Bindjareb ‘yorgas’ staying fit

IF PEOPLE hear the sound of South American dance music floating through Pinjarra on a Monday morning, they can bet some local women are having a ball.

The Columbian dance-fitness craze called Zumba has become part of a new weekly routine for a group of Aboriginal women from Pinjarra seeking a healthier lifestyle.

The women are also taking nutrition classes and walks and while they’re learning about the benefits of exercise and good nutrition they’re making new friends.

Fifteen local women are taking part in the Bindjareb Yorgas Health Program, named after the Bindjareb Indigenous people of the Peel region.

The program is sponsored by the Swap It, Don’t Stop It campaign, funded by the Australian Government and administered by the Heart Foundation.

Launched in March last year, the campaign aims to provide Australians with the tools and understanding to make simple swaps to improve their health.

“It’s been really successful and we’ve had a sustained attendance, which obviously means they are enjoying it,” program coordinator Caroline Nilson said. “And it’s also given them a good sense of woman-ship, if you like.”

Mrs Nilson, a lecturer at the school of nursing and midwifery at Murdoch University’s Peel Campus, devised the 12-week program in conjunction with the Murray District Aboriginal Association’s chairperson Karrie-Anne Kearing.

It started mid-September and centres on the MOASH facility at Pinjarra Primary School where the Zumba dance classes are held every Monday morning.

“These classes are very popular and we’ve been lucky enough to have Jemma Hahn, a local and trained Zumba instructor, to lead the group,” Mrs Nilson said. “The music and the movement get them going and they just love to dance.”

MOASH also hosts Wednesday nutrition classes which teach topics such as reading food labels to checking things like sugar, salt and fat levels, as well as cooking lessons and how to construct healthy shopping lists.

Friday afternoons are set aside for walks.

“We walk between 30 and 45 minutes, mostly along the Murray River, and children are encouraged to come to make it easier for their mothers to attend,” Mrs Nilson said.

“I encourage those on the program to do things like ‘swap deep fried wedges for oven wedges’ and ‘swap fried for fresh’.

“For walking, I’ll say, ‘let’s swap sitting and watching for walking and talking’.

“It’s great that we’re getting Aboriginal people meeting in a healthy way.

“Some of the recipes we’ve been learning we’ve taken to the school where we cook with kids, and they’re enjoying eating them – it’s surprised me.

“I think it starts with the parents; when the parents start enjoying eating healthy, it spreads to the kids.

“Like walking – that becomes a family thing.”

She said a couple of the participants were proud of the fact they’d lost a couple of kilograms in weight all enjoyed the program’s social aspects.

“Instead of sitting at home by yourself, you get in with a group your own age and get talking – it helps your mental state as well,” Ms Kearing said.

The primary target group of the Swap It, Don’t Stop It campaign is parents and carers.

Heart Foundation senior project officer Lisa Wheatley said the campaign encouraged people to consider small swaps involving nutrition and physical activity.