



Breakfast of Champions - The Friendship Club Receives General Mills Grant

When Amanda joined The Friendship Club last summer she knew that she'd be getting help with homework at weekly after school tutoring sessions and that she'd be part of a special group of girls who had taken the club's pledge to say "no" to drugs

and "yes" to staying in school. What she didn't know was that she was going to be challenged to get moving, get active and get healthy courtesy of the General Mills Corporation as part of their Sales Champions for Healthy Kids program.

The Sales Champions for Healthy Kids program was launched in 2007 to encourage sales employees to improve youth nutrition and fitness in their local communities. General Mills employee and local resident Marc Mason and his wife Nanci became involved as volunteers in The Friendship Club in 2006. When Marc heard about the General Mills opportunity he realized that The Friendship Club was a perfect fit for his company. Grants coordinator Mary Collier, who founded the organization in 1995, worked with Marc and executive director Jennifer Singer to complete the grant application. In January The Friendship Club heard from the Mason that they would receive one of only 24 grants awarded in the United States, and the only one in California.

The \$10,000 grant will enable The Friendship Club to offer over 100 area middle and high school girls, many of whom who face challenging circumstances in their lives, regular opportunities to participate in fitness activities during the school year, improve their nutrition during hands-on cooking classes, learn new skills such as tennis, archery and swimming during the summer and prepare for the organization's community fun run in September. Funds from the grant will be used to defray costs of cooking and fitness classes, purchase equipment and appropriate athletic gear for the girls and to support transportation costs.

"This grant helps us address the increasing trend toward lack of exercise and poor nutrition among our nation's youth. Unfortunately, one in five adolescents in our country is overweight," said executive director Jennifer Singer at a recent hands-on cooking lesson at the club. "We are so thankful for this opportunity to help our girls make positive changes in their diet now before bad habits become

ingrained. We're proud to join the First Lady in her quest to get the nation's children healthy; the only difference is we're doing it at the grassroots level."

With a pilot fitness and nutrition program already in place, thanks to support from Catholic Healthcare West and Sierra Health Foundation, The Friendship Club is now able to enlarge and improve on those programs for 2010. The long-term goal of the project is to prevent chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and obesity that are linked to unhealthy lifestyle choices. Short-term goals include helping the girls increase physical activity, decrease sedentary behaviors and choose healthy foods. In addition, by providing girls with community resources to support them in their quest for personal health, the project will increase their self-esteem and help them successfully navigate the turbulent teen years.

At a recent ceremony at the club during which Marc presented a check from General Mills, girls from area high schools donned the Cheerios t-shirts that he and Nanci brought along. When asked if they were ready to make the commitment to good health several of the girls nodded their heads and eagerly bounced up and down. "We're all about breakfast, lunch *and* dinner for champions!" Sierra, a senior, replied.

General Mills has been committed to addressing the societal problem of childhood obesity and has dedicated significant resources to encouraging youth nutrition and fitness since 2002. The Friendship Club has been educating, empowering and engaging girls at-risk in western Nevada County since 1995. Support for their year-round programs comes from community donations and private foundations. For more information about programs, opportunities for volunteering or to hear about upcoming events, the Run for Friendship contact The Friendship Club at 530.265.4311 or check the website at www.friendshipclub.org.