

Camp Has Youths Fit to Be Triathletes

Program Stresses Healthy Choices

By Moira E. McLaughlin
Washington Post Staff Writer
Thursday, July 31, 2008; DZ01



On a recent hot morning, dozens of D.C. kids were not lounging in front of a television, playing [Wii](#) or surfing the Internet. They were running, and doing so happily.

"We're teaching them lifetime fitness," said Molly Quinn, a triathlete and executive director of Achieve!, a Washington-based nonprofit group that runs a triathlon camp for inner-city kids in the District.



For six weeks, the youths are meeting for 3 1/2 hours Mondays through Fridays to run, swim, bike and learn about a living a healthy life. The camp is certified by USA Triathlon as an official training program. At the end of the six weeks, the athletes (no campers here) participate in a USA Triathlon-sanctioned triathlon.

The youths, ages 8 to 14, train by swimming three days, biking two days and running two days each week. They also keep journals about maintaining a healthy mind, body and spirit through exercise and proper diet and rest. At the end of each day, they answer questions about how they feel, what they ate and what they accomplished.

Chuck Brodsky, 42, started the camp last year, the only one of its kind, with about 20 kids. This year, the expanded program uses two facilities in Northeast, Kenilworth-Parkside Recreation Center and Turkey Thicket Recreational Center, where the camp was last year. About 40 kids from the District participate. Brodsky, head of Washington Sports and Event Management, started a similar camp in Houston this year.

"It's natural for me to do something in my community," said Brodsky, a triathlete who started the Nation's Triathlon in Washington three years ago and has lived in the city for 18 years. "You see it every day: overweight kids, diabetes, people not leading healthy lifestyles," he said.

The camp aims to help change that. "We're teaching them that they can make choices that are better than on the couch with a Twinkie," Brodsky said.

Still, the kids didn't seem to have healthy life choices on their minds this summer day. To them, the camp is about fun, friendly competition and achievement.

"Whoo!" Aliza Bolling, 9, of Southeast exclaimed after she swam the length of the pool recently as her fellow triathletes cheered her on. An hour earlier, she had sprinted against another athlete on the track, her pastel hair beads clicking. Aliza said the camp is "great."



"We're learning to be good triathlon people," she said.

Trayvon Wood, 9, of Northeast appeared just as focused. Trayvon was realizing his running speed. He said that Chris Hohn, a coach at the camp, told him, "Don't look at the person you're racing, because that'll slow you down."

The paid coaches at the camp are also athletes. Hohn was a collegiate swimmer. Meghan Ederle, another coach, is a 10-time triathlete. The kids see that their coaches are "just everyday people," Ederle said. "We're not coming in trying to get them to do a sport they'll never do again." What they do at camp are things they can do on their own, she said.



The coaches also stress teamwork through relays and team-building exercises. "You learn to depend on your teammate, and that you can also let your teammate down," Hohn said.

The camp is free and open to kids who participate in D.C. Department of Parks and Recreation summer programs.

Glacéau Smartwater, a bottled water company, sponsored this year's camp. Last year, Brodsky bought 60 bikes for the athletes. The camp also provides any other equipment the kids might need, such as swim goggles and helmets.

The second annual D.C. Kids Triathlon is tomorrow at Kenilworth-Parkside Recreation Center. It is open to the public. The event -- which will include timers, transition areas and water stations, just like official triathlons -- consists of a 100-meter swim, a 5K bike course and a 3K run. All participants receive a racing

jersey. Last year, [Mayor Adrian M. Fenty \(D\)](#) was the race starter.

Brodsky said he hopes to expand the program in the District and the nation.

In the meantime, this year's group of young triathletes will continue training in the summer sun, looking forward to race day.