

# Role Modeling to Reach African American Youth



**R**ole modeling is an important aspect of leadership. Through mentoring programs, local leaders and professionals often serve as role models for youth in their communities. After-school mentoring programs provide youth with valuable insights and experiences. Unfortunately, in the areas of healthy eating and physical activity, mentors may demonstrate negative behaviors, such as eating high-fat foods or leading a sedentary lifestyle, that increase the risk of chronic diseases. The 100 Way Project demonstrates a unique approach to influencing the health behaviors of mentors.

## THE 100 WAY PROJECT

*The 100 Way Project: Promoting Nutrition & Physical Activity to African American Males* In the 100 Way Project, the *California Adolescent Nutrition and Fitness Program (CANFit)* strove to encourage healthy eating and activity behaviors in youth by intervening in local after-school mentoring programs. CANFit partnered with 100

Black Men of America, Inc. (the “100”), a national volunteer organization for professional African American men, to develop a nutrition and physical activity component to the “100’s” pre-existing mentoring program. The goal of the project was to improve the health status of 11-18-year-old African American males participating in the *Mentoring the 100 Way* program. The program’s objective was to develop a culturally sensitive strategy that would empower the “100” mentors to insert nutrition education and physical activities into their existing mentoring infrastructure. In this first phase, a pilot program was developed and evaluated.

## INNOVATION/CREATIVITY

Each local chapter of the “100” operates a standardized, after-school mentoring program that addresses issues of leadership development, self-esteem, and goal-setting, among others. Since the format of each chapter’s program varies, new project strategies have to be flexible enough to be adapted by individual mentors. CANFit developed a series of activities and lessons that could be delivered in the limited time available to the mentors. Lessons addressed issues of importance to the mentors, including reducing stress, eliminating health disparities, improving the health of the community, and supporting the physical and character development of future leaders. The benefits of nutrition and physical activity were tied into each of these issues.

Following research development phase, an assessment of the community environment of three local chapters (DeKalb, Georgia; Dallas, Texas; and Los Angeles, California) included evaluation of knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and local resources. Youth focus groups were conducted, mentors were interviewed, and community resources were mapped. Additional activities followed, such as; pilot programs, mentor training, field tests, and program refinement. CANFit staff provided training and technical assistance via site visits, group and individual training, and monthly conference calls. This level of contact led to mutual trust, so much so that mentors felt comfortable communicating problems and assisting with problem-solving.

The CANFit curriculum included 14 interactive activities, background materials, and resource lists. Materials provided facts on chronic disease and nutrients of concern to African Americans, information on healthy snacks, suggestions for increasing physical activity, and ways to involve youth in nutrition and activity projects. All materials were flexible enough to be adapted by any “100” chapter.

## THEORY BASE/RATIONALE

The CANFit intervention model for working with low-income adolescents has been in place since 1994. All CANFit projects share five common intervention principles:

- 1) Intervention must be culturally appropriate in ethnicity, language and culture
- 2) Youth must be actively involved in planning and implementation
- 3) Teaching about nutrition must be balanced with teaching about physical activity
- 4) Emphasis must be placed on skill-building in key competency areas
- 5) Community environment and norms must support healthy eating and physical activity

The 100 Way project also incorporated the theories of diffusion — using mentors as early adopters of and role models for healthy behavior — and community empowerment in developing its culturally sensitive program.

## OUTCOMES/EVALUATION DATA

A total of eight mentors and 158 youth ages 11-18 from three local “100” chapters participated in the development and pilot testing of the curriculum. An evaluation consultant examined process and outcome data. Six months following implementation, mentors were interviewed to discuss and determine what activities would be continued in their programs. All 158 youth reported being exposed to nutrition and fitness information through the mentoring program, and 98 percent rated activities as “good to excellent.” All mentors found the activities easy to implement and reported revising their curriculum to include nutrition education and physical activity. Additionally, mentors reported initiating positive changes in their personal eating and activity behaviors.

The curriculum has been adopted by the *100 Black Men of America* organization for use nationally.

## REPLICABILITY

The extensive research that preceded the development of the “100 Way” curriculum resulted in the creation of interactive lessons that are culturally relevant to African American adolescents in low-income environments. This curriculum can be used by a variety of after-school programs and groups. The “pick-and-choose” format of the program has enabled organizations like the Boys and Girls Club to adapt it to their needs.

## LESSONS LEARNED

“In order to change community norms, adolescents need to be exposed to healthy eating and physical activity in a variety of settings. By partnering with respected organizations and individuals in the community, it is possible to help adolescents, and the organizations that serve them, learn new health behaviors.”

— *Arnell Hinkle, M.P.H., R.D., Executive Director  
California Adolescent Nutrition & Fitness  
Berkeley, CA*



## QUESTIONS

1. **What is a potential downside of mentoring?**
  - a. Mentors may model negative behaviors
  - b. Mentors may have too little free time
  - c. Mentors may not have adequate financial resources
  - d. Mentors may not know enough about health
2. **What was the primary objective of “100 Way”?**
  - a. To create 100 health messages for African American adolescents
  - b. To change the nutrition and fitness behaviors of mentors
  - c. To create a new mentoring program on health and nutrition
  - d. To develop a culturally sensitive strategy that would fit into an existing mentoring infrastructure
3. **Which of the following was not a form of training and technical assistance in the “100 Way” project?**
  - a. Group and individual training
  - b. Development of computer programs
  - c. Monthly conference calls
  - d. Site visits
4. **What did the evaluation phase show about the nutrition and fitness knowledge of youth in the “100 Way” project?**
  - a. They knew a lot about nutrition and fitness
  - b. They had not previously been exposed to nutrition and fitness information
  - c. They had been exposed to a lot of nutrition and fitness misinformation
  - d. Sports coaches had provided nutrition and fitness information

ANSWERS:  
1.a, 2.c, 3.b, 4.b