

2018 CHILDREN'S CHAMPION AWARD WINNER

Flynn ensures YMCA kids are fed, cared for, protected

By Melissa Fili
MethuenLife Writer

Cathy Flynn's official title at the Merrimack Valley YMCA is executive director of child care. But, in the past 2 1/2 years, she's been on a crusade to feed, care for and protect the 617 kids whose well-being is ultimately her responsibility.

"When kids experience sexual abuse, emotional abuse or food insecurity," she said, "it rocks the core of who they are."

Flynn, a 19-year Methuen resident, was presented with this year's Children's Champion Award by the Michael B. Christensen Family Support Center, a program of the Greater Lawrence Community Action Council, last month at the Methuen YMCA. The award recognizes an outstanding individual who has made a significant contribution in the Merrimack Valley in the areas of child abuse prevention, intervention, treatment and/or child advocacy. In attendance at the jam-packed event were local and state officials as well as fellow caregivers, supporters and children.

Flynn, who previously worked at the Melrose Y for 19 years, has strived to end food insecurity for children and families in the community by providing nutritious meals and snacks for children in YMCA child care programs, as well as Teen



Methuen's Cathy Flynn (second from right) received the Children's Champion award for her selfless work with kids at the Merrimack Valley YMCA. Flynn is shown with her mom Brenda Posta, daughter Anna Flynn and family friend Eric Redard.

MethuenLife photos by Melissa Fili

Dinners and a newly opened food pantry at the Lawrence Y. The impetus, she says, was realizing that some kids may not have access to food during the weekend or that the 10:30am school lunch is their only food source until after their sports practice. Those situations begged the question, "How can we better meet their needs?" and Flynn has provided answers in the form of healthy food.

Additionally, as a facilitator of Darkness

to Light's Stewards of Children program offered at the Merrimack Valley YMCA, Flynn is part of a team that has trained more than 2,000 people over the last 10 years on the prevention of child sexual abuse. She does all of this while overseeing child care operations at the Andover/North Andover, Lawrence and Methuen YMCAs and a YMCA after-school program in Boxford, as well as an Early Learning Readiness and a Summer Learning Loss Prevention

program.

Methuen YMCA Director Anne Whalen said Flynn embodies the YMCA's three focal points of youth development, healthy living and social responsibility, adding, "Her work is closing the learning gap. She always goes above and beyond."

Flynn encouraged the audience to be active advocates for kids in need: "We can make this a world that ends abuse."

She tells MethuenLife she's grateful for the opportunity to lend a helping hand.

"It's been such a blessing," she says of her work, which allows her to personally impact so many children and families. "To relieve just one burden is so important."

What's the best part of her job?

"Meeting a need within the community and helping others," she said. "Just knowing someone's day is a little easier because the Y is here - I can't put that into words."



Adorable Methuen YMCA preschoolers kicked off the event with a couple songs, complete with choreography.

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