

Childhood obesity collaborative initiative to benefit from campaign, receive \$70,000 annually for 3 years

United Way campaign raises record \$12.75 million; childhood obesity initiative to benefit

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1 / 7



[BACK](#)

[NEXT](#)

About CATCH ...

Purpose: The Coordinated Approach to Child Health has been used for more than 25 years to prevent childhood obesity and encourage healthier lifestyles in more than 10,000 schools and communities.

Spreading locally: The program is expected to be incorporated into 71 after-school and summer program sites, including Akron Metropolitan Housing developments, the Shaw Jewish Community Center, YMCA branches and Akron after-school programs. Its anticipated reach is 5,500 children over the next year.

Website: www.catchinfo.org

Moses Smith is passionate about helping children get to and stay on the right path.

"I just enjoy helping children better themselves," said Smith, corporate wellness coordinator for the Akron Area YMCA. "By instructing them, using the CATCH curriculum, we are trying to create long-term healthy habits by teaching them to make healthy food choices and lead healthy physical lifestyles."

The Summit County CATCH Collaborative, or SC3, is a new initiative designed to address childhood obesity by helping children develop and sustain healthy dietary and physical activity patterns. It is one of several programs that will be funded by United Way of Summit County over the next three years.

On Tuesday, United Way announced that its 2014 fundraising campaign netted \$12.75 million. The total, which fell \$50,000 short of the 2014 goal, represents the fifth consecutive year that the charity has set a fundraising record. Donations this year exceeded the 2013 record by \$550,000.

“Our record-breaking campaign results signal continued strong support for United Way’s investments in critical and strategic initiatives that are essential to advance the common good in Summit County,” said Ted Walter, United Way campaign chairman and Fifth Third Bank’s city president for Akron, Canton and Youngstown.

United Way distributes its funding in three areas — education, income and health. Over the next three years, its awards will focus on the health impact area. CATCH (Coordinated Approach to Child Health) will receive \$70,000 annually for three years, plus \$7,500 in the first year to fund an AmeriCorps VISTA position. The VISTA member will serve as the coordinator for SC3’s CATCH initiative.

CATCH is a national model that has been used for more than 25 years to prevent childhood obesity and encourage healthier lifestyles in more than 10,000 schools and communities. It touts itself as the largest evidence-based obesity prevention program in the nation.

The Akron Area YMCA serves as the fiscal sponsor for the local collaboration. The partnership includes Akron Children’s Hospital, Akron Public Schools’ Akron After School Program, Buckeye Health Plan, Kent State University, **Mature Services RSVP**, the Shaw Jewish Community Center, Summit County Public Health, the United Way of Summit County and the University of Akron.

Helena Peters, director of cause advancement at the YMCA, said the cooperative grew out of a meeting where representatives from the various agencies discussed childhood obesity in Summit County. Based on information from Akron Children’s Hospital that 54 percent of all 6- to 12-year-old children in Summit County are overweight or obese, the group decided to take action. Comparatively, the state rate of that same age group is about 42 percent and the national rate is about 36 percent.

“All of us recognize that this is something we need to work on and do whatever we can to turn this around. Together, we can have a greater collective impact,” Peters said. “The ultimate goal is to become a volunteer-led, staff-supported initiative. We are open to others joining the collaborative.”

A free training session to teach volunteers to serve as facilitators of SC3 CATCH will be offered from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., April 18 at the Firestone Park YMCA, 350 E. Wilbeth Road, Akron. To register, call 330-376-1335 or email helenap@akronymca.org.

“CATCH activities are designed to engage children. They are easy to implement, but they can have a major impact in the lives of the children you work with,” Smith said. “You’re basically having fun, so the kids are excited. The bonus is they’re learning two valuable principles — make appropriate dietary choices and make healthy physical lifestyle choices.”