

## Advocating a healthy start in life

WINDSOR RN REPRESENTS NURSING ON PROVINCIAL PANEL TO ADDRESS CHILDHOOD OBESITY.

CAROL DIEMER UNDERSTANDS THE torment obese children suffer. Jack,\* a 13-year-old boy who has struggled with his weight since the age of eight, and who is now dealing with depression and stress, has been a client for much of his youth. "It breaks my heart to see children who are struggling with (obesity) psychologically, socially, physically," the Windsor RN says. "I feel anger at the disparity and challenges that some (children) deal with...and sadness for the shame (Jack) has to endure due to his weight."

Diemer says Jack wants to lose weight, but his social circumstance is throwing a wrench in his plans. He and his younger brother live with their mother, a single parent whose annual income is less than \$20,000. Limited resources make it impossible for many families to access healthy foods, she says.

This is not the first time Diemer has seen how a child's socio-economic status can impact on weight. Education and exposure to certain media and advertising can also lead to childhood obesity. Diemer and her team at Windsor Essex Community Health Centre (WECHC) are currently treating an estimated 20 children with obesity problems that may be linked back to these influential factors. This is why Ontario's Ministry of Health chose her to help recommend holistic solutions to the problem.

In May, the Windsor RN joined a 17-member *Healthy Kids Panel* as the RN representative. The panel includes professionals from health care, education, advertising, social marketing, academia, and more. She says the group will think holistically as it develops recommendations

graduating from the nursing program at St. Clair College in 1984. Diemer soon discovered the profession suited her sociable personality.

She began her nursing career at Windsor's Hotel-Dieu Grace Hospital (HDGH), starting out on the neurosurgical unit and

community and her present position at WECHC as staff nurse. Mental health "improved my outlook as a nurse overall," she says.

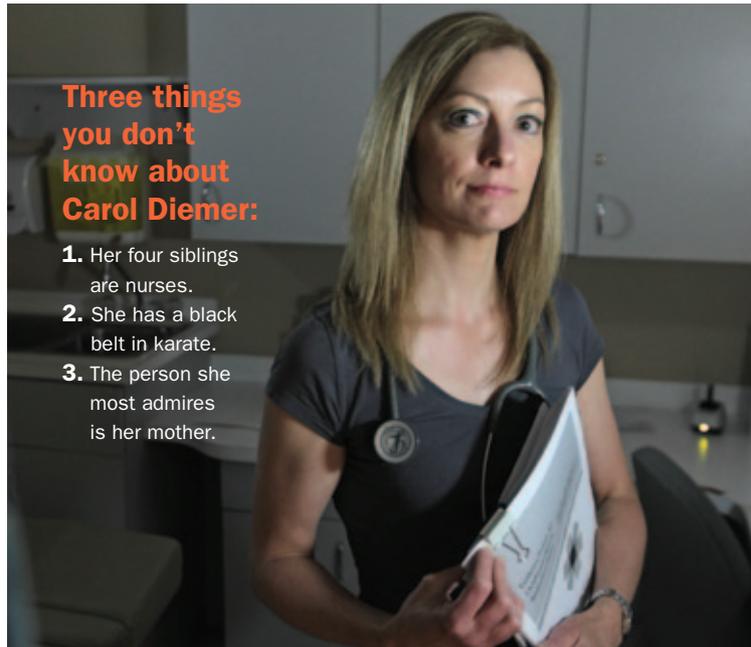
During her initial three years at WECHC, Diemer led the development of local health initiatives, including a childhood obesity strategy. Key to that strategy was the organization's implementation of RNAO's *Primary Prevention of Childhood Obesity* best practice guideline in 2010. Her efforts ultimately led to the community health centre's Best Practice Spotlight Organization (BPSO) designation this past spring.

Diemer and her colleagues have their work cut out for them when you consider Statistics Canada reports childhood obesity rates have tripled in the last 20 years.

Whether in her day-to-day work or as a member of the provincial panel, Diemer says she's eager to

help solve this issue. "Knowing that I can be part of a healthy change for (these children), knowing that I have made a difference, fulfills my journey as a nurse." **RN**

CLAIRE O'KEEFFE IS EDITORIAL ASSISTANT AT RNAO.



### Three things you don't know about Carol Diemer:

1. Her four siblings are nurses.
2. She has a black belt in karate.
3. The person she most admires is her mother.

for the government strategy that hopes to reduce Ontario's childhood obesity rate by an ambitious 20 per cent in five years.

"The panel is here to look at the problem in a way that it hasn't been looked at before," she says.

If you asked a teenaged Diemer what her future career might be, she admits nursing wasn't in the picture. She always wanted to become a veterinarian, but changed her mind thanks to the promise of a guaranteed nursing job after

moving to the ICU shortly after. By the mid-90s, she became a research co-ordinator with a focus on allergies, respiratory and critical care. Two decades after graduating, her focus shifted once again – this time to mental health. By 2006, she was manager of the *Schizophrenia and Psychosis Project* at Windsor Regional Hospital, followed by unit manager of HDGH's mental health program. Diemer credits her experience in mental health for preparing her to shift gears once again to the

The expert panel's report to the Ministry of Health is expected by the end of 2012. For more information, visit [www.RNAO.ca/healthy-kids-panel](http://www.RNAO.ca/healthy-kids-panel)

\* A pseudonym has been used to protect privacy.