

# Active Kids! Physical Activity/Nutrition Intervention for Underserved Youth

California State University, Fullerton  
Dr. Lenny Wiersma & Dr. Clay Sherman

**PROJECT OVERVIEW:** Active Kids! is a physical activity and nutrition education after-school program at Richman Park in Fullerton. Held twice a week, the program started in October, 2005 as a partnership with St. Jude Medical Center and serves approximately 40 children ages 6-12. The goals of Active Kids include:

- Foster an intrinsic motivation to engage in PA
- Provide developmentally appropriate games and physical activities
- Educate youth on principles of healthy eating habits
- Allow children to build positive relationships with peers
- Build mentor relationships with youth that focus on positive lifestyle choices

**METHODS:** Pre-and post measures of height and weight (BMI), waist circumference, and nutrition education and preferences. Daily physical activity during the program is monitored by Walk-4-Life Duo Pedometers. In addition, levels of PA engaged in structured (planned curriculum) vs. unstructured (free choice) activities while at the park will be assessed.

**RESULTS:** Posttest assessments to be completed in May, 2006. Preliminary findings from 8-week intervention in Fall, 2005 included reduction in waist circumference in 65% of the participants.

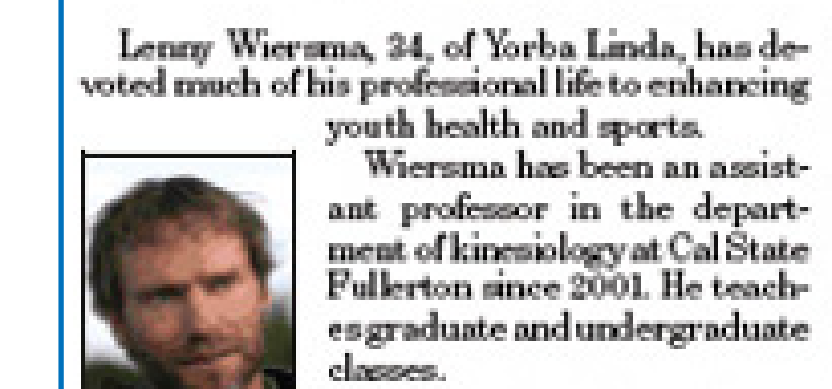


JACK E. HANCOCK/YORBA LINDA STAR  
LENNY WIERSMA, of Yorba Linda, developed an after-school program to teach nutrition and exercising to students at risk of obesity.

## Healthy action

CSUF kinesiology professor Lenny Wiersma applies his knowledge and resources to improve youth sports.

By LOU POWERS  
YORBA LINDA STAR



Lenny Wiersma

Lenny Wiersma, 34, of Yorba Linda, has devoted much of his professional life to enhancing youth health and sports. Wiersma has been an assistant professor in the department of kinesiology at Cal State Fullerton since 2001. He teaches graduate and undergraduate classes. Additionally, Wiersma is co-director of CSUF's Center for the Advancement of Responsible Youth Sports and is a co-investigator for the College of Health and Human Development's Center for the Promotion of Healthy Lifestyles and Obesity Prevention. He earned his doctorate from Springfield College in Mass., where he conducted most of his research on youth athletic and fitness programs. Wiersma's latest project, Active Kids, involves integrating exercise and nutrition programs into the lifestyles of low-income youth at risk of obesity. Children play non-traditional

games in a non-competitive environment. The games are meant to provide exercise, yet be enjoyable enough so that the children don't realize they are actually exercising. Wiersma says he's benefited physically, socially and emotionally from exercise and sports since his early childhood in Hayward, Calif. The professor sat with sports writer Lou Powers last week and talked about some of his projects, and why the enhancement of youth sports is so vital. **Q: Tell us about your latest project, Active Kids?** **A:** It's an after-school program for children to come and learn about nutrition education and have opportunities to play. These are children at risk of obesity, diabetes, and growing up in a neighborhood where a lot of families don't have health insurance. They are out there jumping around, sweating. They are excited

SEE HEALTH • PAGE 33

### It's not exercise, it's fun and games

Assistant professor at Cal State Fullerton, combats obesity with a workout routine in the park for kids.

By LOU POWERS  
YORBA LINDA STAR

Regina Palma of Fullerton said her daughters, Zuleyma, 11, and Yuliana, 7, are running and jumping a lot more lately. And Palma makes sure her daughters are eating healthier as well. "She makes us eat fruits and vegetables each day," Zuleyma said. "The sisters, along with about 35 other children, are part of Active Kids, a program that was designed to promote physical education and proper nutrition to another group with no weight restrictions. All the children wear a pedometer, which measures the distance the youngsters travel during their hour of exercise. When the study was conducted for the first time in September, children were pre and post tested. Sixty-five percent showed a decline in waist circumference. The program was developed by Lenny Wiersma, an assistant professor of kinesiology at Cal State Fullerton. The youngsters, who are mostly Latino from low-income families, gather for an hour after school every Monday and Wednesday at Richman Park in Fullerton, where they play games that keep them running, kicking, throwing and jumping. Wiersma organized a variety of youth sports and nutrition programs. He said the key is making the activities enjoyable for the youngsters. "I consciously don't use the word exercise," Wiersma said. "The idea is to get the kids moving. We might play a game and they are exercising and don't have a clue. All the kids know is they are outside in the park and having fun." Other games demonstrate the value of proper nutrition. For example, to instill in the young-

WHEN: 3 to 4 p.m. Mondays and Wednesdays

BACKGROUND: The program is a collaboration between St. Jude Medical Center and the College of Health and Human Development at Cal State Fullerton.

Wiersma said the youngsters from the west Fullerton neighborhood are at greater risk of obesity because many are first and second generation immigrants who don't have health care insurance or they rarely see a doctor. He added, the types of foods the youngsters eat also puts them at risk. "Obesity is not something that is easy to deal with for a child," said Todd Noffke, 25, an instructor in the program. Elizabeth Chudabadi directs an after-school tutoring program for the North Orange County YMCA and works with many of the children in Wiersma's program. Chudabadi said her children are more focused and have greater energy since participating in Active Kids. "The (Wiersma) has helped the kids lead healthy lifestyles," Chudabadi said. "I know that they promote that."

The program began as the result of referrals to CSUF from St. Jude Medical Center's medical clinic, which had a list of children from the west Fullerton neighborhood who were at risk of obesity.

straight to his children too. When the girls last would arrive outside and. Initially, Wiersma had been planning After: still

NEIGHBORHOOD CHILDREN RUN WITH LENNY WIERSMA, to promote healthy activity and nutrition. MINY CALVERT, 15, AND ABRIEL CALVERT Wiersma when they arrive for their exercise program.

