



Louisville, KY

▲ Community Example from Chapter 2 of "Lessons for Leaders:"
Lessons in Communication

Community Background

Youth were a critical part of the healthy community advocacy efforts in Louisville during the city's *Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities* (HKHC) grant. Momentum was building around childhood obesity prevention prior to HKHC with the Mayor's Healthy Hometown Movement, led by the Louisville Metro Department of Public Health and Wellness. Louisville was already developing walking trails, bike paths and other health programs, and HKHC allowed the city to expand its efforts to advance other improvements in its physical environments, especially in older neighborhoods with limited access to fresh, healthy foods, and safety and environmental problems that discouraged physical activity.

Community Action

Knowing that lasting change would only occur when youth became involved, HKHC partners recruited young people in several neighborhoods. Through Photovoice and digital storytelling, youth identified the problems in their neighborhoods, explored solutions and informed policies around healthy eating and active living. Aided by their Photovoice projects and advocacy training, youth held a number of successful events and gallery showings with metro council members and other city officials.

During one year, about 50 youth surveyed residents in West Louisville neighborhoods and discovered that increased access to fresh, healthy foods was a top priority. Their findings helped lead to the opening of several Healthy in a Hurry corner stores that now provide fruits and vegetables in neighborhoods such as Shawnee, Chickasaw and Smoketown.

From that success, and aided by a 2013 Conference of Mayors' grant, partners worked with the local YMCA to begin the Metro Youth Advocates (MYA) program. MYA enables young people to advocate effectively for policy change at the community level, elevating their voices across the city and engaging youth more substantively in issues that affect them. Participants strengthen their advocacy, public speaking, problem solving and critical thinking skills while engaging with public officials, community leaders and peers from the Louisville metro area.

In addition, three youth advocates attended the Southern Obesity Summit, where they shared their work and learned from others from 15 Southern states. They also convinced conference planners to choose Louisville as the host city for the 2014 summit and offered to help with the youth components of the conference.

One of the best outcomes is how youth have stayed involved in their community even after they completed their time with MYA. Michael Williams was one of the first youth advocates in the Shawnee Neighborhood. He participated in a Photovoice project and then worked with the Shawnee Neighborhood Association in 2009 to help with violence prevention, neighborhood cleanup, youth leadership and more. During the summer before he left for college, he became a Healthy in a Hurry produce manager. He is still involved in the neighborhood when he's home as an advocate leading change for a healthier community.