

Dear CHIP Team,

I want to take this opportunity to thank all the staff at the McGill Cardiovascular Health Improvement Program (CHIP) for the most incredible and life changing experience in my daughter Jamie's life.

Jamie had struggled with a lack of self-esteem, a negative body image, and unhealthy eating and exercise habits her whole life. As a family, we had spent several years making positive changes to the household in terms of providing healthy foods and opportunities for family physical outings, but Jamie had been reluctant to participate and we were regularly engaging in power struggles over portions.

The most worrisome of all was the way in which she felt about herself. This became frighteningly evident the day we attended her graduation ceremony for elementary school. She was awarded a special certificate for effort, and instead of marching up to the podium to accept her award with pride, she looked like she wished she could melt into the crowd and disappear. She wasn't comfortable in her own skin. Her father and I were truly worried about what the future would hold for her, adolescence is challenging enough, but when one doesn't like or believe in oneself the pressures can be overwhelming. We were desperate to help her discover what an incredible girl she was, and that if she set her mind to something, she could accomplish anything.

At her annual checkup her pediatrician showed us the pamphlet for CHIP for Teens. When we discovered that they had a spot open, we grabbed it. Jamie committed to making the difficult changes in her lifestyle habits, and to keep an open mind to try physical things that she had avoided in the past.

Well, the girl that started the program is not the one who completed it. She incorporated everything that was suggested to her throughout the summer, from vigilantly eating breakfast everyday, to eating the right foods, to the importance of regular physical activity. Her confidence level has soared, and thanks to her regular hard work she has seen the benefits in both her body and in how she sees herself. Now, I have trouble getting her away from the mirror!

I personally know how difficult it is to make healthy lifestyle changes as an adult. Thanks to the CHIP for Teens program, Jamie has been given the gift of establishing the proper eating and exercise habits while she is young enough to incorporate them into daily life.

I thank you all for the excellent tools that you have provided, and encourage any family who have a child who is struggling with these issues to run, not walk to the CHIP office and register for next summer. It takes true commitment on the entire family's part to make the changes necessary to succeed with healthy lifestyle choices. We are all looking and feeling better than we ever have.

Jamie's commitment continues to inspire us all.

Sincerely,

Tracey Greenberg Guben

Dear Marla,

When my paediatrician first told me about how my body had become a huge disaster, she right a way mentioned CHIP (the McGill Cardiovascular Health Improvement Program) to my mom and I. My first impression was okay, whatever, just another thing that I will never even look at! Unfortunately for me, my mother wasn't thinking the same thing.

One day, I came home from school for the usual homework routine. She sat down and started telling me that she had looked at the CHIP for Teens pamphlet and how she had already called the director of the camp, Marla Gold, to find out more information! My mom told me that there was 1 spot left and that if I wanted to go we could cancel any other camp plans I had! My first impression was NO WAY! The thought of going off with a bunch of kids I didn't know and having to go downtown three times a week for seven weeks was not in my plans! I was planning on being with my closest friend for the summer. Why would I want to leave her for this?

After a little bit of discussion (and some tears I may add) I finally decided that it was time to make a change. I hated myself. I wanted to hide in a corner and disappear. At the time, if you asked what I thought of myself I wouldn't even have to think about! It would automatically be: me? What about me? Who cares? I'm me and I wish I wasn't! I new it was time for change. I wanted to start fresh for high school. I wanted to be a new different healthy happy person in high school. Although, I must admit, at the time the only thought for me was I want to be skinny. I didn't understand what I was about to go through!

The first day at camp was awkward. Everyone was sort of by themselves unless you knew someone. Lucky for me I had made a friend on the first get together with our parents. She introduced me to some more people and by the end of the day; I had made at least three friends! One thing I loved about CHIP was that everyone there was on the same page you were on. Even if they didn't show it as much, they all felt the same way! It's probably the reason I started to love playing games and sports (not to mention participating!) It was totally new for me. I realized that I liked playing rugby- basketball and also that I wasn't very good at squash! I didn't care! I was to busy laughing and joking around to feel nervous or embarrassed! I must tell you, it wasn't always fun and games. They checked your lunch every day and marked it. We had nutrition lessons and even psychology sessions. Those helped a lot to build up my self confidence. One thing that was very important about this whole experience was that you and your family really had to be ready for a life time of change! If you're not, you won't get much out of it! In the end I love myself and I would totally recommend this to anyone!!

Jamie Guben (12 years old)