

Program shows wiping out obesity is about choices

by Marcus E. Howard

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Vanetta S. Keyes is the founder and CEO of the Center of Helping Obesity In Children End Successfully. She was recently recognized by General Mills for her commitment to community service.

KENNESAW - Vanetta Keyes, founder and executive director of the Kennesaw-based Center Helping Obesity In Children End Successfully Inc. has been recognized by the General Mills corporation for her working in fighting childhood obesity.

Keyes is the Atlanta area finalist of General Mills' Feeding Dreams program that honors African-Americans who are everyday heroes because of the time, energy and talents they invest in improving their communities. Now in its third-year, the program expanded to 10 southeastern cities: Atlanta, Birmingham, Charlotte, Columbus, Jacksonville, Jackson, Memphis, Miami, New Orleans and Norfolk.

Metro Atlanta residents may cast one vote per day through Oct. 31 for Keyes and her nonprofit organization at FeedingDreams.com. The nominee who garners the most votes will receive a \$10,000 grant to benefit the charity of his or her choice. All nominees receive a \$500 check as acknowledgement of their community service.

In 2002, Keyes founded CHOICES after watching her daughter, now age 22, struggle with being overweight. Her nonprofit aims to increase awareness of childhood obesity through family wellness workshops, interactive nutrition education, summer camps, and a program that teaches overweight girls how to get fit called Sisters in the Lifestyle Intervention Teaching Exercise.

"My daughter was overweight as a child and I felt that the organizations and resources that we had available to us did not quite assist me in the way that it should have," said Keyes.

"So my goal, of course, is just to try and educate children and parents so they don't experience some of the anguish (my family experienced)."

Each year, CHOICES conducts about 50 mobile expos in which it visits metro Atlanta after-school programs and health fairs to teach people the importance of healthy eating through activities and games.

On Friday, the Marietta-Roswell Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc. partnered with CHOICES and the Marietta Sixth Grade Academy to hold a mobile expo at the school in recognition of September being National Childhood Obesity Awareness Month.

First Lady Michelle Obama has taken up the cause during her husband's first two years in office, which caught the attention of the sorority chapter, said chapter President Patsy Pattman. Last year, the chapter conducted a healthy eating on a budget program.

"We work with children, we have a mentoring program already, so this childhood obesity just fits right in with it," Pattman said. "It may be a little late with some of us, but if we can catch them at this age and start teaching them now, then it carries on into their adulthood."

Keyes said her advice to parents is to help children understand that they have options when it comes to food. Using the nutrition facts label on the back of food and beverage packages is a good way to decide what to eat, she said.

"You're trying to get them to understand that you're only allowed like 40 grams of sugar a day and if you drink a soda - depending on what type of drink - you've already had your quota of sugar for the day," she said.

On Oct. 2, CHOICES will host a nutrition expo at the Atlanta State Farmers Market at 16 Forest Parkway in Forest Park.

To learn more about CHOICES and vote, visit www.choicesforkids.org.

Read more: [The Marietta Daily Journal - Program shows wiping out obesity is about choices](#)