



ABOVE: Luke McCaughey has got away from the Xbox and started exercising.

LEFT: Luke McCaughey, Eboney Wolk, Grace Yensch and Nastarsia Pickham burn off the calories with a Go4Fun dash.

Pictures: BEN EYLES

their own healthy recipes — sweet potato wedges, multigrain pita chips and vegetable fritters with homemade tomato sauce and tzatziki.

"The exercise is also designed to be a change from the usual competitive, structured activity sessions experienced at school that not a lot of the kids enjoy.

"There is a sense of equality where the children do not feel pressured to perform to a certain standard or win, permitting their confidence, physical activity levels and fitness to soar."

Grace Yensch, 9, has now given up Coco Pops but allows herself the occasional hamburger.

She has lost 15 kilograms in the past year.

"I used to love Coco Pops but then we learnt to read the food labels and understand what they mean, they were really bad for me," she said.

Her mum Debbie says she is a different girl.

"Grace now packs her own lunch — generally it includes salad," she said. "Her resolve is incredible if I had half of it I would be happy."

"This whole program has opened our eyes to healthy ideas for meals and shopping.

"We don't use but-ter any more, rarely get takeaway.

"It has been great for Grace but I think a lot of parents need to do this, understand what are they eating."

Belinda Wolk says the program has turned Eboney's life around.

"She was the typical couch potato, more interested in the computer than exercise," she said.

"Now she is doing a four-kilometre walk each night whereas before, after 10 minutes, she would be whining 'mum I'm sick of this'.

"I haven't seen her eat a chocolate bar in the past five weeks, she eats breakfast, drinks water."

"The change has been dramatic, incredible."

Mrs Wolk says a supermarket tour as part of the program was a "giant wake-up call."

"Our diet was not healthy — it was snacky, fast foods, convenient," she said.

"Before I would walk down the aisle grab whatever cereal, biscuits, yoghurts, cheeses.

"But during the tour it blew me away that we couldn't find a cereal with a low level of sugar, same with biscuits, even the plain ones — when you read the labels, understanding, you just can't believe it."

Eboney says she doesn't eat McDonalds any more and prefers fruit.

"Last night on our walk we went up the big hill," she said.

"I used to think that I couldn't do that and then through this program I have got way fitter and it was so easy."

"I used to feel yucky but now I'm more energetic, ready to exercise."

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REPORT
BRAD WORRALL

A program to tackle childhood obesity has helped some Border children turn their lives around. Healthy diet and exercise are now an enjoyable part of their daily lives.

BONEY Wolk has a smile from ear to ear. The tween was once a couch potato with exercise a foreign word and chocolate her comfort food.

But this week the Lavington schoolgirl climbed a mountain, well at least the steep hill on Burrows Road.

It was something the 12-year-old never thought possible but after an hour of walking the 4.5 kilometres she turned to her mum and asked if she wanted to go further.

Eboney is one of a growing number of Border success stories in the battle against childhood obesity.

She was one of eight children, some as young as eight, to take on a NSW government-funded program.

This week in the Pablo Picasso wing of the North Albury Public School, weatherboard clad rooms painted in pastel hues, they went through the last of the twice-weekly sessions that have been part of their life since September.

Parents sat at desks designed for kindergarten kids while their children, shuffled between step tests, weigh-ins and exercise in the courtyard. It was very natural, very relaxed.

But most noticeable was the sense of pride in parents and children alike. They were not only losing weight, they were changing lifestyles.

Their lives they say are better. They are all smiling.

One in four Australian children aged five to 17 are technically obese, Access Economics estimating the cost to the

nation in adult obesity is now \$58 billion a year.

And while a federal government report last year said the growth in childhood obesity had plateaued, it concluded the level was still too high.

Between 40 and 70 per cent of obese children will become obese adults and so the cycle continues.

The challenge for health authorities is how to stop the rot.

The productivity commission report dismissed "hard" interventions such as taxes or subsidies as difficult to justify and administer.

Instead it championed "softer" methods, like the Go4Fun program, targeted at addressing information failure and education.

Learn Pickham said the program and particularly the food education was a rude shock.

Both her daughters, Nastarsia, 11, and Bethany, 8, have been part of the group.

"Before the program I thought our family diet was healthy but I have been in for a very rude shock by learning to read the labels," she said.

"We tended to eat a lot of cheese and the fat content was amazing, same with yoghurt and sugar.

"It certainly pointed the kids in the right direction with food — knowing the difference between healthy foods and foods, treats, you can have at other times."

Luke McCaughy turned 12 on the day of the last session this week.

He was ruddy faced from a step workout.

But like the others smiling with self-pride.

Mum Pam said the program had got Luke away from the Xbox and

taking more notice of the food he ate.

"It introduced him to stuff about food and nutrition that he had never really thought about before," she said.

"It made him think a little more about what he is putting in his body and it helped us as a family to be more conscious of our own diet.

"I thought that we ate well but probably didn't have particularly healthy snacks.

"Luke is not an active kid, he prefers computer games to sport but this has helped him keep a mental note of his exercise, understand the need to exercise each day.

"His physical goal was to do 20 minutes of exercise a day and that had been his responsibility.

"Initially it needed me to gently remind him about that goal but by the end of the 10 weeks it was his own initiative, he'd say 'I need to go and do some exercise'.

"So it has been a mind shift."

Border dietician Kerryn O'Brien has overseen the free program throughout the year.

She says it hasn't been without its pitfalls.

Cold winter nights were a contributing factor to a high attrition rate in one of the 10-week trials in the middle of the year.

"But we have had 24 children involved, all were overweight and all have benefited, in understanding what is an isn't health and in the measurements we take when they start and finish," she said.

"The program is educational, inspirational and touches on the psychology of triggers for healthy habits and eating.

"We had a MasterChef session where the children prepared and cooked

I used to feel yucky but now I'm more energetic, ready to exercise.

— Eboney Wolk, 12



Kids Versus

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● Kerryn O'Brien

It's fun to be healthy

A GROUP of Border children are about to compete in the third GO4FUN program to be held in Albury.

The program is about helping children who are above their healthy weight, and their families, to lead a healthier life.

Two-hour, twice-weekly sessions held over 10 weeks offer a unique and interactive experience, placing equal emphasis on (M)ind, (E)xercise, (N)utrition, (D)o it, the key learning elements for GO4FUN.

The initiative is run by Border Dietitians' team of accredited practising dietitians and is funded by NSW Health.

Children learn about nutrition in a fun, interactive manner.

Accredited practising dietitian and program manager Kerryn O'Brien said the aim was to keep the program fun, informative and engaging.

"Recently, we took the children across to Coles, Lavington, where we put our label reading skills to use," she said.

"It was really rewarding seeing how enthusiastic the children were about the challenge.

"They are becoming very skilled at label-reading and are aware of how to detect for hidden sugars and fats in foods.

The children also participated in "the GO4FUN fabulous food fest".

"This session was like a Children's Master Chef session," Ms O'Brien said.

"The children prepared and cooked their own healthy recipes such as sweet potato wedges, multigrain pita chips and vegetable fritters with homemade tomato sauce and tzatziki, homemade pizza and raspberry fluff."

As well as gaining nutritional knowledge, the program encourages children to become more active.

Albury-Wodonga's free newspaper