

# Family fun nights offer free exercise, fun for everyone

**Moving Grays Harbor**  
**By MaryAnn Welch**

“It costs too much money.”  
“I don’t have the equipment.”  
“I don’t have anyone to watch my kids.”

These are some of the potential barriers people have to pursuing physical activity.

As the HealthNOW! group from our community looked into ways to encourage community members to become more active, we wanted to promote activity that was as inexpensive and accessible as possible.

Now, to find someplace that was accessible and available for public use.

Aha! Neighborhood elementary schools fit the bill!

Central Park Elementary in the Aberdeen School District has been the first to try a weekly “Family Fun Night;” and it’s been a huge success.

The gym is open for one hour one night of the week. (At Central Park, the day of the week it’s scheduled on varies.) Different people – including students—take turns planning the activities with everybody encouraged to participate.

So far it’s ranged from jazzercise and kickball, to tag, basketball, beachball-volleyball and crazy relay races.

The school works great. It has a gym, a closet full of equipment, and a regular newsletter that reminds folks of the Family Fun Nights. Also, it’s relatively close to home for everyone who attends.

Attendance varies, but has been as high as about 40 people. In the dark, cold winter months, especially, kids (and

their parents!) seemed to relish a way stay dry, be active and socialize with their school community.

“What a great idea this has been,” says Tricia Dietrich, a mother who attends regularly with her two children.

“The kids love it and everybody just seems to be having a good time and I think it’s important for the kids to have something like that.”

Marcy Peterson, another Central Park mom agrees.

“It’s funny because I work until 5:30 and sometimes it’s hard to get there, but once we’re there it’s great fun.

“Everyone is included. It’s not like you have to be a skilled athlete or anything to say, play kickball.”

Central Park’s principal, Olivia McCarthy also sings the program’s praises.

“Family Fun Night is awesome, it’s wonderful!” she said.

“The thing that is so nice is having families coming out and participating together and having fun,” she said.

McCarthy said some of the families that have attended she would have guessed would have been drawn to such a program and others have been surprises.

“It’s so gratifying for me to see people leaving after an hour with rosy cheeks and huffing and puffing. They just look like they are going to go home, gear down and have a good night’s sleep!”

This idea was presented to many elementary schools, but really took off at Central Park because one of our own health educators, Wilma Weber, is a parent at that school.

It just takes one proactive volunteer to take on the roll of organizing the program. Wilma is the perfect fit because she really believes in the value of activity.

Wilma says it’ has been an easy program to start. “The school already has the equipment and the space, you just need a few ideas. I met with our PE

teacher to go over equipment and also got some ideas on activities.

“Turns out, I really don’t have to plan much as the kids kind of take over that aspect. Now I just make sure the games are moving smoothly and modify rules as needed to make sure that all age levels can participate.”

In fact, a family from A.J. West recently attended a Fun Night in Central Park and is excited to get one started at their school.

For more information on how you can help encourage a Family Fun Night at your local elementary school, call Wilma Weber at 532-8631, ext. 483.

*contact the health department at 532-8665 ext. 483, e-mail us at [moving@co.grays-harbor.wa.us](mailto:moving@co.grays-harbor.wa.us) or visit our web site at [www.ghphss.org](http://www.ghphss.org).*

### **This week’s challenge**

Plan physical activities can you do with your kids as summer approaches. Would you like your school to consider a Family Fun Night program next fall? Give a call to Wilma or to your neighborhood school to see what you can organize.

### **Mark Your Calendar**

- **Preacher’s Slough Interpretive Trail:** off highway 107, this well-maintained nature trail offers 3.5 miles of walkway. Maps at trailhead give distance and trail guides. Look for trail sign off the Montesano/ Raymond cutoff road. Signs along the trail tell of local history and environmental facts. It’s a fun way for kids to learn and get activity!
- **Damon Point State Park:** In Ocean Shores, follow Point Brown Avenue south for 4.5 miles. Turn left just past the marina to park entrance. This area offers 1 mile of walkable beach.

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*If you have questions about becoming more active or have information about free or low-cost activity in the area,*