

## Louvenia Anderson \* Youth Fitness Trainer

Louvenia Anderson's heart sank when her 165-pound, 12-year-old cousin asked her, "What happens to obese children when they have too much fat around their heart?" Recognizing a great need, Anderson sprang into action. "I went back to school to become a personal trainer for children," she says. "I am now a certified personal trainer as well as an aquatic aerobics instructor."

But this Allegheny East Conference member didn't stop there; last May she opened *Totally You: Weight Management for Youth*—a ministry targeting overweight/obese children ages 5-15. Based at the Miracle Temple Worship Center and Ministry Complex in Baltimore, Md. (where she is a member), the program is designed to show children, and their families, how to make healthy decisions.

"This is an excellent opportunity to address a vital community need that often goes unnoticed," says Miracle Temple Pastor Fredrick Russell. There are eight children enrolled in the current program, with the majority coming from the community.

Anderson describes *Totally You* as a seven-week mentoring and counseling program that focuses on participants' social, educational, psychological, spiritual, and physical well-being. Classes meet three times a week and cover weight management, nutrition, etiquette, hip hop aerobics, and karate. "These classes build stamina, discipline, self-esteem, and confidence," says Anderson. There's also a weight room at the church, grocery and health food store tours, and more.

Anderson knows that obese children go through bouts of depression, emotional pain, loneliness, low-self esteem, feelings of isolation, or just being ignored because of their weight problem. "We have social workers on staff to do either group or individual assessments to combat those issues," she continues.

Another way Anderson works to encourage the participants is by focusing on girth measurement, rather than weight. "We only measure inches," explains Anderson. "By showing a child how much they've lost in inches, it makes them excited and they can see a physical change. This gives the child something to be proud of and a sense of accomplishment." Once the seven weeks are over, participants return to the center for weekly exercises and to meet with their social worker.

Obesity can be attributed to genetics, environment, or lack of exercise. Experts say that 10.4 percent of children ages 2-5 are overweight, as are 15.3 percent of children ages 6-11, and 15.5 percent of children ages 12-19. This increase in obesity has skyrocketed over the last 20 years. Statistics also show that being obese as a youth can lead to adult obesity and increase health problems such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, arthritis, cancer, hypertension, and respiratory disorders.

Baltimore community leaders have acknowledged the outreach efforts of *Totally You*, and recently presented Anderson with the 2005 Martin Luther King Jr., Community Service Award. For more information on *Totally You*, visit [www.Totallyyou.com](http://www.Totallyyou.com) or call (410) 254-1555.—George Johnson

