Fitness in the City
Promoting physical activity through community connections

Launched in 2005, Fitness in the City (FIC) is a partnership between Boston Children’s Hospital and 11 Boston community health centers. FIC utilizes case managers at the community health center sites to connect overweight and obese children with nutrition education, motivational support and physical activity opportunities within their local community. More than 900 obese and overweight children are referred by their health center-based primary care providers to participate in FIC every year.

Case managers are tasked with engaging families to develop wellness goals and then supporting them to reach these goals through nutrition education and referrals to physical activity opportunities. Many of the health centers have registered dieticians on staff to provide nutrition counseling and education, but FIC supports health centers to establish partnerships with other local organizations to increase access to physical activities for families.

“Health centers know their populations intimately, so they understand how to best address cultural and linguistic needs for their patients as well as how to leverage resources in their own communities,” says Shari Nethersole, MD, medical director for community health at Boston Children’s. Many FIC sites have reached out to local Boston Centers for Youth and Families or other community organizations such as Boys and Girls Clubs to provide programming such as karate and yoga.

Since its inception, FIC has provided fitness scholarships for families to attend their local YMCA or UMass Boston’s GoKids Gym. In February 2013, FIC established a new community connection—it began offering scholarships for families to join Healthworks Community Fitness in the Codman Square neighborhood of Dorchester.

“Partnering with Boston Children’s allows us to collectively serve more children,” says Lauren Broadhurst, executive director of Healthworks Community Fitness. “Together, we’re able to provide essential support to children in a variety of ways with a shared goal of improving health and well-being.”

Above: Children participate in a Yo-Sport class, which is a fusion of yoga and athletic agility. Photo courtesy of Healthworks Community Fitness.

For more information on FIC, visit bostonchildrens.org/FIC

FIC participants have reported increasing their physical activity per week, and decreasing the number of hours spent watching TV during the weekends.