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Farmington Training Center

Improvisation brings home Weight Watcher message

By Loraine McClish
staff writer

Betty McKenzie describes her job in Farmington Training Center as "getting them fired up to go home and not eating."

She takes on that job every Friday in two back-to-back classes of Weight Watchers brought into the center by teacher Sankosh Kapil.

One class is an elective students can choose for leisure-time education. The other is part of the curriculum and includes more academic studies in nutrition.

"But both dovetail into the feeling-good-about-yourself self-concept that is so important in all of our teachings here," Kapil said.

"When social life is lacking, people eat. That's a common problem with these students. Then some of them have physical problems that in themselves encourage the eating binges."

"Now they are learning to set goals to make themselves look better and

feel better. Weighing-in time is the feedback they need to help them walk toward that goal."

Kapil, who was on a weight-loss regimen herself, sought help from Weight Watchers because she believed, and now says she's proved, that the Weight Watcher concept would be the most easily improvised, as well as most beneficial for her mentally impaired students.

THE IMPROVISATION comes from Weight Watcher lecturer McKenzie, who has brought the full program down to its simplest level.

Games are played with cutout pictures pasted on paper plates.

She may bring three apples of different size to a class to convey the meaning of a medium-sized apple, for instance.

During her "lecture," she will talk about vitamins contained in a given food. Or she may talk about the roller skating party some of the students attended during the past week to bring in a lesson on exercise.

"I have gotten a few of them to start running as their substitute for eating, because eating is their substitute for something to do," she said. "I have a whole string of suggestions for what to do to prevent the eating binges."

Her students all wear Weight Watcher buttons while going through the cafeteria line for meals prepared by the center's cooks in cooperation with the program.

And the staff cooperates by teaching, on occasion, how to make a Weight Watcher "legal" snack in a cooking class. And teachers weigh-in with the Weight Watcher students.

"COOPERATION of the parents is paramount to reinforce the program at home," Kapil said.

"They got their Weight Watcher lessons last fall and know how important their cooperation is. But it is the students who are making good things happen for them and they know it."

"A good part of this teaching is for them to know they are in control and it is they who either put or don't put the wrong kinds of food in their mouths."

As enthused as Kapil was about getting the Weight Watcher program started for her students this school year, she still had to get past the hurdle of the money problem, since Weight Watchers is a commercial venture.

"We could not ask the parents for the going rate, and the school simply doesn't have that much money in its activities fund," she said.

"But we found Weight Watchers to be very sympathetic to the handicapped and we found a friend in our lecturer who is being paid pennies for this."

McKenzie is a Farmington Hills resident, a retired parochial school teacher and an avid promoter of Weight Watchers who said she had no trouble "finding a few gimmicks to stimulate the physically inactive within the program."

She's still improvising gimmicks for her Farmington Training Center students in between teaching a couple of classes for Concordia College in Ann Arbor and holding down a full-time musician's job for Trinity Lutheran Church in Saline.



Teacher and students exercise together as Betty McKenzie carries on with a running commentary about proper diet and exercise.



Betty McKenzie takes materials supplied by Weight Watchers 'Personal Program' and converts them into an easy lesson on the four basic food groups.



The weighing-in ritual leads off each Weight Watchers class. Lynn Bulman (above) gets the good news from teacher Betty McKenzie, and (right) students and staff applaud after the announcement of the weight loss.



Mary Roller takes part in a discussion of how it feels to be on a diet. Students set their own goals in the weight loss program

and steadily gain confidence as they see the results.

Staff photos by Randy Borst

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