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# KAREN MITCHELL

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*Meet Karen Mitchell, founder of Ashburn's Fitwize4Kids. You may not yet have heard about this growing business, but it is redefining health and fitness in our community and inspiring families to make positive changes.*

At the core of this endeavor, the branch's founder is truly committed to her cause and proves to be an inspirational woman with the drive and ambition to make an impact.

Growing up in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, Karen had no idea where she would discover her calling. She earned a business degree and embarked on a successful career in sales and marketing. Despite her accomplishments, she was searching for more. The desire to make a difference in the lives of others led Karen to leave her day job and focus on family. She needed time off to figure out her next steps.

While substitute teaching, she realized there was a critical need for positive physical education for children. Unhealthy snacks and lack of exercise were taking their toll on her students, and she learned that many of them had an aversion to fitness due to the fear of failure. If exercise could be fun for kids, she thought, they would be more likely to stick with a program and improve their health. To get the ball rolling, Karen started coaching a "Girls on the Run" team and began researching what she could do to promote healthy living. She discovered the Fitwize4Kids franchise and opened her own location in February, 2011.



## Healthy Living

Karen Mitchell, Owner of Ashburn's Fitwize4Kids

a co-ed running club, a jump rope club, adult and family fitness classes, and personal training. The staff includes physical education instructors from Loudoun County Public Schools. Their services are advertised mainly through word of mouth, making Fitwize's rapid growth all the more impressive.

Fitwize4Kids has grown from its humble beginnings to provide Ashburn families with one of the funnest and safest places to get healthy. Summer camps are full with waitlists, and after school and kindergarten enrichment programs are popular. The location offers tumbling classes, cheer teams,



Moving forward, Karen hopes to see Fitwize4Kids continue to grow. She believes strongly in the value of community service and giving back to others. She is committed to keeping this concept at the core of Fitwize and wants to teach children that serving is as important to a healthy lifestyle as diet and exercise. To ensure that this message is not lost, she is overseeing the development of a community outreach program that will provide kids a way to get involved in making a difference. The years after founding Fitwize in Ashburn, Karen Mitchell is still finding ways to develop and grow her business. She has found her niche and is happy to be able to provide a unique outlet to encourage family health and fitness. Her dedication and desire to positively impact the community is truly infectious. Her story proves that taking risks can have great rewards if we stick to what we believe in and focus on what matters. For this reason, we are thrilled to spotlight Karen as an inspirational, modern woman.

**What is the most rewarding part of your job?**

The part of my job that I love most is developing new and exciting programs for the kids. I am always talking to the kids and parents to determine what else I can be offering to make their experience the best that it can be. When parents come to pick up their children and their child does not want to leave our gym, it provides confirmation to me that our program is working. I also love to see the enthusiasm of the children when they are participating in our Backpack Community Outreach Program. Their willingness to participate and help other children is a true inspiration to us all.

she realized there was a *critical* need for positive physical education for children.

**What do you hope to accomplish in the future?**

I hope that my children will learn the value of hard work and dedication from me and they understand that everyone has failures in life, but it's what you learn from those failures that makes you a better person and determines your future successes.

The kids always *inspire me* to want to do more than I did yesterday.

**How do you balance work and home life?**

It's definitely been a challenge. Fortunately, my business is one in which my family can be heavily involved. My oldest daughter is employed at Fitwize and my younger daughter participates in the Fitwize Cheer & Tumbling Program. They all spend time in the gym and have gained a basic understanding of what it takes to run a business. By making health and fitness a part of my own life, it seems natural to do my early morning boot camps or

workouts with the kids at Fitwize. When there's a large goal I'm training to obtain, it's important for me to set mini-goals along the way. I have found this is true in life in general. For example, my daughter and I ran a half marathon last year, and I set small goals along the way to stay focused and not get discouraged in my attempt to reach the main goal of the 13.1 mile race.

**What advice do you have for women who may want to start their own business?**

There will always be disappointments and setbacks along the way but through focus, patience, determination and a true passion for something, you can only succeed. Believe in yourself and maintain a positive attitude. I truly believe the saying: Whether you think you can or you can't, you're probably right. Also, be willing to ask for and accept help from others when needed. I never pretend to be the expert about everything in my business, and I rely on others for their knowledge and experience as well.

**What most inspires you?**

The kids always inspire me to want to do more than I did yesterday. When I look at one of them and see how far they've come during their time at Fitwize, I feel like I could actually be making a difference in their lives. The kids always inspire me to want to do more than I did yesterday.



**TANYA SCHOOR**

*Tanya Schoor is an enthusiastic freelance writer who enjoys researching activities and ideas that benefit Washington area families. She graduated from The Ohio State University in 2007 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Atmospheric Science. Tanya currently resides in Loudoun County with her husband, Greg, and their dog, Boomer.*

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