Adopting a healthy lifestyle is a family affair for one boy and his parents

In the past year Glenda’s family has made many changes in the way they cook, shop, and play. “I used to make fried chicken three times a week!” she says. “But no more—now it is a special treat.”

Elena Webber, NP, told Glenda at her son’s 9-year checkup that he was at risk for obesity, and recommended significant adjustments to the family’s lifestyle. “We stopped drinking juice and soda in our home, we eat more fruits and vegetables, and I’ve learned how to bake chicken so that it is almost as good as fried!” Glenda laughs. “My son likes it—he is proud to be healthy and active.”

“I love exercising—I feel good,” her son Jerson agrees. Enthusiastic about his new energetic outlook, he is working to inspire changes in his extended family members. “My uncle, he sits and watches TV a lot. I tell him we have to go play—I’m trying to teach him how to jump rope!”

The jump rope is a gift Jerson received when he and his family joined the Healthy Living Group led by Webber. The 12-week program brings together families who want to develop healthier habits.

Each visit has a physical activity, an educational component, and a healthy snack. Webber runs the groups with the assistance of Julie Chan, PNP, Mary Lucy Giuffrida, RN, Lisette Crime, clinical assistant, and Erin O'Donnell, PsyD. Each two-hour visit also includes an individual medical check-in.

Group members also help each other set goals each week. One of the goals is to get more exercise. The children wear a pedometer during the week. Webber tracks how many steps each child takes each week and keeps a cumulative total. She uses a map of the United States as a visual aid to track progress. “By week five we had made it all the way to New York,” she says, “and by the end we were in South Carolina!”

Glenda says that the group has been good for the whole family. “My husband and I have lost weight and become healthier as a result of helping our son,” she says proudly.

“I want to give Glenda a big hand,” says Webber. “I talk to many parents about making changes to improve the health of their children and their families, but not everyone is ready to really commit to it. Glenda has not only made many changes, but she has really taken them to heart.”
Walking group provides support and motivation to change

Primary care is not the only department encouraging patients to focus on exercise and nutrition as a vital part of health and healing. Walking groups have been integrated as a regular part of Lynn Community Health Center’s Group Therapy Program.

Vina and Jose are two enthusiastic members of the group. Jose, who has diabetes, joined the group about a year ago at the recommendation of his physician. “I was not getting the exercise I needed, but this group helped me make a habit of it,” he says.

While not a weight-loss program, Vina and Jose between them have lost more than 30 pounds. They are very proud of this, but do not count it as the most important accomplishment.

“My health is better,” says Jose. “I see the progress I am making with my diabetes, and that managing how I eat and exercise can help. I also feel much better emotionally. I feel proud of that.”

“Sometimes I feel alone,” says Vina. “But I realized in the group that a lot of people share similar symptoms and problems. It helps to know I am not the only one.”

“Juana R. De Gonzalez inspires members of the walking group to develop new habits.”

The group’s regular route takes them from the health center to a public beach, where they practice yoga, stretching, and breathing techniques before heading home. At the end of every 12-week session, De Gonzalez holds a “graduation” ceremony with a barbeque at the beach. “I am so proud of the accomplishments of all group members,” says De Gonzalez. “They have all come a long way!”

Group therapy is open to everyone! If you are interested please call the Lynn Community Health Center Behavioral Health Department at 781-477-7222.

Our community thrives because you care!

You are the reason that Jerson, Jose, Vina, and Julia have been able to change their lives for the better. You support ensures that care is always available to them when they need it. Thank you!

To make a gift or learn more about how you can help even more people thrive visit www.lchcnet.org/donate.

You will make a difference!
Facing a chronic disease led to a total life transformation

Julia wakes up in the morning and makes herself a fresh carrot and orange juice to go with her morning yogurt. She takes a brief walk, then gets ready to go to work. Before she leaves the house she looks in the mirror. She sees a healthy, confident young woman.

This was not always the case.

Julia lives with her father and stepmother and two younger siblings. When she was 16 she dropped out of school to help take care of her family. Her parents worked long hours and in addition to her own part time job she was needed to take care of her younger siblings and manage the household.

Kathryn Schuettinger, NP, began seeing Julia two years ago. “Julia came to me initially with abdominal pain, and was diagnosed with polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS), but she also had pre-diabetes, metabolic syndrome, and was extremely overweight,” she says. “Her diagnosis was a wake up call. PCOS can have severe negative effects on fertility and this motivated her to act.”

Julia learned everything she could about PCOS and how to manage the condition. She learned that poor nutrition and obesity can complicate the disease, and that regular medication can help.

“She realized that she could take control of her life,” says Schuettinger. “The transformation has been amazing! She decided to change her diet and exercise habits, and has lost more than 40 pounds.” These successes increased her confidence such that she began to see her future in a different way. Julia is now taking classes to finish her GED, and is determined to go to college. “She wants a better future for herself and she is reaching out with both hands to get it,” says Schuettinger proudly.

Julia’s turnaround has had a transformational effect on her family as well. Because she does most of the shopping and meal preparation, everyone is eating healthier and more balanced meals. Her siblings are now looking up to her as a role model for them as they go to school every day.

“This is a true success story,” says Schuettinger. “This is real, permanent change that has happened over the course of two years. I have rarely seen a patient more committed to her health and well being than Julia.”

Lynn Food and Fitness Alliance make whole community healthier

Buying healthy food has become easier for Julia and her family, thanks to the Healthy Market Program, brought to Lynn through the Lynn Food and Fitness Alliance and a group of local teenagers. They are working to ensure that local markets not only stock a variety of fresh food and healthy choices, but display them prominently in the store. So far four local Lynn convenience stores have been certified, and the group is working on more.

Lynn Food and Fitness Alliance is a collaboration between the City of Lynn and many local organizations, including Lynn Community Health Center. The Alliance has made many positive changes in Lynn including a city-wide ban on trans fats, implementation of the “Safe Routes to School” program for 16 schools, and partnering with the health center to establish The Baby Café to promote and support breastfeeding.
Expansion of behavioral health provides much-needed access to services

Expansion of behavioral health provides much-needed access to services

It is well-documented that those who face challenges in their lives such as chronic disease, poverty, language barriers, or lack of education are more likely to experience behavioral health issues. Lynn Community Health Center is launching three new initiatives that will ensure more access to care for those most at-risk in our community:

Lynn Community Health Center is one of 22 sites to receive a grant from The State of Massachusetts Workforce Transformation Fund. With this grant the health center, in collaboration with 1199 SEIU, Union Hospital, and North Shore Medical Center, will design a training to help frontline staff better serve patients who have complex medical and behavioral health care needs.

The Attorney General’s Office has awarded the health center a grant to provide on-site behavioral health care in three elementary schools in Lynn. These are in addition to the nine sites that already provide school based health care. “The Lynn Public Schools has been a superb leader in meeting the educational and socio-emotional needs of students and we look forward expanding our partnership,” said Lori Abrams Berry, health center Executive Director. “We believe that providing mental health services in the school setting is an effective way of serving the behavioral health needs of high risk children and improving their ability to learn and succeed in school.”

In January the health center significantly expanded the behavioral health department at its 20 Central Avenue site. A $100,000 grant from the Cummings Foundation will help the health center ramp up to a full caseload in the new space over the next two years. We expect to serve an additional 960 patients by 2016.

To explore how you can support the health center please visit www.lchcnet.org/donate