



JUNIOR LEAGUES' *KIDS IN THE KITCHEN* BACKGROUND

Junior Leagues' *Kids in the Kitchen* is an Association-wide initiative of The Association of Junior Leagues International (AJLI) designed to help communities address the urgent issues surrounding childhood obesity and poor nutrition. Launched in 2006 by Junior Leagues in over 225 communities in four countries, the program is now in its third year. Junior Leagues are committed to improving the health of today's youth by empowering them to make choices that lead to healthy lifestyles. The initiative illustrates the power of voluntarism to address community needs on both the grassroots and international levels.

Recognition of the need for the **Junior Leagues' *Kids in the Kitchen*** program is apparent to community leaders in healthcare and receives substantial attention in the media. This attention is focused on alarming statistics related to the percentages of overweight and obese children and adolescents in all four countries where Leagues exist, and the fact that these youth have increased chances of developing health problems such as Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol.

Educating both children and their families is key to reversing the trend toward increased levels of childhood obesity. The **Junior Leagues' *Kids in the Kitchen*** initiative aims to make an impact in this area by educating the public at the grassroots level regarding solutions that they might adopt. Junior Leagues across the Association provide lessons and demonstrations related to preparation of healthy meals and snacks that are both tasty and affordable. Leagues conduct the education program in partnership with local community organizations in order to raise awareness and provide solutions for this growing problem. Events range from partnering with local chefs who give cooking demonstrations in schools and community centers to hands-on grocery store tours that show kids and their parents' nutritious and affordable ways to select recipe ingredients and maintain a healthy lifestyle. The Association of Junior Leagues International provide materials to support the success of these activities and also continues to distribute recipes and tips on nutrition on a website, which is <http://kidsinthekitchen.ajli.org>.

To date, the **Junior Leagues' *Kids in the Kitchen*** initiative has reached over 200 million people through media coverage with messages and materials that promote healthy lifestyles for youth. In addition, thousands of youth have participated in hands-on educational activities in their local communities. Program activities focus around March, which is National Nutrition Month in the U.S. and Canada, with support from Cartoon Network, which enhances the reach and quality of the program in the form of televised public service announcements and interactive web materials. The initiative's work to change eating habits fits into Cartoon Network's Get Animated program, which also promotes exercise and the goal to restore recess in schools.

Key to the impact of the initiative is the ***Kids in the Kitchen*** website, which includes fitness and nutrition tips from ***Kids in the Kitchen*** program partners the United States

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Department of Agriculture (USDA), American Dietetic Association (ADA), Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA), National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute and many more! The ***Kids in the Kitchen*** website also includes a virtual recipe collection from celebrity chefs, local restaurateurs, celebrity moms and nutrition experts, designed to teach young children healthy eating habits at an early age. These recipes are available in electronic and downloadable formats on the new website, <http://kidsinthekitchen.ajli.org>. The recipe collection and website launched in March, 2006.

The **Junior Leagues' *Kids in the Kitchen*** program continues a heritage of impact Junior Leagues have had on family nutrition over the past 105 years. For example, in the early 1900s, the Junior League of Brooklyn successfully petitioned the Board of Education to provide free lunches in city schools, and created a model for school lunches everywhere. During the Depression, many Leagues opened milk stations, nutrition centers and soup kitchens. In the 1980s the Junior League of Oklahoma City participated in a community-wide project, the Harvest II food drive, which collected 275,000 pounds of food. This was the nation's most successful food drive at that time. And in the 1990s, the Junior Leagues of Calgary and Edmonton developed a program to teach cooking to children as part of an after school effort for latchkey kids.

The Association of Junior Leagues International is an organization of over 165,000 women in 293 Leagues in four countries (Canada, Mexico, the United Kingdom and the United States). With their combined efforts to bring recipes and nutrition tips to children and their families across four countries, the Junior Leagues intend to help address the rapid rise of childhood obesity. Education is the first step to making a lasting change in our children's future.