering, but, beneath the statistics, there are individual children—boys and girls who deal with painful difficulties each day and significant risks in the future. Children like Courtney Potter, a 15-year-old, 5' 5" tall, high school student from Miami, Florida, who, last year, weighed 250 pounds. She was struggling in school, subsisted on a fat- and sugar-rich diet, and spent much of her free time on the phone.

The alarming epidemic that had engulfed Potter is the result of a perfect storm of converging factors, including: less physical activity at home, in school, and in the community; the prevalence of TV, video games, the Internet, and cell phones; and a surfeit of processed food, larger portion sizes, and greater caloric consumption.

A growing number of constituencies—parents, the media, educators, physicians, politicians, and club operators—have become aware of, and concerned about, the problem, and are now bringing ideas, skills, and resources to bear on it. If there's a focal point for the groundswell of

initiatives, it might well be Michelle Obama's *Let's Move!* campaign, a program endorsed by IHRSA, which seeks to end childhood obesity within a generation by promoting exercise and sound nutrition.

The First Lady's goals are also championed, more broadly, by IHRSA's Vision for a Healthier, More Prosperous America, which sets forth a powerful wellness policy.

But, for our industry, the front line in the battle against childhood obesity lies in individual clubs.

Program evolution

Historically, family-oriented clubs have provided childcare services and some youth programs, such as tennis and swimming lessons, to entice parents to join. As the health and fitness needs of children came to be better understood, and as kids' role as consumers was recognized, clubs responded by introducing more, and increasingly sophisticated, programs.

nati Sports Club, in Ohio, provides strength training and group exercise classes, including yoga and Zumba, for youngsters 5-13. And The Atlantic Club, in Manasquan and Red Bank, New Jersey, operates an Elite Baseball Academy and a Parisi Speed School to improve children's athletic performance.

As the youth market has matured, and as clubs have become more responsive to newly identified needs, specialties, such as sports-performance, have emerged. Now, given concerns, specifically, about obesity and, generally, about the health of young people, the emphasis has shifted sharply toward fitness, nutrition, wellness, and disease-prevention. It's a movement that's also gaining momentum and strength in the nation's schools.

"It's all about exposing kids to healthy habits early that, hopefully, they'll make use of the rest of their lives," explains Kevin Ramirez, the

"TODAY, I CAN DO MANY THINGS I COULDN'T DO BEFORE, AND MY FAMILY IS SO EXCITED FOR ME. FITNESS HAS BECOME A BIG PART OF MY LIFE." —COURTNEY POTTER

Today, many IHRSA facilities boast menus of options for kids that are comparable to their adult offerings. The Dedham Health and Athletic Complex, in Dedham, Massachusetts, engages its young customers with, among other things, soccer, karate, rock climbing, dance classes, and a swim team. The Cincin-

general manager of Renaissance Family Fitness, in Houma, Louisiana, which recently opened a Kids Fitness Zone for children 6–15. Among its current attractions are a workout room, racquetball, swimming, and youth fitness classes, including circuit, hip hop, martial arts, and Zumba. Now being developed: →

Youth Fitness Findings

nutrition and cooking classes; 5K family training; and a triathlon training camp.

“The benefits of youth programming are immense,” suggests Kirsten Ryan, the general manager of ACAC, which operates three clubs in Virginia. “Helping our families live their best includes creating opportunities for children, from a very young age, to experience healthy choices. We develop programs that allow families to exercise together or allow a parent to exercise while their child is active in a safe and supportive environment.”

for youth. Recently, ACAC opened a year-round, state-licensed preschool program that emphasizes physical activity for the very young.

Growing sophistication

Increasingly, clubs are focusing specifically on children’s weight issues, and their programs are trending toward the medical. The Bronson Athletic Club (BAC), part of the Bronson Healthcare Group, in Kalamazoo, Michigan, recently launched a new physician referral-based program for youngsters 8–12

aren’t active at an early age, they’re destined to have health issues later in life. We utilize a coaching methodology that motivates them and gets them to buy into what we’re doing, and we always try to make it fun.”

One of the pioneers in weight management, the Pritikin Longevity Center and Spa, in Miami, has been conducting special one- and two-week summer Pritikin Family Programs since 2002. Parents follow the traditional Pritikin health and weight-loss regimen and attend workshops, with or without their children, to learn how to make healthier lifestyle choices.

“Each day, the children whoop and holler their way through drum-thumping classes, such as cardio-rap workouts, funky-salsa-hop dance classes, and Pump ‘Em Up strength training sessions. They also get to

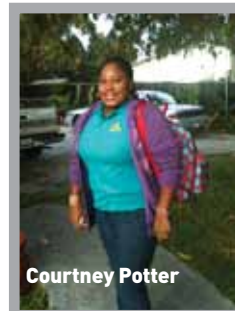
enjoy golf, tennis, kayaking, and water-park activities,” describes Scott Danberg, the director of fitness at Pritikin. “The Pritikin Family Program empowers children with the skills they need to grow into lean, healthy adults, and, at

“HELPING OUR FAMILIES LIVE THEIR BEST INCLUDES CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN, FROM A VERY YOUNG AGE, TO EXPERIENCE HEALTHY CHOICES.”

For the past nine years, children’s programming at ACAC has been growing, driven, in part, by suggestions and requests from members. Today, the wealth of possibilities includes racquetball, squash, kendo, karate, field hockey clinics, travel lacrosse leagues, conditioning classes for some high school sports, and group exercise classes designed

years old. The six-week sessions involve workouts twice a week, which include games and obstacle courses, and nutrition education.

“We asked local pediatricians what they’d like to see, and they’re incredibly excited about this program, because they need a place to refer kids,” reports Kristina Knight, the fitness director at BAC. “If kids



Courtney Potter



ACAC’s youth programming in action



Kids’ accomplishments increase self-confidence

the same time, they discover—much to their delight—how doable and how much fun healthy living can be.”

The results are impressive. Scientists who studied overweight children in the program found that, in just two weeks, the kids lost an average of nearly 10 pounds, decreased LDL by 25%, lowered triglycerides by 39%, and reduced inflammation markers by 41%.

Courtney reimagined

Miami is also the home of Kids and Fitness, the facility that Courtney Potter turned to for assistance. The defining objective and unique value proposition of this business, founded six years ago by Teri Sibai, is to put children on track to lead healthy, active lives. Sibai, the mother of three and a certified youth-fitness trainer, was inspired to open the center by the growing number of overweight children she saw and the lack of comprehensive fitness programs in local elementary and junior high schools.

Helping overweight kids change is a challenge, she concedes. “They come in with such low self-esteem and tend to hide themselves. We work hard to make the studio a haven for them, and to achieve an emotional and physical connection with them.”

Each of her young clients is given a customized exercise routine, which makes use of resistance tubing,

pants record their progress in activity and nutrition logs.

According to Sibai, 95% of her charges achieve their goals.

Potter was tempted to give Kids and Fitness a try. “I finally thought, ‘Why not make the effort?’” she says.

Initially, she was so embarrassed she wouldn’t even walk across the basketball court for Sibai. Put on a schedule of three cardio and strength workouts per week, Potter attended the studio regularly, and battled her inclination to skip meals and eat junk food. Now, she’s trying to eat

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cardiovascular equipment, and hydraulic strength machines, and a nutrition plan based on food choices and portion control. The program targets three-month goals that address weight, BMI, percentage of body fat, and eating habits. Partici-

regular, balanced meals including protein, fruits, and vegetables.

In the year since she joined the studio, Potter, who is now 16, has lost more than 50 pounds, and is currently working to become a certified youth-fitness instructor.



Don Starr, Ryanhard Cate

United States Tennis Association’s ‘10 and Under Tennis’ program engages young players



Early morning workout

“It was hard, but really worth it,” she testifies. “Today, I can do many things I couldn’t before, and my family is so excited for me. Fitness has become a big part of my life. If it weren’t for Teri and Kids and Fitness, I might well be lying in a hospital right now.”

“Working with kids is extremely rewarding,” says Sibai, who recently opened a second studio in Miami. “We provide them with a lot of positive reinforcement, and, when they start to believe in themselves, they can really progress.”

“If I can help just one kid,” she concludes, “I feel great!” —

— Julie King, julie.king1@comcast.net

PRODUCT SHOWCASE

As the childhood obesity epidemic continues to escalate, an increasing number of IHRSA clubs are answering First Lady Michelle Obama's call to action—"Let's Move!"—to end this alarming trend. As always, IHRSA associate manufacturers and suppliers stand ready to assist, with a wide range of products and services.



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American Fitness magazine is the official publication of the Aerobics and Fitness Association of America. On the November cover is C.J. Senter, a 10-year-old fitness sensation known as The Workout Kid! With an energetic, motivating style, C.J. serves as a role model for kids in his hometown of Atlanta, Georgia, by getting them up and moving. His positive message: "Working out can be fun!" Catch his inspiring story and much more in *American Fitness* magazine.

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