

**We Can!**® media coverage includes over 1.3 billion impressions in national and local print, television, radio, and online media.

## **!Podemos!™: A Journal Article Publicizes We Can! Success with San Diego's Latinas**

The University of San Diego—a **We Can!** general community site since March 2008—made headlines for **We Can!** with the publication of its study “Ways to Enhance Children’s Activity and Nutrition—A Pilot Project With Latina Mothers” in the *Journal for Specialists in Pediatric Nursing* (JSPN, October 2010).

As lead study author and nursing professor Kathy James, DNSc, APRN, reports, however, the good news goes beyond the study’s publication. Follow-up with study participants has revealed that they’re still benefiting from learning how to get the whole family to eat right, move more, and spend less time in front of the screen.

“I think seven of eight lost weight, with one woman losing about 10 pounds. Their reported changes include cooking with less fat, eating more fruits and vegetables, eliminating sodas, and increased activity by walking. Their children are walking with them as well, some four to five times a week!” said James. “We are so proud of them!”

The purposes of the mixed-method pilot study were two-fold:

- To discover whether Latina mothers would be receptive to and participate in the **We Can!** program
- To examine whether there would be changes in their opinions, perceptions, and health-behavior intentions (such as increasing physical activity; buying less high-fat, high-calorie food; limiting sweetened beverages; and TV viewing)

James says that the group of 18 mothers who were recruited at an urban elementary school in a diverse neighborhood met weekly at that school for six weeks in 2010. The school nurse also attended the meetings, so that she could continue running **We Can!** after the study concluded. James and her team even recruited one of the young mothers to become the nurse’s co-leader on future programs.

James says that it became clear that participants weren’t sure which foods were best to serve, and hadn’t thought about serving as a role model for healthy behaviors. However, choosing weekly goals for both nutrition and physical activity, and then talking about it in small groups the following week, helped because participants were eager to learn from one another.

“They would drop their preschoolers off next door and then attend our meeting held in a classroom,” said James. “We also sent the mothers to the local clinic and paid for laboratory screening for diabetes and cardiovascular risk factors. As a result, we found several moms who are pre-diabetic, and a few children with elevated cholesterol, triglycerides, and fasting insulin levels.”

James reports that the next step is to conduct another, longer study to see whether participants continue to maintain changes, and if this healthy behavior and its benefits are passed down to their children.

You can read about the study in the October 2010 JSPN, volume 15, #4, and view the PubMed citation at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20880277>.



*Kathy James, DNSc, APRN*

## Media Highlights

### The Windy City's Top Newspaper Covers a *We Can!* Program... and Triggers Interest Across the Country

Nearly five years ago, Orlandus Thomas, a physical education (PE) teacher at the Gary Comer College Prep charter school in south Chicago, was asking his fitness-expert friend Tony Czapla for ideas on how to motivate his 500 students.

Cue the *We Can!* program. “He’s the one who introduced me to *We Can!*,” said the man students call “Coach Thomas.” “Since then, we’ve been partners in advocating for the *We Can!* cause, so I would like to give him credit for introducing me to *We Can!* and sparking the fire in me!”

From there, Coach Thomas began weaving parts of *We Can!* into his own fitness-focused PE curriculum, and also into events to promote a healthy weight in the predominantly African American community of Chicago’s south side.

In 2010, some of those workshops and activities included:

- **Hip Hop Aerobics Classes:** These classes were very popular with high school students.
- **Chef-guided Nutrition/Cooking Classes:** Coach Thomas worked with a chef to offer a combined Thursday/Friday evening class. Students learned about a specific food and its nutritional value on Thursday, and then prepared it on Friday.
- **Women’s Health and Fitness Seminars:** The chef from the nutrition classes, a physician, and Thomas partnered to teach women about both nutrition and physical activity.
- **Wednesday parent sessions on healthy eating patterns in the African American community:** There were two different sessions: one focused on vegetables and their nutritional properties, while the other looked at the nutritional properties, including calories and fat, in fast food.

“I try to push the envelope by combining programs—nutrition and physical activity,” said Coach Thomas. “I want to show the community what a healthy lifestyle looks like. It’s been a whirlwind of a year but I’ve only scratched the surface on what I want to do.”

That burst of activity caught the attention of the *Chicago Tribune*, the city’s largest newspaper. Reporter Pete Reinwald covered the Coach’s efforts in a piece, *Pumped-up P.E. at Comer Prep*, this past September. You can check out the article by copying and pasting the following URL: [http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2010-09-29/news/ct-x-c-gary-comer-childhood-obesity-20100929\\_1\\_physical-fitness-physical-education-exercise-stations](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2010-09-29/news/ct-x-c-gary-comer-childhood-obesity-20100929_1_physical-fitness-physical-education-exercise-stations).

And the story didn’t just reach the *Tribune*’s more than 452,000 subscribers—it was also posted to the paper’s Web site for millions of others to read. One of those readers, Sara Harmon, a health and physical education at Ragsdale High School in Jamestown, NC, contacted Thomas about his *We Can!*-based programming, and is now arranging for him to travel there to teach a professional development course for teachers from 16 North Carolina schools.

To top it all off, Coach Thomas is still receiving coverage in the Illinois media: a local television report featured him and his students, and there was a similar story in a Waukegan Park District local paper. As a result, he has received invitations to speak about his programming at other organizations, including the Illinois Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation & Dance 2010 Convention.

“This is my passion and this is personal: I have parents who were overweight and diabetes runs in my family,” said Thomas. “No one ever taught me about the importance of healthy eating and physical activity; that’s why I decided to focus my career on it, and to help teach others.”

