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Steps to a HealthierPA – Fayette County Continues Partnership with the Highmark Foundation to Prevent Childhood Obesity

KidShape program helps overweight children and their families learn how to become healthier

Uniontown, PA (April 10, 2007) – The Mayo Clinic reports that over the past 30 years, the rate of obesity in the United States has more than doubled for preschoolers and adolescents, and it has more than tripled for children ages six to 11. To address the epidemic of childhood obesity and give help to children struggling to deal with weight issues, Steps to a HealthierPA – Fayette County has partnered with the Highmark Foundation to offer KidShape®, a nationally recognized, family-based weight management program.

The nine-week program, sponsored through the region as part of the Highmark Healthy High 5 initiative, is a program for families with overweight children ages six to 14. They are referred to the Fayette County location based on weight criteria by physicians, school nurses, and other health care providers. The program helps children

and their families through better nutrition, increased physical activity and improved self-esteem. Parents or guardians enroll along with their child in KidShape and are required to attend the sessions.

Developed in California in 1987 by a pediatric endocrinologist, KidShape has shown effectiveness in helping families improve their eating and exercise habits. Eighty-seven percent of students lose weight during the nine-week program and children who return for follow-up sessions report maintaining weight or continuing weight loss 1 1/2 to 2 1/2 years after the program ends.

“We can see what a dramatic impact weight has on health and we wanted to bring a comprehensive program to the area to help children avoid serious health problems down the road because of excess weight,” said Donald Fischer, M.D., Highmark’s chief medical officer. “In addition to low self-esteem, overweight and obese children are also often at greater risk for asthma, heart disease, high blood pressure, arthritis and type 2 diabetes.”

The KidShape curriculum has been offered in Fayette County since January 2006. A registered dietitian, mental health professional, and physical activity specialist have worked as a team to help local families adopt better nutrition habits and engage in more frequent physical activity while providing group and peer support. During the nine-week program children and parents participate in hands-on activities that are educational and fun. Based on attendance and completed “assignments” students have an opportunity to earn prizes.

“We believe through participation in this program, overweight children and their families have received information to make significant lifestyle changes crucial to their long-term health and wellness,” said Barbara Lewis, R.N., site coordinator for the Fayette KidShape program. “The opportunity to follow up with families and monitor progress is a special part of the program. We are grateful to the Steps Program for offering incentives to children who complete regularly scheduled follow-up over 12 months.”

For more information about Steps to a HealthierPA – Fayette County’s KidShape program, call 724-439-1484. For more information about Highmark Healthy High 5, visit www.highmarkhealthyhigh5.org.

About Steps to a HealthierPA – Fayette County

Fayette County in southwestern Pennsylvania is a partner in the Steps to a HealthierPA initiative. This program is part of the national Steps to a HealthierUS effort from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) that advances the goal of helping Americans live longer, better and healthier lives. Steps to a HealthierPA – Fayette County is a collaboration of the Fayette County Community Health Improvement Partnership (CHIP), and the Southwest Pennsylvania Area Health Education Center (AHEC) that works with the Pennsylvania Department of Health. In 2004, the Pennsylvania Department of Health was one of three new states to receive a grant from the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services. Fayette County was selected by the PA Department of Health to participate in the Steps to a HealthierPA program based on demographic and chronic disease burden. Steps to a HealthierPA – Fayette County is targeting local health issues and promoting health programs and education efforts within our schools, communities, workplaces, and with health care providers.

About Highmark Healthy High 5

Highmark Healthy High 5 is a five-year, \$100 million community initiative of the Highmark Foundation aimed to reverse the current trends in children’s health and to promote lifelong healthy habits in children throughout its 49-county service area. Highmark Healthy High 5 will address five critical children’s health issues including nutrition, physical activity, self-esteem, grieving and bullying – through education, communications, volunteerism, grants and programming.

About the Highmark Foundation

The Highmark Foundation is an affiliate of Highmark Inc. and was created to support initiatives and programs aimed to improve community health. The Foundation is a charitable organization and a private foundation. The Foundation seeks to improve the health, well-being and quality of life for individuals who reside in the 49 Pennsylvania counties served by Highmark.



**Made possible through funding provided by
Highmark healthy high 5**

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Photo Captions

Steps to a HealthierPA – Fayette KidShape® Program

Steps to a HealthierPA – Fayette County provides incentives to children who regularly complete follow-up appointments for 12 months. The Fayette County KidShape® program recently announced the winner of the 12-month follow-up for the second class of participants. Pictured in the photo is Morgan Lutz receiving a \$100 gift certificate from Barbara Lewis, KidShape site coordinator. Standing behind them on the left is Janet Lutz, parent participant, and on the right is Kelly Minster, KidShape mental health professional.

In February 2007, Fayette KidShape program received visitors from the National KidShape Foundation in California and Highmark. Pictured during the visit (left to right) are: Larry Stone (KidShape Foundation), Kelly Minster (KidShape mental health professional), Robert Renzi (KidShape physical activity specialist), Atiya Abdelmalik (Highmark clinical preventionist), Barbara Lewis (KidShape site coordinator), Heidi McClain (KidShape registered dietitian), Carole Perry (Steps to a HealthierPA – Fayette County) and Christiane Rivard (KidShape Foundation).