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California Leadership Council

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Local Edition

Parents Lead the Way to Combat Childhood Obesity

Local volunteer inspires others to improve children's health and futures

Across America, childhood obesity has reached epidemic rates and, as a result, this generation of children may live shorter lives than their parents. Nearly one-third of children in America are overweight or obese—a rate that has tripled in adolescents and more than doubled in younger children since 1980.

Youth in Compton, California are no exception. Nearly three out of 10 local children are obese, and only about one-third get the recommended minimum amount of physical activity each week.

The issues of childhood obesity and school nutrition have recently burst into the national spotlight, especially with the attention of the First Lady.

In February, Michelle Obama launched the "Let's Move" campaign designed to end childhood obesity in a single generation by helping parents become better informed about nutrition and exercise, improving the quality of food in schools, making healthy foods more affordable and accessible for families, and increasing the focus on physical education.

In March, more than 7.5 million people watched Jamie Oliver's "Food Revolution" on TV, which follows the British chef in his quest to improve nutrition in Huntington, WV, statistically the most obese and unhealthy town in America.

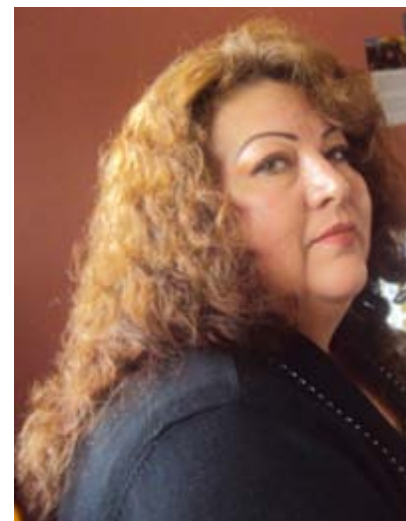
But for almost two years, on a much smaller—but just as important—stage, parents in Compton have served as ambassadors of change on behalf of children in the local school district by advocating for healthier options and greater compliance in the school food environment through INMED's Food for Thought program.



The parents and community leaders of Food for Thought, in conjunction with participants in Take Charge!, INMED's obesity and diabetes family case management program, meet twice a month to plan their next steps in combating childhood obesity and its effects, such as diabetes, depression, asthma and hypertension.

Many of these parent leaders have joined efforts to promote better nutrition in their children's schools, through activities such as serving students fruits and vegetables at "refueling stations" during recess time, and recognizing schools that encourage healthy activities as a part of Food for Thought's "Caught Being Healthy" initiative. Several parents have also joined a new School Wellness Task Force Committee spearheaded by the school district's Nutrition Services Office.

Volunteer Juanita Garnica joined Food for Thought at a time when she was recovering from her own health issues. "I joined this group because I really



Parent volunteer Juanita Garnica is leading Compton's children and families on the path toward better health and nutrition.

"I see the obese children and it breaks my heart. I know that we can turn this around as a community."

**— Juanita Garnica,
Compton parent leader**

care about the children in the community," she says. "I have grandchildren and I know my own family needs to change our ways so they can have a better life."

Since joining the group, she has incorporated the community organizing principles and healthy eating strategies she has learned in the semimonthly Food for Thought meetings into a complete lifestyle overhaul. Garnica's focus is reducing obesity on the community level—one person at a time. She now makes physical activity and healthy eating a regular part of her life. "My energy is improved and I don't get tired as early as I used to," she says.

As Food for Thought activity leader, she started a walking club and has recruited parents from the local park to join her on the path to wellness. "I see the obese children and it breaks my heart. I know that we can turn this around as a community."

Her family believes in the project so much that her son offered his talents to create the Food for Thought program logo (see above).

Garnica also shares recipes for healthy eating as a featured columnist in Food for Thought's monthly newsletter. At a recent Food for Thought meeting, she taught parents to make her newest recipe, *ceviche de soya* (soy ceviche)—see her recipe on the right.

In the past month, Garnica has lost eight pounds by taking daily walks and incorporating more vegetables into the foods she loves. She shows no signs of slowing down—and is always looking for someone new to join her on the road toward better health.

Ceviche de Soya

3 cups water
2 bay leaves
3 cups dehydrated soy meat
5 Roma tomatoes, finely chopped
¾ cup onion, finely chopped
½ cup cilantro, finely chopped
2 medium cucumbers, finely chopped
½ cup **fresh** lemon juice
¼ cup fresh orange juice
1 teaspoon salt

Directions:

In medium saucepan, bring water and bay leaves to boil; remove from heat and remove bay leaves. Stir in soy meat. Let set for 20 minutes. Strain excess water from soy (squeeze the soy to remove excess liquid or use paper towel).

In large mixing bowl, combine soy, chopped tomatoes, chopped onions, chopped cilantro and cucumbers. Mix until well combined. Stir in lemon and orange juices and salt. Refrigerate 2 or more hours to let the citrus marinate the soy. Serve in appetizer portions.



I need a Mentor!

Debbie is a 13-year-old African American teenager. She originally signed up with the program a little over 2 years ago. She's been matched twice, but both times the match ended prematurely when the mentors were unable to fulfill the commitment. So we're looking for that "3rd time's a charm" mentor for her!!

Debbie lives in a foster home with her guardian, an elderly woman with limited physical mobility. Debbie says she wants to "experience adventures," and she enjoys going to the circus and movies. She also likes music, drawing and science experiments. She also enjoys being active by playing basketball and tennis.

Despite how her first two matches have ended, Debbie still has hopes of finding that perfect mentor, one who will be consistently in her life. Are you that special friend Debbie has been waiting for?

Spend one hour a week to help a child or teen at risk beat the odds against them and build a brighter future. Visit us at www.inmed.org/mentoring.htm or on [Facebook](#), contact program coordinator Sedreana Saldaña at 310-764-0955 ext. 127, e-mail ssaldana@inmed.org, or download our [mentoring overview](#) to learn more.

For confidentiality purposes her name has been changed



About INMED Partnerships for Children

INMED Partnerships for Children is an international humanitarian development organization. Since 1986, INMED has built alliances with public- and private-sector partners in more than 100 countries to rescue children from the immediate and

irreversible harm of disease, hunger, abuse, neglect or violence, and to prepare them to shape a brighter future for themselves and the next generation.

Together with our partners, INMED is transforming the future for hundreds of thousands of children and their family and community members in the U.S., Latin America and the Caribbean, and southern Africa by:

- Securing children's health, development and safety
- Developing skills, knowledge and opportunities for children and youth
- Building family and community capacity to support and sustain positive change

For more information or to submit questions and comments, please contact Joey Shanahan, Senior Manager for Development at Joey.Shanahan@inmed.org.

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