

TRAVELING GYM BIG HIT WITH PRESCHOOLERS

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Cheers and squeals of joy aren't sounds that typically greet school bus drivers, but Brian Fabish is no ordinary driver. The Slippery Rock health and fitness teaching grad is the pilot of the Gymagic Bus, which makes visits to 30 preschool classes a week. After the doors of the brightly painted Gymagic Bus creaked open at the Stepping Stones Children's Center on Warrendale Road earlier this month, it was quickly filled with the sounds of eight little voices and 16 quick and tiny feet bounding over everything a gym might have: bars, beam, rings, incline mats, barrel mats, zip line, monkey bars, and a minitrampoline.

Fabish combines fun with a structured lesson. "This is muscle day," Fabish exclaimed. He asked his attentive students to show him a muscle. Everyone displayed their biceps like Popeye does.

Fabish explained there are muscles everywhere in the body, and soon the children were chewing to feel the muscles in their cheeks. Allison Shepard was able to guess the name of the muscle in the chest that goes "thump, thump." The group ran in place, giggling, before Fabish asked them to sit quietly and feel their hearts.

"Mine is really going faster and faster," Justin Meinert shouted.

Fabish then had them move through the stations set up inside the bus, which include a chin-up bar, mountain climber and even a "dice game" in which children perform the exercises that appear on the sides of the giant die they roll. The excited group concluded a half-hour session by playing a game of tennis with balloons and paddles made from paper plates and paint stirs.

Fabish decided two years ago to use his 24 years of experience in gymnastics to teach preschoolers.

"I love teaching kids, and I saw an opportunity to give convenience to parents. It was a chance to offer gymnastics to a large number of children," said Fabish, whose mantra is "fun, learning and fitness."

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Illustration: PHOTO

PHOTO: Joyce Mendelsohn/Post-Gazette: As children from Stepping Stones play aboard the mobile gym, Brian Fabish, right, assists one youngster.