

[Click here for stories and resources about parenting.](#)

## YMCA sets a target to empower Oklahoma City children

OKLAHOMA STUDENT GAVE TIPS ON NATIONAL HEALTH COURSE

BY TIM HENLEY  1 Comment  
Published: February 22, 2010

Metro-area YMCA branches are offering a free anti-obesity program to teach children to become health conscious at an early age.

The eight-week program titled EmpowerME4Life is for children ages 8 to 12. It's open to all.

Each session will be 45 minutes and participants will learn about exercising, setting health goals, reading nutrition labels, eating more fruits and vegetables, drinking low-fat milk and limiting their screen time to no more than two hours per day, YMCA spokeswoman Dena Drabek said.

Screen time refers to the number of hours spent watching television, playing video games or using a computer.

The program will be offered at YMCA locations in Oklahoma City, Edmond, Bethany, Midwest City, Guthrie and Chickasha.

"This will teach the kids healthy skills that they will hopefully continue to use throughout their life," said Angela Jones, the YMCA's associate director of health and wellness.

The EmpowerMe4Life program was developed by the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, a joint effort between the American Heart Association and the William J. Clinton Foundation.

Twenty-five children and teens were appointed to serve on the alliance's youth advisory board.

Board members are tasked with promoting healthy lifestyles in their communities by hosting youth forums and speaking at public meetings.

Board members also gave their input on how the national EmpowerMe4Life program should be structured.

Casady School junior Scotie Conner, 17, is the only Oklahoma resident serving on the board.

Two years ago, Conner was carrying 183 pounds on his 5-foot, 8-inch frame. The 15-year-old old was classified as overweight, according to the body mass index.

During the next two years, Conner said he reduced the amount of junk food he ate and incorporated physical activities into his daily routine. He said he also limited his screen time.

Conner is now 40 pounds lighter, two inches taller and stands at a normal weight.

He gave the alliance firsthand suggestions on topics that should be addressed in the program.

"I used to have problems with my weight, so I understand exactly what some people are going through," Conner said. "All you have to do is make simple changes, and it will make a huge difference."

In 2009, Oklahoma was ranked the sixth-most obese state in the nation for adults, according to a report released by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Trust for America's Health.

The state has the 33rd highest rate for overweight children ages 10 to 17. According to the report, 29.5 percent of the population in this age group is overweight.

Jones said that if people are targeted at an early age, they likely will continue engaging in a healthy lifestyle when they reach adulthood.

She said children do not have to be overweight or obese to participate in the eight-week EmpowerMe4Life program.

Most metro-area YMCA branches will start the program this week, and it will begin in Edmond and Norman in March.

For times and locations, go to [www.ymcaokc.org](http://www.ymcaokc.org) and click EmpowerME4Life.

comments powered by DISQUS