

ROXBURY, WELLESLEY

A family's unity catches on with fellow youth-club members

Posted by Matt Rocheleau

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(Courtesy: Katie Kaizer)

From left to right, Coca-Cola spokeswoman Harriet Tolve, 15-year-old Malik Rochelle, 8-year-old Keleyia Rochelle, Tinea Rochelle, and Yawkey Boys and Girls Club of Roxbury Executive Director Andrea Swain.

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

On a recent weekend, Tinea Rochelle went on a family trip to the Museum of Fine Arts expecting her 15-year-old son Malik and 8-year-old daughter Keleyia would each meet up with groups of similarly aged youth.

However, the Rochelles were met by a younger crowd, the oldest of which – other than other accompanying parents – was several years younger than Malik.

“He wasn’t too happy about it,” recalled the 43-year-old mother and lifelong Roxbury resident. “Initially, I’m sure he was like ‘What is my mom getting me into?’ ”

Yet, what had seemed like the start of a potentially rocky afternoon ended up proving a greater point Tinea said she is trying to teach her children: “You can’t say you won’t like it, if you don’t try it.”

As one of three families competing in an inaugural tri-city [Boys and Girls Clubs of America](#) contest designed to be a model for a national campaign the organization launched in 2005, the Rochelles have been focusing on spending more time with one another. The trio was already close and hung out together before signing up for the program, Tinea explained, but their involvement is a more conscious effort to try new things as a family.

In addition to helping members of their local Boys and Girls Club become more involved and recruit new families to join, the program has brought the Rochelles closer. All three have ventured beyond their comfort zones, often yielding positive results – including in unexpected ways like at their recent MFA field trip with the club.

Despite being completely outnumbered by adults and kids his little sister’s age, Malik enjoyed his visit to the museum that day, which also included a duck boat ride and screening of the new Harry Potter movie. The Wellesley High School freshman didn’t admit it outright, Tinea said, but several days later Malik told a friend about how much fun he’d had and about the interesting exhibits he’d seen at the museum. Malik’s friend’s mom overheard and mentioned it to Tinea later.

“Once you get out of that little phase of ‘I’m up early on a Saturday,’ you’re good to go,” Tinea said.

“One being 15 and one being 8, they don’t always have much in common” she said of her two children. “I always try to explain to them that these are opportunities to expose yourself to other things. And, the worst case scenario is if you don’t like it, you don’t have to do it again.”

It was the Rochelles first visit to the MFA as a family, and Tinea said she plans to make more trips with Malik and third-grader Keleyia, who also attends school in Wellesley, to take advantage of similar city attractions.

“I lived here all my life and I’ve never gotten to go to some of these places,” she said. “They’re able to live in the city and have a lot of things at their front door that people make special trips to visit the city for, so I want them to get to experience those things.”

Aside from special outings, the family has been setting aside time to play Nintendo Wii and board games together. They’ve also been trying new foods and working out together – which are part of the national youth organization’s [Triple Play program](#) slogan, “a game plan for the mind, body and soul.”

The organization which serves 4.2 million youth through membership and outreach launched Triple Play in collaboration with the Department of Health and Human Services with support from the [Coca-Cola Refreshments Co.](#) to encourage eating healthier, becoming more physically active, and engaging in healthy relationships.

“I enjoy [the program] because it gives us a chance to sit down and enjoy each other’s company,” Tinea said. “It’s more of a way to relax. If I need to talk to them, I will ... but sometimes it’s easier to communicate in that setting,” rather than just direct questioning.

Already active with swimming and basketball respectively, Keleyia and Malik have tried out vegetables they’re not accustomed to, including squash, zucchini, and spinach. Tinea has tried out eggplant and switched to eating celery if she’s hungry in between meals instead of snacking on potato chips or cookies. She now takes six flights of stairs to her accounting office instead of riding the elevator.

The family cooks healthier with advice from Dr. Ian Smith of VH1’s Celebrity Fit Club who is coaching each family in the contest. The Rochelles have continued bike riding together and have gradually moved from drinking whole milk to 1 percent milk.

“I was very resistant to that,” Tinea said. “Fat free and skim: I don’t think we’re quite ready to go there yet.”



(Courtesy: Katie Kaizer)

Keleyia Rochelle, 8, on the club's climbing wall.

And, the Rochelle family’s efforts have been catching on with other members at the [Yawkey Boys and Girls Club in Roxbury](#), which is celebrating its 100th year.

Nearly 100 people gathered Tuesday night for the club’s first-ever Triple Play Family Fitness Challenge, which was part of the national youth organization’s Triple Play program and also a send-off for the Rochelle family, who will attend an event in Los Angeles next week. There the family will learn whether the work they’ve been logging for the contest since October has trumped the efforts of the other two competing families’ – one from Washington D.C. and the other from L.A. The winning family will receive a vacation at a to-be-determined destination.

When the Rochelles agreed to participate, they did not know any prize would be involved in the program, Tinea said. The family was asked to participate in the competition and said yes because of how involved they have been the Yawkey Club.

“It’s more than just bringing your kids here and dropping them off,” said Tinea. “It’s about a family unit, and that’s what I hope everyone takes from tonight. It all goes back to being a family.”

Standing in a hallway outside the club’s second-floor gymnasium and talking over the muffled sound of work out music, cheering and clapping, the Yawkey Club’s Executive Director, Andrea Swain discussed why she hand-picked the Rochelle family to participate in the program.

“I needed a family that had the fortitude and whose kids were already active and wouldn’t mind taking it to the next level,” she said. “They’re a family that other families can model.”

And Swain said the family’s contagiously positive, fearless attitude has spread to fellow club members. Instead of the initial 10 families that had signed up to attend the weekday work- and school-night fitness event, three times as many showed up.

“They’re getting over their fears,” said Swain referring to the club’s membership as a whole. “Everyone is trying new things they wouldn’t normally.”

Seconds later, 7-year-old Keyanna C., a friend of Keleyia’s, emerged through the gymnasium doors with a beaming smile and gave Swain an emphatic high five. Keyanna had just scaled the club’s artificial rock climbing wall for the first time.

Still smiling moments later while munching on a healthy food spread provided after the event, Keyanna said she had not attempted the climbing feat before because she had been scared.

She admitted she was “kind of nervous” while climbing, but, “I just saw other people doing it, and I decided to do it,” she said, adding that she plans to ascend the wall again.

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(Courtesy: Katie Kaizer)

Members of the Yawkey Club in Roxbury work out at Tuesday night's first-ever Triple Play Family Fitness Challenge with Brandy K. Cruthird, founder and owner of [Body By Brandy Fitness Studio](#) in Roxbury.