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Photos Courtesy of Christine Wolff

The JCC MetroWest has created a new Kids Fitness Program to keep children active with age-appropriate equipment and activities.

Tweens, keep yourselves fit this year in the JCC's gym

By Shanee Frazier
Staff Writer

Creating opportunities for younger community members to become and stay active is the main goal of the new Kids Fitness Program being offered by JCC MetroWest that specifically focuses on the needs of children ages 10 through 13.

This new health and wellness initiative targeting "tweens" includes a new fitness center with age-appropriate equipment, group exercise classes and personal training, and is the only child-targeted fitness program with a dedicated space in the Suburban Essex area.

The new Kids Fitness Program was developed in response to demand from parents to engage children and young teens in age-appropriate and well-supervised physical activities. The Kids Fitness Center houses equipment specifically designed for ages 10 through 13, and group exercise classes will also be offered for children ages 7 through 13, including indoor cycling, boot camps, dance fitness, boxing and yoga.

"With childhood obesity on the rise, it is important that kids make fitness and wellness an ongoing part of their life. Not every kid is a soccer or basketball star, and even those that are need a place to continue their physical activity during their off seasons," Marcy Baruch, JCC membership and marketing director, said in a recent email to the West Orange Chronicle. "There is no other program in the area that offers ongoing fitness opportunities for 7- to-13-year-olds and so we made the decision that we needed to be that place for the community."

Although the JCC has always offered sports, recreation and aquatics programs to this age group, Baruch says that the difference now with this new program is that there is a fitness component to go along with the activities.

"Now we can offer kids what their parents have had, which is a dedicated fitness center with fitness professionals working one-on-one with them," she said. "We have also been known for having one of the largest group exercise programs for adults in the area and so we wanted to create a similar program for kids."

The new initiative will also feature an

educational component that addresses different topics related to health and fitness.

"They will get different pamphlets each week for older kids," JCC fitness director Sharon Tobey told the Chronicle. "The younger ones will get sheets with food groups and fruits and vegetables. The older ones will get info about muscle groups, the importance of drinking water, and some options for healthy snacks."

So far the response to the new program has been overwhelmingly positive, between the younger consumers and their parents alike.

"The last two weeks have been so rewarding; they're interested they want to come back. The best part of the program is kids who actually want to come back," Tobey said. "The responses from parents are that their kids are finally moving and not sitting in front of their computer or their videogame."

The new initiative has also brought new faces to the JCC MetroWest, as families now have a place where both parent and child have activities geared specifically toward them.

"The response has far exceeded our expectations. Our current family members are thrilled because now parents can bring their kids to work out at the same time they do," Baruch said. "We have also signed up many new family memberships specifically because of the Kids Fitness Center."

Baruch also says that future plans for the program include in January expanding their popular JFIT 10-week weight loss program to include a JFIT for children.

The success of the new program reflects the JCC's response to the needs expressed by the community, a trend that JCC MetroWest will continue to follow.

"After a month we will review everything and ask the parents to give us their comments," Tobey said. "We may change times, we may expand certain things, but we want feedback."

The Kids Fitness Center will be open Mondays and Wednesdays from 5 to 7 p.m. and Sundays from 10 a.m. to noon. For more information on membership and group class schedules, call 973-530-3443 or visit www.jccmetrowest.org/kidsfitness.