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# Program helps children follow running regime

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Ten-year-old Edgar Ramirez runs in his spare time.

The fifth-grader at Gateway Elementary School in Phoenix tries to squeeze in at least five minutes of running a day. He prefers the park, but he's not picky. He'll run at school, too.

"Sometimes I do, sometimes I don't. Sometimes there's no time," he said.

Last year, he ran in the P.F. Chang's Rock 'n' Roll Arizona Marathon. In September, he ran 17.8 miles.

Thanks to all that running, he has earned a pair of new Nike running shoes through the Kids Rock Stars program, sponsored by Phoenix Children's Hospital.

The Phoenix Children's Hospital's Kids Rock Stars programs helps children ages 6 to 12 to follow a walking or running regime by tracking their completed miles on a chart.

Children ages 6 to 12 and their families are encouraged to walk or jog 25.2 miles, one mile short of a marathon, and complete the final mile at the P.F. Chang's Rock 'n' Roll Arizona Marathon in January. Kids and parents also learn about health and nutrition.

"The kids have a club to belong to, which focuses on walking, running, jogging and being together, staying active," said Sally Moffat, Phoenix Children's Hospital community outreach director.

"It's the benefit of health, but it's also the benefit of belonging, of self-esteem, of setting a goal and moving forward. It's good to walk, and it's good to be with people that you enjoy."

The goal, said the program's coordinator, Susan Bookspan, is healthier kids and, when they grow up, healthier adults.

She also hopes the children learn how to make healthy choices when it comes to exercise and nutrition.

Moffat said family involvement is welcome in the program.

"We really push kids to be active with their families, too," she said.

"So on the weekends, if their family goes for a walk, or they play really hard together, they can count the time."

Program officials get good feedback from parents, Moffat said. Some parents tell her, "My kiddo's not athletic, and he's finally gotten to do something with other kids and gets to shine."

As a reward for all those miles, the children got to choose a pair of new shoes on Nov. 15, trying them on with the help of volunteers.

Mischerel Soriano's twin daughters, 9-year-olds Cenail and Moeneya McCall, completed the Kids Rock Stars program last year.

"They would practice after school, running laps and writing it down," Soriano said. "When they saw it this year, they definitely wanted to do it again. They see it as fun right now, not as exercise."

The girls each picked out pink Nikes.

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