Fighting fit at party time
By Joanna Tovia
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PIN-the-tail-on-the-donkey and pass-the-parcel are yesterday's news for progressive parents wanting to throw a healthy birthday party.

One option now on offer to mums and dads who want to create a memorable day is called Kids' Exercise – an active way to have fun.

Mother of three Sue Cutbill came up with the idea when she moved to Australia from London and found outdoor activity made a huge difference to the health of her children.

Her two oldest children, Oliver and Angus, were both born with kidney conditions which meant they were in and out of hospital from a young age.

Living in the cold, damp conditions of London meant the family spent a lot of time inside where they had little room for physical activity. "They were indoors most of the year and they were sick all the time," Ms Cutbill says.

The Cutbill family spent so much time in emergency at hospital that Ms Cutbill says it became a running joke among their friends – if they couldn't be contacted, it was assumed one of their kids was in hospital again.

Since moving to Australia three years ago, the kids have been able to live an outdoor life packed with activity ... and are much healthier for it. "It's made a huge difference not just to their quality of life but to my husband's and mine as well – we actually have a life now."

Ms Cutbill comes from an active family – one of her brothers is a personal trainer and her parents, both in their 70s, still visit the gym three times a week. Kids' Exercise, which opened for business in November 2005, has a staff of five. All are parents who love being around children.

"We find people who have children respond better at the parties – it works really really well."

Kids' Exercise caters for children from four years up to about 11 or 12 and the activities and equipment they use are varied accordingly.

"My boys have given me a lot of input," Ms Cutbill says. "We use car tyres for crawling over, cargo nets for them to scramble under, tug of war ropes, hoops, skipping ropes ... all the age groups have different needs and abilities."

Making sure all children are included is something Ms Cutbill says Kids' Exercise is very careful about and that's one reason people with children make the best team members. "Parents are more aware if children are finding it difficult to join in," she says. "Nobody is left on the sidelines."

If a child really doesn't want to join in an activity, however, they aren't forced to. Instead, they are encouraged to do something else such as help with equipment. "Everyone is always included," she says.

Ms Cutbill, who worked in hospitality and for Christies auction house prior to having kids, couldn't be happier about the decision to start her business. "I love it. I'm absolutely passionate about the whole thing. I get a buzz every time we go to a party."

A Kids' Exercise party session lasts an hour and for parties held around Sydney's northern beaches, the cost is $200. It costs more for parties held outside the local area.

Getting the word out about the business has been mainly via word of mouth.

Ms Cutbill says a lot of families have two parents who work and want to hold a feel-good party that's easy and well-organised so word is spreading.

Although Kids' Exercise is a healthy party option, after an hour of running and jumping, throwing and climbing, kids are ravenous and ready for some good old-fashioned party food.

Sausage rolls and fairy bread probably never tasted so good.