

Our opinion: Bond Cooking Club plans a healthy menu

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(Photo: Democrat files)

You are what you eat, someone once said. If that truism holds, the future bodes well for some of our area's youths, specifically those who will enroll in Bond Community Health Center's Cooking Club, which is scheduled to begin this spring.

The Cooking Club comes courtesy of a Christmas gift wrapped in good intentions and the spirit of raising healthier children. Florida State University College of Medicine and the Children's Miracle Network provided Bond with \$75,000 to establish the Cooking Club. The money was garnered from the Florida State Dance Marathon.

The grant will pay to renovate Bond's Specialty and Community Wellness Center at 1549 S. Monroe St. The renovations include creating space for several classes of 12 children and installing three cooking stations, where groups of four children will get help learning to prepare the kinds of meals that form the basis of a healthy diet. Bond's nutritionist, Janice Rankins, will facilitate the classes, which can be a boon for underserved children in the area.

Bond's CEO Dr. Temple Robinson hopes to start improvements next month and to have the first cohort of students in the classroom and kitchen by April. She also envisions summer camps and after school sessions.

This Bond initiative is ambitious and laudable. The goal is to introduce new tastes to children's palates so they can learn to appreciate the flavor of healthy foods and snacks. Healthy and delicious snacks can coexist on the same plate.

"Eating healthy snacks is not like taking medicine," Robinson says.

The cooking classes are about changing attitudes — attitudes about eating and cooking, attitudes about living. Some children spend too much time indoors playing video games and snacking on high calorie snacks and sugar-loaded beverages. Others go to bed too late. The hope is that children will take home lessons they learn about healthy cooking and eating and influence their parents.

At the same time, Bond officials acknowledge the limits of a 12-week cooking class. They also plan to address long term psychological issues surrounding food and obesity. How does a child deal with the depression that comes from being bullied because he's obese? As part of this initiative, Robinson said the agency is looking for a licensed clinical social worker to support the children and families who are morbidly obese.

Robinson also envisions a mini reality show involving youngsters teaching their siblings and parents how to prepare healthy meals. The activities will be shared with patients seated in the waiting rooms of Bond satellite sites around Leon County.

In announcing the grant, Robinson called the initiative a "novel idea" that will put Bond and Tallahassee "in the forefront of the battle against obesity."

Robinson's language is justifiably militaristic. This is a life and death struggle. Obesity has shortened the life expectancy of too many relatives, neighbors and friends.

Experts say children and adolescents who are obese are more likely to become obese as adults and are at risk for adult health problems such as heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, stroke, several types of cancer and osteoarthritis. In Florida, almost one-third of all children are considered either overweight or obese. Those numbers should be a call to action.

There are other numbers that should concern us. The grant is a one-time funding opportunity, so Robinson and her staff plan to look for other financial resources to continue this program. This battle of the bulge is much closer to home. It demands and deserves our attention and support.

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