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Boys and Girls Clubs of Southern Maine Promotes Healthy Eating and Receives 'Redy' Recognition Award

Portland, Maine, June 9 – After the final bell of the school day rings, hundreds of youth in Southern Maine can be found participating in organized sports, becoming involved in community service clubs or creating art with their friends, and they are doing this, along with dozens of other activities, under one roof. Where are they, you ask? They are at one of the five Boys and Girls Clubs of Southern Maine (BGCSM). BGCSM understands the significant role that their after school environment can play in developing positive health behaviors in youth. In recent months they decided to take this role one step further and develop a set of nutrition guidelines that apply to food served / offered at the club and what is sold in the vending machines. The strong guidelines were created with the help of *Let's Go!*, a community-based initiative to promote healthy lifestyle choices for children, youth and families in 12 Greater Portland communities, and *Healthy Portland*—a local Healthy Maine Partnership and a program of the City of Portland's Health & Human Service Department, Public Health Division. Nutrition Guidelines are important because they provide a framework for long-lasting, sustainable change. They also help the children gain a greater understanding of healthful eating habits, expose them to a variety of healthful foods that they may otherwise not eat, and improve children's as well as staffs' diets by including nutrient-rich foods.

The idea of these guidelines came on the heels of the success from removing soda from the vending machines at the Portland Club. Lead by Carolyn McGoldrick, Chair of the Program Committee and the program committee members, these guidelines encompass three important evidence-based ideas; nonfood rewards, healthier options at celebrations/events and healthier options in the vending machines in accordance with Power Vending guidelines. *For a complete list of these guidelines, visit www.letsgo.org*

When asked what helped to make these guidelines such a success, Beth Blakeman-Pohl, Director of Program & Marketing for BGCSM, said “that including youth representatives in developing the guidelines from each site is what really made this whole endeavor possible.” Tiffanie Panagakos, Site Director of the Riverton Park & Sagamore Village Clubs, reflected on the process that “It wasn't even that hard to do. We are just no longer offering food as a reward.”

Let's Go! and *Healthy Portland* would like to congratulate the staff and youth of Boys and Girls Clubs of Southern Maine for raising and educating a healthier generation of children! The nutrition guidelines that have been developed provide a framework for long-lasting, sustainable change that will give youth in BGCSM healthier nutrition choices. In special recognition of this work, BGCSM has been awarded the prestigious 'Redy' Recognition Award for demonstrating outstanding commitment, leadership, and innovation to Let's Go!

If you would like to learn more about the partner organizations, please visit the following websites:

Boys and Girls Clubs of Southern Maine: www.bgcmaine.org.

Healthy Portland: www.healthyporland.org

Let's Go!: www.letsgo.org

Let's Go! promotes healthy lifestyle choices for children, youth, and families in 12 Greater Portland communities by focusing on physical activity and healthy eating. The multi-year project is funded by Let's Go Founding Partners Anthem Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation, TD Bank, Hannaford, MaineHealth, Maine Medical Center, Unum, and United Way of Greater Portland. The program also receives significant support from the Harvard Pilgrim Health Care Foundation. Let's Go! works collaboratively with the public health professionals, community based organizations and programs working to increase physical activity and improve nutrition among children and families in the Portland area. Let's Go! was created in direct response to a doubling in the rate of obesity in Maine's children over the past three decades.

Healthy Portland is a community coalition working to promote health in four public health areas: physical activity, nutrition, tobacco and substance abuse. With the help of worksites, schools and the community, we strive to make Portland a healthier place to live, work and play.

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