

Kyia Hill, Age 16
Senior at Ballou Senior High School

I attended the advocacy session on Children and Education. Speakers in this session were Jonathan Weiss, founding chair of the Smart Schools, Smart Growth Initiative, Nsedu Obot Witherspoon, executive director of the Children's Environmental Health Network, and Ruth Perot, executive director of the Summit Health Institute for Research and Education.

As a youth reporter, I found the presentation by Ruth Perot about the Early Childhood Obesity Collaborative to be very interesting. I found out that more than 15% of our Washington DC teenagers and kids are overweight; this is more than three times the number of young people overweight in the 1970's. I also was sad to hear, but not very surprised, that my own Ward 8 has the highest obesity level in the district. Being a resident in the Ward 8 community, I can elaborate on the high obesity level. Most of the students with whom I attend school are considered to be obese. Because of living in an urban area, most of the money spent in the local corner stores and carry outs are from student allowances. Our built environment revolves around satisfaction and convenience. Having video games and fatty foods at our fingertips is very convenient and extends this obesity issue in my community. It is extremely convenient to access foods from the corner store; however the options are not what people would consider healthy. We are full of chips and sodas, but lack fruits and vegetables. The question I have revolves around access. I don't understand how we can eat better foods and do more physical activity if we don't have access to these opportunities.

When stereotyping my community, most people may use the statement "African Americans are materialistic and clothes are very essential to them." This falls in place with obesity because of the fact that the latest trends in the fashion industry are becoming equipped with plus size women and since the retail marketplaces are adapting, this is a real indication about how far this weight trend is progressing and how we must stop it. At the end of the presentation there was a discussion on how as a community we must come together and meet to see how we can improve obesity and I thought that was the most useful part of the presentation. Without collaboration from all fronts I cannot see any major changes happening in my community. I think it was an amazing idea to pull in students to listen at the conference. When we establish community plans, I feel it is so important to gather our student input to see what really limits us from being healthier.

Donnell Kie, Age 16
Junior at Ballou Senior High School

I had a wonderful experience being a youth reporter at the Active Living Research Conference. I attended the session on Children and Education, where I listened to representatives from Smart Growth, Children's Environmental Health Network, and the Summit Health Institute for Research and Education. I enjoyed hearing about some of the impacts that those organizations have had on several communities. I also learned about several topics touched on by researchers, including, of course, exercise and obesity, but as well as the impact of chemicals, stress rates, environmental safety, and types of pollution, etc. The disappointing research and data stated about Washington, DC really hit home because I am a born and raised Washingtonian. My thoughts toward the topics grew stronger as I learned about the Ward 8 community and its lack of healthy living and exercise promotion, mainly because I'm from there. Not only does Ward 8 have an increasing obesity and chronic disease rate but it also has one of the biggest poverty rates in the metropolitan area. The ward has very little parks, playgrounds, and little to no healthy food places. Things got a little bit better when I heard about the up and coming programs and events that will soon be affecting the community in a positive and healthy way.

If there was one thing that I would change is the number of youth present. I believe that healthy living conditions should be put into practice at early ages, so why not have more youth in attendance? I really enjoyed myself. I learned a lot and I look forward to promoting healthy lifestyles in my own community.

Brittany Dobbins, Age 17
Junior at Ballou Senior High School

I was very honored to be given the opportunity to act as a youth reporter for the Active Living Research Conference. I attended the advocacy session on Socioeconomic Disparities, and was so encouraged to be in a room with researchers and four strong women exemplifying their special organizations. The first speaker was Ms. Lisa Neel from the National Indian Health Board. Their mission was to promote physical activity for American Indians and Alaska Natives. With their partnerships, the organization has more power to express to the community. There are also 18,168 people who have joined in with the Just Move It program. Just Move It is an organization that helps Native and Alaska Americans reduce obesity and have more physical activity in the communities.

Dr. Marjorie A. Innocent was a speaker from The Congressional Black Caucus Foundation. The organization started in 1976 and since that time they helped many African American communities. The program is based on education, economic development and educates African American about being overweight and the obesity problem. The main objectives are to motivate adults and children to have more physically active lifestyles and eat a more healthy diet. The Black Caucus foundation is partnering with the [www. Blackwomanhealth.com](http://www.Blackwomanhealth.com). The successes of the foundation had 3,000 African Americans to join the event.

Jennifer Ngandu, from the National Council of La Raza, talked on behalf of the Hispanic community. She talked about a study in 1982-1984 on the prevalence of overweight and obesity in the Hispanic community. The first comprehensive epidemiological studies were with NHANES. The major problems in Hispanic community are low-income status, not speaking English well and, of course, low access to health care. The organization tries to help those people in the community by starting programs for low-income families to help them get better health care and English-speaking classes.

The last speaker was Deena Jang from the Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum, an organization that was founded in 1986. It addresses health, political, social, and economic areas. Deanna said that poverty is very high within the Pacific Islander, Hawaiian, and Asian populations.

Overall, my experience with the Socioeconomic Disparities session taught me the fact that so many groups consider themselves poverty stricken. That really allows us to unite on a common front. The obesity epidemic has a lot to do with healthy eating and being more physically active, but I think that a large part of our efforts must be focused on bringing down the barriers for equal access to a healthy lifestyle. I can directly see how my community suffers from this obesity problem, and I hope that I can be an agent of change to really influence my friends, family, and school.

Gregory Campbell, Age 16
Sophomore at Bell Multicultural High School

I had the opportunity to be a youth reporter at the Active Living Research Conference in the Transportation/Land Use advocacy session. Speakers in this session were Bill Wilkinson, executive director of the National Center for Bicycling and Walking, Keith Laughlin, executive director of the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, and Andy Clarke, executive director of the League of American Bicyclists.

At the beginning of the program I was given the question, “How do I think the obesity epidemic directly affects me and my community?” My answer has more to do with an overall attitude of complacency. I feel like most people are obese in my community and when they look around that is all they see, so it ends up being a big cycle. People think it is okay because their parents and friends are also overweight.

At the meeting the advocates spoke about an easy solution to the obesity in my community. It seemed as if they proposed the idea of having bikes and bike racks for the community members and then “poof” all the problems would go away. I did not feel like I could truly agree with all those comments. I feel like in my situation we would love to ride bikes more, but it is not always safe for us to ride out in the streets. Having bikes would be great, but a safe place to ride them seems to be the biggest problem for us. However, this taught me that there cannot be one answer for solving this obesity issue and it will take a lot of teamwork from community members and head researchers before we can actually make something that will work in many different communities.

Terra Campbell, Age 14
Freshman at Duke Ellington Middle School

I reported on the Physical Activity and Recreation breakout session. Speakers in this session were Sheila Franklin, executive director of the National Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity, Richard Dolesh, Senior Director of Public Policy at the National Recreation and Parks Association, and Catherine Nagel, executive director of the City Parks Alliance. This was a very memorable experience for me as the youngest member on the team. I feel very privileged to be able to be a youth reporter and I feel that I learned so much at the conference, not only from listening to the speakers, but from getting the opportunity to talk with so many friendly people.

We were able to discuss how we could make life healthier and safer for young children to travel to neighborhood playgrounds. I used the word “we” because I really felt a part of the small group discussion. I asked a question about what I could do as a student to get more physical education in my school and I was received with open arms. Many community leaders gave me their contact information and invited me to speak with my mayor and school board. I am so excited and I feel so empowered in helping my local community make steps to leading better lifestyles to one day stop the obesity epidemic.