

Vincent Bottiglia

Healthier Communities



KidShape is a Family Affair

Tracey Bottiglia, Harrisburg, signed up for KidShape, PinnacleHealth's program aimed at promoting healthy food choices and active lifestyles for children and their families, because she wanted her son Vincent, now 13, to learn to take responsibility for what he eats and to live a healthy lifestyle. The entire family showed its support by participating, and she is pleased with the benefits.

As part of the nine-week Highmark Healthy High 5 initiative, the Bottiglia family took part in interactive games, exercises led by a trainer, cooking demonstrations and discussions about food choices and behaviors. Separately, Tracey and her husband James heard from nutritionists and health professionals while Vincent and his sister Victoria, 10, learned about self-esteem and healthy living.

"It has helped us pull together and find common ground in our food and lifestyle choices," says Tracey noting that family trips to the grocery store now include a lot of label reading. "My son loves to cook with his dad. Now they change recipes to make them healthier."

PinnacleHealth employees volunteer to run the program after their regular workday, receiving only a token stipend. Highmark provides funding, and PinnacleHealth provides facilities and equipment. Through six KidShape programs since September 2009, KidShape youth achieved an average 1.0 change in BMI percentile for age — a significant change over a short duration.

Long term, organizers hope the healthy lessons will help participants avoid chronic problems like obesity, high blood pressure and diabetes. Vincent appears to be on the right track. He talks about his success in terms of increased activity, feeling good and improving his school fitness test performance.

PinnacleHealth and Capital Blue Cross partnered on improving nutrition and reducing obesity at the Harrisburg Elementary Schools, serving more than 5,000 children in 2010.

Obesity Statistics by County

- Cumberland County — more than 20 percent of school-age children are at risk of being overweight, and 19 percent are at risk of being obese based on body-mass index measurements. (PA Department of Health 2006-07 school year)
- Dauphin County — more than 17 percent risk being overweight and nearly 15 percent risk obesity. (PA Department of Health 2006-07 school year)
- Perry County — more than 28 percent of adults in Perry County are at risk of being obese (Centers for Disease Control Community Health Status Indicators)

Effects of Obesity

Obesity increases the risk for serious health conditions like type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol — all once considered exclusively adult diseases. Obese kids also may be prone to low self-esteem that stems from being teased, bullied or rejected by peers.