



For Immediate Release

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YMCA of Metro Atlanta Receives Innovation Award at 2nd Annual Healthy Georgia Awards

ATLANTA (October 9, 2017) – The YMCA of Metro Atlanta received the Innovation Award for nonprofits at the 2nd Annual Healthy Georgia Awards presented by Lt. Governor Casey Cagle’s Healthy Kids Georgia, Georgia SHAPE and the Georgia Department of Public Health at the College Football Hall of Fame. The Y was recognized for its programs Start For Life and Youth Fit 4 Life and the impact they have had addressing youth wellness and combatting childhood obesity in our community. Kristin McEwen, who leads the Y’s work to Empower Healthy Living, was on hand to accept the award.

“We are incredibly honored to be recognized by the Lt. Governor and the Georgia Department of Public Health for the work we are doing to address youth wellness,” said Kristin McEwen, senior vice president of operations at the YMCA of Metro Atlanta. “Start For Life and Youth Fit 4 Life are two important Y programs that help to combat childhood obesity and ensure our youth learn healthy behaviors that they can carry with them for a lifetime.”

The Innovation Award is given to organizations that are considered revolutionary and groundbreakers, who achieve impact through creative thought and outside-the-box action. Championing for health and wellness within their own communities, they aim to transform traditional methods, perspectives and approaches while celebrating diversity.

Start For Life and Youth Fit 4 Life are two programs that have been part of extensive studies led by James Annesi, Ph.D., vice president of Research and Evaluation for the YMCA of Metro Atlanta. Over the past 16 years, these studies have resulted in the creation of several YMCA research-to-practice wellness programs that demonstrate proven results: THE COACH APPROACH, Start For Life, Youth Fit 4 Life and Weight Loss For Life. These Research-Tested Intervention Programs are listed with the NCI - National Institutes of Health five times - making the YMCA of Metro Atlanta, the only organization with this many program listings. Listings can be found by visiting <https://rtips.cancer.gov/rtips>

A strong research program supports the development and validation of each program's protocol. Methods are designed to make their implementation practical, economical and reliable in community settings such as the YMCA. These initiatives focus on health behavior change theory and methods applied to exercise adherence, weight management and the effects of physical activity on mental health, self-image and other quality of life factors.

Each of the curricula were built around the same basic paradigm where individuals learn to set goals, track incremental progress, and create a logical plan of action. Instruction and practice in specific self-management skills (e.g. restructuring unproductive self-talk), along with social support, reinforce progress and complete this effective behavior-change model. It is based on empowering individuals to cope with life's barriers (both perceived and actual) to being physically active and eating in a healthy manner.

The Healthy Georgia Awards recognized nine organizations across Georgia, including non-profits, communities and school districts, for their extraordinary results in promoting and fostering health and wellness among Georgia's youth. Three awards were given in three categories for each sector - Innovation, All-Star and Legacy.

In addition to the Y receiving an award, Gavin McGuire, executive director of the Andrew & Walter Young Family YMCA was part of a panel of community representatives discussing the importance of "Building Wellness Ecosystems in Georgia Communities."

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About the YMCA of Metro Atlanta

The Y is a powerful association of men, women and children joined together by a shared commitment to nurturing the potential of kids, promoting healthy living and fostering a sense of social responsibility. Every day, we work side-by-side with our neighbors to make sure everyone, regardless of age, income or background, has the opportunity to learn grow and connect. Visit ymcaatlanta.org or call 404-588-YMCA (9622).