



For Immediate Release
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NEW HEALTH PROGRAM ENCOURAGES KIDS TO TAKE CHARGE OF THEIR HEALTH

Kansas City, MO . Getting kids to step away from their computers and cell phones, eat nutritious foods and be enthusiastic about their own health issues can be difficult. With support from MetLife Foundation, Camp Fire USA, a national youth development organization, has created *Hold On to Health*, a new program that not only encourages kids to live healthier lifestyles, but also shows them how to have fun while doing it- at little to no cost.

Today millions of youth and families in communities throughout the United States are facing serious health issues as a result of inactive lifestyles, poor nutrition, and other unhealthy choices. Children who have weight and other health challenges often have low self-esteem, which can lead to serious social and psychological problems. This, in turn, can result in poor academic and work performance.

Young people are now developing health conditions and diseases typically associated with many older adults. A shocking study released in April 2009 showed that one out of every five four-year-olds is already obese. Of even greater concern is evidence showing that if the obesity epidemic continues, this will be the first generation of children to have shorter life expectancies than their parents.

The *Hold On to Health* program employs goal-setting and decision-making exercises to teach young people and their families about the importance of eating healthy, being physically active, and making healthy choices. It is age-appropriate, with specific activities designed for youth at each level, from kindergarten through ninth grade.

"*Hold On to Health* can be an integral component to helping youth become strong, successful adults," said Becky Davis, executive director of Camp Fire USA Baltimore Council, which piloted the program. "In our urban community of Baltimore, we see so many families struggle with the impact of unhealthy choices and thought it was important for our council to join the fight against childhood obesity. *Hold On to Health*, which we tested on a pilot basis, has been not only critical for the community we serve but has integrated fun and tasty ways to connect to our youth."

Even with the support of *Hold On to Health*, most children cannot do it alone, which is why the program contains an extensive family component for parents and guardians. Youth who participate in the sessions are encouraged to take home information and materials to share with their families so that everyone can be involved. Parents, guardians, and siblings can be invited to sessions and family events at which they can prepare healthy and low-cost meals and

snacks, participate in fun and active games, and create support networks for attaining physically active lifestyles and eating balanced diets.

In cities where pilot programs have been introduced, parents have consistently reported seeing positive changes in their children's behaviors and attitudes toward health. Janeal Nielsen, a leader at Camp Fire USA Southwest Louisiana Council, another pilot participant, recounted, "I taught the group Elbow Tag and watched as the group of parents and youth ran around, giggling and laughing together. A parent mentioned that she never ran around and played games with her daughters and was thankful for this opportunity."

Local councils have partnered with other community-based organizations to find funding and space to reach out to larger audiences. According to Vu Le, Executive Director of the Vietnamese Friendship Association, which has sponsored the program at Camp Fire USA Central Puget Sound Council in Seattle, "Parents have a better understanding of how important good rest and food are for students to excel academically, and students are starting to grasp that exercise is necessary--and sometimes, even cool!"

To learn more about *Hold On to Health*, or locate a nearby Camp Fire USA council, visit www.campfireusa.org.

Camp Fire USA

For nearly a century, Camp Fire USA has changed young people's lives. We offer girls and boys, from birth to 21 years of age, opportunities to learn and play together in comfortable settings. Through their interaction and involvement with Camp Fire, they build confidence and independence and develop an awareness of who they are and who they can become. They learn to protect nature by discovery, curiosity, compassion, and concern for the environment. As Camp Fire continues to strengthen youth and families, the benefits can be seen in local communities. Camp Fire USA, with national headquarters in Kansas City, Missouri, provides all-inclusive, coeducational programs, providing nearly 22 million program hours each year, in hundreds of communities across the United States. For more information, visit www.campfireusa.org.

MetLife Foundation

MetLife Foundation was established by MetLife in 1976 to carry on its longstanding tradition of corporate contributions and community involvement grants support health, education, civic and cultural programs. For more information about the Foundation, visit www.metlife.org.

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