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Leadership

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"As citizens of this democracy, you are the rulers and the ruled, the law-givers and the law-abiding..."

– Adlai E. Stevenson





BMOREFIT

Building Careers in Fitness

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In many inner-city communities, health concerns such as diabetes, heart disease, and obesity run rampant. Meanwhile, parks and bike paths are scant, and healthful grocery stores even more scarce.

Fitness and wellness professional Jon A. Kaplan received an Open Society Institute fellowship to teach young people to adopt healthier lifestyles with a program he calls Baltimore Fitness Academy (or BMOREFIT, for short). He is partnering with YO! Baltimore, an initiative of the Mayor's Office of Employment Development.

Twelve students were selected to be part of the pilot program and participate in a six month academy based out of Meadow Mill Athletic Club. During the program, participants learned the basics of physical fitness – strength training, cardiovascular training, weightlifting and nutrition. They also studied anatomy, physiology and kinesiology. For all that, they were paid an hourly wage.

But after the Academy trained and certified them, they learned so much more.

For starters, they have picked up the business skills such as marketing, branding and customer service – as well as the interpersonal skills – to become successful fitness entrepreneurs in the future. "They leave with a better understanding of what is available in terms of careers in the fitness industry," Kaplan says, pointing to such jobs as personal trainer, group fitness instructor, or community fitness ambassador.

Equally as important, the Academy trainees will be able to communicate about healthy living to people in their communities, starting what Kaplan hopes will be a new cycle of physical fitness and healthful eating. "They learn to live a healthier lifestyle," he states, "and then reach out to other people within their community about the importance of taking care of your body proactively and treating your body well so it will treat you well."

Kaplan, who was recently voted "Best Personal Trainer" by *Baltimore Magazine*, has found that his true passion in life is motivating others to live healthier lifestyles. What started as a fun pastime soon became a way of life; Kaplan developed a love for working out and taking care of his body. When he moved from Pennsylvania to Baltimore to sell billboard ad space, he taught aerobics part-time at the Downtown Athletic Club. A year later, he quit the billboard and communications businesses altogether and took up fitness full-time.

Working with the BMOREFIT Academy is the perfect fit for Kaplan. "It allows me to utilize skills I have learned from 24 years in the fitness industry, combined with my marketing and communications background, to promote a healthy lifestyle," he says. "But the best part is seeing the transformations that take place. A lot of people don't get that in their jobs. When you see someone who transforms their life, it changes yours."

To date, six of the students have received their Personal Training certification through the YMCA. "The partnerships that we have established with the "Y", Merritt Athletic Clubs, Maryland Athletic Club, Brick Bodies and local personal trainers who serve as the faculty of BMOREFIT have been wonderful. When you see the community pitching in to create such wonderful change it makes you want to give back more," states Greg Freitag, Exercise Physiologist for the Johns Hopkins Weight Management Center who helps to coordinate the faculty for BMOREFIT.

Kenneth Smith, a student of the program, has experienced a life changing transformation. "Not only have I lost 30 pounds – I have gained the skills and motivation to make healthier choices in my life! I am so grateful to the faculty of BMOREFIT and the staff of Meadow Mill Athletic club for allowing us to be in their club!"