

"Great Moves" aims to keep kids healthy

(Ally Donnelly, NECN) - Over the last few decades in this country, childhood obesity has become a growing and critical problem. Children are being treated for everything from high blood pressure, to cardiac concerns.

One Massachusetts program is aiming to step in and help kids before the problem spirals out of control. 12-year-old Eleni Stamoulis is learning how to make chicken stir fry with registered dietitian Suzanne Rostler. The Medfield, Massachusetts seventh grader is part of a new program called Great Moves.

Founder Stan Goldstein: What we're trying to do here is teach families new habits... Habits for healthier eating, exercising.....and living. Based in Newton, Massachusetts Great Moves partners with doctors at Children's Hospital Boston to implement a six month program aimed largely at improving kids' nutrition and physical activity levels

In the United States, rates of childhood obesity have reached epidemic levels – experts say more than 30 percent of kids are either overweight or obese and facing health issues that previously had only been seen in the middle aged.

Stan Goldstein: We're seeing today that children have type 2 diabetes -- a disease that was formerly called Adult onset diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol -- they're now even talking about giving kids statins.



Goldstein says the *psychological* impact of being overweight or obese can *also* be profound on children -- especially when some kids can be so cruel.

Eleni: They kept on calling me fatty and thunder thighs and stuff and it was, like, really hurtful.

The kids have peer groups and one on one sessions to work through those kinds of issues and at great moves, staff never uses the "w" word. Weight. Instead, they talk -- about and measure -- body mass index or BMI.

Suzanne Rostler, Clinical Director: We don't want to shame kids. We don't necessarily point out why they're here. Most know it. We just emphasize that it's important for everybody -- regardless of weight -- to be healthy.

Exercise is obviously a critical aspect of the program, but the Great Moves gym is pretty interesting. As you can see, there isn't a treadmill or Stairmaster in sight. The gym is dominated instead by electronic images shot up on a screen...things the kids really connect to.

Suzanne Rostler: We have something similar to Dance, Dance Revolution and an interactive target wall called XerTrainer for developing motor and sports skills while exercising brain and body. Everything in the physical activity center is non-competitive and fun. Fun. We really emphasize that a lot here.

Another integral component of the program is family involvement. The kids and at least one parent must come to great moves at least once a week.

Suzanne: Parents are role models and kids are watching what they do. It's not enough to say it's important to eat healthy, you need to show kids how to eat healthy.

Eleni's mom, Litsa comes most often. She and her husband have two other children and own a pizza parlor, so breaking bad habits has been a challenge, but they are committed.

Litsa: It's different when you go in and somebody tells you, explains to you what is good, what is bad.

Eleni says they've gotten rid of most of the junk food in the cabinets and are exercising as a family. She has also improved her BMI.

Eleni: I've been feeling really good inside because it shows me what I can do if I choose a healthy lifestyle.

Litsa: I can see her...she laughs more, she has more energy, she's not sitting on the couch so much anymore.

When she grows up, Eleni wants to be a famous singer..."I don't know if I can achieve that yet."

She's achieved so much already. But regardless of what Eleni does for her career, she wants her life...to be a healthy one.