



Hares For Health

CHUBBY AND SLUGGISH
HELP KIDS BEAT OBESITY

by **Niloo E Sarabi**

Chubby and Sluggish, a pair of health-conscious bunnies, have left the rabbit hole and headed out to their neighborhood public schools and day-care centers to meet and play with their human buddies and to educate them about fitness and proper nutrition. Chubby, also known as Eric, and his sister, Sluggish, whose real name is Allie, are inspirational characters created by an Indiana-based company, Chubby & Sluggish LLC, to address the looming childhood obesity epidemic in the United States.

A young and energetic rabbit who loves to play and be active, Chubby does not always make the right choices when it comes to eating. He prefers junk food to lettuce and carrots. Sluggish, on the other hand, knows a great deal about healthy eating, but she is not a big fan of exercising. Through their interaction with kids, these bunnies inspire each other and their young friends to eat better and be more active. “We want to communicate to kids that just because someone is chubby, it does not mean that they cannot keep a healthy diet or be active,” said Howard Harding, founder of Chubby & Sluggish LLC.

In early 2005, Harding decided to combine his entrepreneurial flair with his interest in childhood obesity prevention. After founding the company, the next step was creating fun characters that could communicate his message to young children. That was how Eric and Allie came to life. “We decided to take a proactive approach and focus on educating kids between the ages of three and seven, because we believe that these impressionable years are very important in developing healthy lifestyle habits for the rest of a child’s life,” Harding said. “Children can easily relate to Chubby and Sluggish, and at the same time they have a lot of fun with them.”

Harding’s group has developed partnerships with local communities and public schools in Indiana, Washington, Georgia, Ohio and New York. During a “Fitness Day,” Chubby and Sluggish, along with staff members, visit kids in their schools and teach them about nutrition and exercise through fun activities. At the end of the program, each participating child gets warm hugs and handshakes from the bunnies and a goodie bag to take home. The bags include healthy recipes, informational handouts and toys. “Our main focus is to educate the kids and to help them develop healthy habits,” Harding said. “We also recognize that most of those habits are formed at home, so we try to help the parents by providing them with educational tools on proper nutrition and helpful tips on how to be active.” Kids and parents can also contact the bunnies by calling their toll-free number or by visiting them online.



Childhood obesity is a complex problem that needs to be addressed at the local and national level, in schools and at home. “Our society is growing so rapidly, and our lives have become so fast-paced that our time together as a family has diminished considerably,” Harding said. “We realize that we have to address childhood obesity from a social and emotional standpoint as well, and we are trying to bring awareness about those issues in the books and videos that we are developing.”

With nutritionists, personal trainers, educators, child psychologists, writers and animation artists on staff, Chubby & Sluggish LLC offers a wide array of programs and educational products including entertainment, interactive software, videos, toys and books for children, parents and teachers. To expand its efforts, the company is conducting research on how to address childhood obesity in children beyond the third grade, and it plans to release a series of videos that address fitness, healthy eating and safety for children and teens.

“We are also in the planning stages of a statewide ‘Fitness Day’ at our convention center, the RCA Dome in Indianapolis, Indiana, for children, parents and educators, and we are looking into inviting professional athletes from the NBA, NFL and MLB as well as other health officials in our community,” Harding said. “We are actively seeking sponsorship for our nationwide programs. Businesses and individuals can get involved in what we do by becoming a friend of Chubby and Sluggish, sponsor a ‘Fitness Day’ in their city or log on to our website and volunteer their time when Chubby and Sluggish visit their community.”

For more information, visit www.chubbyandsluggish.com or call 1-888-363-7931.