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Small steps lead to healthy lifestyle MULYP teaches MAM youth to fight obesity

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Plop goes a cherry tomato into 9-year-old Malcolm Robins's mouth. "I always thought this wouldn't taste good, but now I find out that it has 'nutrients' my body needs ... and it is very, very good."

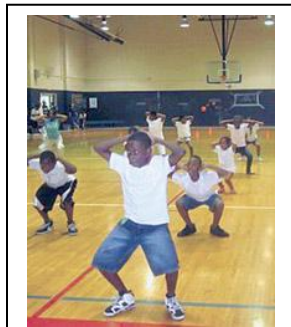
The young professionals who are members of the Memphis Urban League Young Professionals' (MULYP) are very much aware of Malcolm's need, and thousands of other urban youth, to understand the meaning of good nutrients. According to the 2009 Memphis Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 17 percent of Memphis high school students are obese and that number is steadily growing.

So with that in mind, MULYP members decided to make youth health and fitness their number one priority with their National Day of Service event called Get P.H.I.T (Physical, Healthy, Interactive and Tough).

The first Get P.H.I.T. event, designed to empower at-risk, urban youth to become personally responsible for their health and well-being, was recently held at the **Memphis Athletic Ministries' (MAM) Bethel LaBelle neighborhood youth center**. Around 80 middle and elementary school boys and girls from five of **Memphis Athletic Ministries' (MAM)** 14 centers attended.



The lesson? Eating healthy keeps bodies well and strong. From left to right are Bernard Turner, 13, Taddarian Bonds, 12, LaDarius Bonds, 9, and Denzel Jenkins, 9.)



MAM kids learn the new "Move Your Body" routine.

"MAM's holistic approach to changing the lives of our city's underprivileged youth works well with MULYP's same goals for these kids," said Lori Spicer, president, MULYP. "Any time we can partner with premier youth development organizations like MAM to teach kids how to live better, healthier lives and become agents of change in their families and neighborhoods, we are happy to be a part of that effort."

James Armfield, MAM president, said what the kids are learning from the role models reiterates MAM's teachings about the importance of making healthy choices and how it impacts the future.

"We can't thank the team from MULYP enough for choosing our kids as the recipients of such a positive, encouraging event."

Jonathan Watkins, the MULYP organizer of the event, said one of his concerns about the future of Memphis youth is the rising obesity among younger kids as well as teens.

"Thirty percent of kids in Tennessee are considered obese according to the CDC. As young professionals in Memphis, we need to get out in the community and show these kids that being healthy cannot only be fun, but is necessary. You don't have to be an athlete to exercise, just move and know you are doing something to improve yourself."

The young professionals trained the youth with a variety of drills and techniques, mixing up the routine to keep the kids' interest and attention. From dribbling a basketball to dancing to fitness drills to learning the new "Move Your Body" routine created by Beyoncé for the Let's Move Campaign, MAM youth were all winners with smiles and maybe just a little sweat. All that exertion was rewarded with a filling lunch, consisting of a deli sandwich, apple and a pasta salad, topped off with "healthy" chocolate chip cookies.

“I really like moving to the music. At first I was kinda embarrassed but our teachers told us that we don’t have to be perfect, we just have to move,” said Devonta Dorton, 14. “And it’s fun – not a chore, like running laps in gym class.”



A'Jewel Johnson, 9, and Mariah Hall, 4, display their Nike hats and other prizes that promote fitness

Tadarrian Bonds, 12, liked Miranda Byrd’s lesson on bike safety. “She showed us how to test brakes, check tire pressure, and told us some laws about biking I had never heard before. I learned that I must have some reflectors on my bike.”

Participants were awarded certificates of participation, and thanks to the generous contributions of NIKE and the Memphis Grizzlies, a bag filled with gifts to promote fitness – a frisbee, Nike hat and wristbands, Grizzlies health and fitness poster and T-shirt.

Spicer wanted the kids to walk away with a feeling of accomplishment.

“We want the kids to believe they are getting fit and feel proud of themselves for all their hard work. We want them to understand that good health does not happen overnight. It’s a matter of taking baby steps and believing in yourself – that you are valuable and worth the hard work.”
