



KAPLAN

NONPROFIT TEACHES YOUTH TO 'bMOREfit'

By Melanie R. Holmes, AFRO Staff Writer

The following article appeared in *The Baltimore Afro-American* on January 9, 2010. It is used here with permission from the Afro-American Newspaper Archives and Research Center. bMOREfit is the project of 2008 Baltimore Community Fellow, Jon Kaplan. Students in the program were recruited from YO! Baltimore, an initiative of the Mayor's Office of Employment Development.



Jon Kaplan's dream became reality when his vision to diminish gang violence developed into bMOREfit, a nonprofit program for at-risk youth. He sought to create a positive alternative for teens in danger of causing harm to themselves or their peers by transforming the lives of high school drop-outs through fitness training.

"Steering people away from violence, I put together this program," Kaplan said. "It was successful to the point where we started our own nonprofit after a year."

In October 2007, Kaplan received funding through the Open Society Institute to found bMOREfit, a six-month program that teaches participants the basics of physical fitness, nutrition, strength training, cardiovascular training, weight lifting and also introduces them to anatomy, physiology and kinesiology.

Kenneth Smith, 18, lost 50 lbs during the completion of bMOREfit, a nonprofit organization for at-risk youth and is now an instructor at a YMCA. (Courtesy Photo)



Participants also take classes to complete their GED, receive job training and are paid minimum wage to attend all program requirements. The program began in March 2008 with 10 participants, four of which left the program early on.

Kenneth Smith, 18, is one of Kaplan's first success stories after losing 50 pounds. He is now a certified fitness trainer and is on his way to becoming an instructor at a local YMCA.

"I wanted to be more healthy and live a long life," Smith said. "Before, I used to eat out of boredom, snack while walking... Now, I drink a lot of water... I love salad and I don't eat fast food anymore."

Not quite at his goal of 200 pounds of solid muscle, Smith does a lot of cardio and advises others who desire to lose weight to work out but don't overdo it.

"If you're tired, take a break," he said. "Don't hurt yourself. Ask people for help if you need it."

Running the program has been one of the greatest challenges of Kaplan's life, but also one of the most "amazing" experiences. He is particularly proud of Smith, who he said is "a really smart kid," but also of the other five participants.

The organization will be recruiting its second group of youth in March.

"It's just been such a wonderful experience for them because they were exposed to some of the best and brightest trainers in the industry," Kaplan said. "You really saw them grow mentally and physically."

For more information, log on to www.bmorefit.org