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Greetings!

We are letting them tell their own story. These are kids and adults who have discovered something extra special at the YMCA. Your generous gifts make these stories happen.

Janet Dunn, CEO



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Kids Who Like Celery

"Here's a 2-year-old boy who looks in the refrigerator for leftover celery sticks from the lunch that day at the park. Then he uses a step stool to get into the cupboard and get the peanut butter down," Betty Strickland chuckles. "After dipping the celery sticks in the peanut butter he has it up to his elbows!"

A couple of years ago Betty started bringing her



grandchildren and other neighborhood children to the **Mobile Fit** program.

"At first I thought it would be something to do. Let's play and eat lunch at the same time," Betty says as she sprays the kid's legs and arms with peppermint water to keep the bugs from bothering them. Then she realized even the most picky eaters in her group of kids were affected. **"You wouldn't believe the difference. Eating healthy here means eating healthy at home,"** she says.

Now the YMCA's Mobile Fit program attracts as many as 25 kids to Highland Park Commons, a public park two miles east of downtown in one of Chattanooga's largest urban neighborhoods. A healthy lunch five days a week, then the kids play tag, jump rope and play ball.

Laketha Hendley says, "I didn't know they'd like celery, yogurt and kiwi. Now I incorporate these foods into our meals at home. It's a chance

Homeless Kids Go To Camp

Krystal's mom died in April 2015 of a sudden heart attack.

"My mom and I were a team. We lived together and she took care of my kids while I was studying to get my GED and working as a dishwasher," Krystal says. She was a single mom living paycheck to paycheck with a 12-year-old son and 9-year-old daughter. By the end of the school year they were homeless!

"We ended up at Family Promise and that opened up opportunities for me to move forward."



Meanwhile, the folks at Family Promise offered

Day Camp scholarships to Austin and Kasie through their partnership with the Downtown YMCA.

"It was their first summer camp experience. At first they hated to leave me," Krystal says. "But they made friends -- even with the counselors -- which is a big thing since their father isn't around. One counselor cleaned out his closet and gave Austin a whole bag of his clothes!"

The family was sleeping in a different church each week and often did not have access to showers, so the counselors arranged for them to take showers at the YMCA and even brought them shampoo.

Austin says, "I give the Y an A plus! I know

to try something new. Before, I wasn't a vegetable person and didn't force them. Now I don't have to force them. They are finding new things they like to eat. It cuts down on sugar too because when they want a snack I tell them to go get a piece of fruit. And there's no arguing, they just do it because they know they like it."

Swimming from a Wheelchair

William Toney is a charming 19-year-old who loves to talk, but can just barely walk. With cerebral palsy he needs a wheelchair.

Two days a week you'll find William at the North River



YMCA with his **Personal Trainer**. From his motorized wheelchair he works out on the machines, uses the hand weights and then gets out of his chair to do squats and that's when he can "feel the burn."

Being in the pool is his favorite exercise because he has better mobility. Getting into the pool is a process he has mastered for himself. Hear his explanation on this brief video clip: [Pool \(30 secs.\)](#)

"When I'm in the pool I walk the perimeter and then I do leg kicks, walk the side step and swim the length of the pool," William says. "That tires me out! I swim laps but one arm works better than the other so I have to work hard. Also I have to float on my back and I hate that. I'd be terrified if they didn't have a hand under me. I would sink like a rock, but with a belt on I'm swimming like a fish! Being in the pool is easier than walking; for me it's like dancing. I can go sideways better in water than out. I can even do the Moonwalk in the pool!"

William "sings" about the Cupid Shuffle (his pool exercises.) [1-minute video](#)

"Ms. Rachel, my trainer, even teaches me new vocabulary words every day. I learned to count 1-2-3 in Japanese," William says. "I also helped pack the lunches for the summer program. All the people at the Y know me and say 'Hey William, how you doing?', even the people in the water aerobics class."

William competes in Special Olympics at school earning a first place finish in bowling, the softball throw and the wheelchair races. "Because I work out, my arms are stronger

my momma wanted me to have a great time and I did, plus she got a break from me," he grins.

His little sister Kasie liked to help the autistic kids, especially during swimming when she carried a special needs kid on her back in the pool. "He was always laughing," she says with a smile. "**The YMCA is just a surprising big ole fun place. The last few days the counselors gave us lots of hugs,**" Kasie remembers. "I made a picture to thank all the people that supported the YMCA kids. They are awesome to pay lots of money, thousands and thousands of dollars to support us."

Video of Kasie singing a camp song.

[30 seconds of happiness](#)

Making a Deal with the Doctor



"I've been diabetic for six or seven years," says Mike Carter, "but I didn't take it seriously. "I was in terrible physical shape! The only thing I was doing was walking in the neighborhood, or occasionally an hour on the treadmill... but not real fast," he

admits. "I used to eat dinner and then a half gallon of ice cream! The week before the doctor's appointment I'd get back on my diet and hope for the best."

Then last year Mike went to the doctor for the usual visit to refill his oral diabetes medication. And that's when it all changed.

"He wanted to put me on insulin! So I said 'No, I can control this.' He said he would give me three months to get my A1C down from 8.4," Mike says.

[A1C is a test that reflects your blood sugar levels for the past several months. Normal A1C is 6 or less.]

So the next day he was driving by the North River YMCA and saw a sign for a diabetes exercise program.

"This is for me!" Mike thought. "I need total body exercise, more than just walking. And I need someone to show me what I should be doing."

Move Well Today is an exercise program specifically for diabetes management. Participants become part of a small group working with a personal trainer who customizes an exercise program to fit their abilities and goals. An assessment is taken before the class and at the end of 12 weeks to show improvement in exercise ability. Each person tests their blood sugar

for the softball throw. I just want to win! In my mind I'm thinking WIN!!"

He doesn't let his disability slow him down. His message to others: **"If you have a trainer, tell them about your disabilities and they can help you with the equipment and work up to trying new things for exercise. It is tiring but it feels good because you tried. My mama says as long as I try my best that's all she wants."**

before and after class.

After 12 weeks Mike was thrilled to discover his A1C was down to 7.3!

"I attribute that to the combination of exercise and diet. I quit eating so much white food like potatoes, rice and bread. If I'm exercising there's no point in ruining that effort," Mike says. "I lost 13 pounds! And I was shocked to see more than a 50% increase in the weights and stepping exercises. Todd, my trainer, was always so encouraging and we became friends. He really knows his stuff."

The doctor is sticking to the deal and giving him a chance to continue his progress. When the program ended Mike and Todd created a personal exercise plan that he continues today.

Watch for future newsletters and let us know what you think!

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(423) 265-8834