

UAB MINORITY HEALTH & HEALTH DISPARITIES
RESEARCH CENTER

The University of Alabama at Birmingham

A University-Wide Interdisciplinary
Research Center Since 2005



**GROWING
COMMUNITY**

2019 edition

A Word from Dr. Mona Fouad

2019 has proven to be one of the most exciting years in recent memory for the Minority Health & Health Disparities Research Center. Building on the foundation that we established in 2002, as we've forged community relationships, pursued meaningful research, and offered training, we've been able to expand our reach beyond anything we could have imagined. Initial relationships with international partners in Egypt and the United Kingdom have deepened into ongoing initiatives with wide-ranging global impact on health. Thousands of students of all educational levels have benefitted from a wealth of training initiatives. Our research has provided unprecedented insight into the myriad factors impacting minority health and health disparities. And this year - we're reaching the community as never before.

In May, we were deeply honored to be named the recipients of UAB's inaugural Grand Challenge for our proposal: "Healthy Alabama 2030: Live HealthSmart." Our goal is ambitious - we plan to move Alabama out of the bottom 10 in national health rankings by the year 2030. The problem of poor health is both thorny and multifaceted, and will require unprecedented collaboration and innovation.

We could not be more excited.

Thanks to a wealth of partnerships and the long-lasting relationships we already enjoy in so many Alabama communities, as well as remarkable support within UAB, we believe that we are equal to the challenge. We envision an Alabama that will serve as a model of health not only to the nation, but to the world. We strive toward a state in which every child born has the same opportunity to live a long, healthy, fruitful life. We work for a brighter future for our state, and we believe that it is within our grasp.

This challenge will require dedication and commitment from all of us - for this is not only an MHRC initiative, this is an initiative for all of us, everywhere. This is about our health, this is about our hopes, this is about our future. We're embracing the challenge, together, starting now.

Mona Fouad



MHRC Staff

Mona Fouad, MD, MPH

Director, MHRC
Senior Associate Dean for Diversity & Inclusion
UAB School of Medicine
Professor and Director,
Division of Preventive Medicine

Will Anderson, PhD

Director, Research

Theresa Wallace, PhD

Program Director
Live HealthSmart Alabama

Tiffany Osborne

Director, Community Engagement

Kimberly Speights

Program Administrator,
Community Engagement

Ann Smith, MPH

Director, Training

Dawn Fizer

Program Manager, Training

KaShunti Farmer

Program Administrator, Training

Susan J. Driggers

Director, Communications

Laura Heider, MBA

Program Manager, Diversity and Inclusion
Writer, Graphic Designer

Randi Gilinson

Assistant to the Director

Hannah Bae

Intern

Graphic design and layout: Laura Heider



2

Embracing the Challenge



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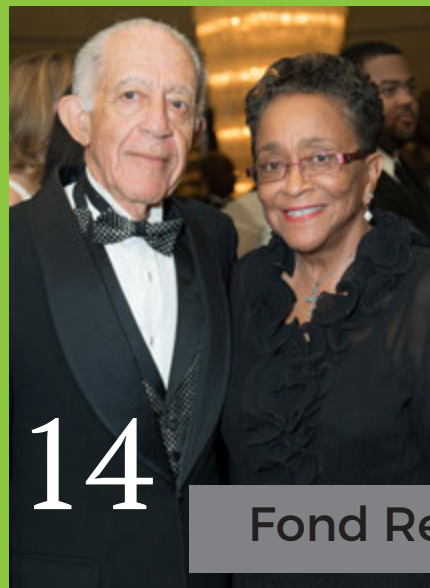
Grand Challenge
Grand Partnership

MHRC UAB Minority Health & Health Disparities Research Center



10

Voices from the
COMMUNITY



14

Fond Remembrance



17

A Healthy Happy Kid
Gives Back



18

Growing a Legacy:
MAVERICKS



20

Harlem in the 'Ham



EMBRACING THE CHALLENGE

by Laura Heider

For 17 years, the Minority Health & Health Disparities Research Center has been tackling problems which resist simple answers.

Which perfectly positioned the MHRC to answer a Grand Challenge – with a Grand Solution.

UAB's aspiration was both broad and sweeping: innovate a solution to an intractable societal problem. This "Grand Challenge," a key component of Forging the Future, UAB's strategic plan, was initiated in order to encourage a UAB team to tackle an ambitious goal with the aim of transforming a key area of public life. By definition, a grand challenge deals with an issue that is large, complex, and varied, requiring a combination of approaches and collaboration across siloes. The solution to this problem would impact not only a large number of individuals, but society as a whole. The intention was not only to capture public imagination, but also to build support for meaningful policies and investments, and serve as "North Stars" for interdisciplinary collaboration and innovation.

Mona Fouad, M.D., MPH, Director of the UAB Minority Health & Health Disparities Research Center (MHRC), and her team of researchers and community specialists at the MHRC already had two decades of experience in addressing complex and difficult issues when the inaugural UAB Grand Challenge was announced.

The Grand Challenge's initial call for proposals garnered 77 entries, drawing in hundreds of individuals and representing dozens of departments, schools, and organizations. This large pool was ultimately narrowed down to six finalists.



In May, 2019, a single winner was announced: Fouad’s proposal, “Healthy Alabama 2030: Live HealthSmart,” was awarded the entirety of the \$2.7 million grant.

The project’s goal is epic in scope: to move Alabama out of the bottom 10 in national health rankings, and into the 30s, by 2030.

Alabama’s health numbers are grim and well-known: the state ranks 48th in the incidence of diabetes, 49th in stroke, and 49th in cardiovascular deaths. This is linked to the state’s poor ranking in health behaviors: Alabama is 4th from the bottom in the country in obesity, and 6th from the bottom in both physical activity and vegetable consumption.

These numbers aren’t new for Fouad and her team. High rates of death and disease and diminished health outcomes disproportionately affect those who already struggle with added social burdens: minority racial and/or ethnic status, those in poverty, and those with lower

levels of educational attainment. Drawing upon rigorous research and comprehensive community engagement, the MHRC has worked diligently to create effective and impactful interventions since its founding in 2002.

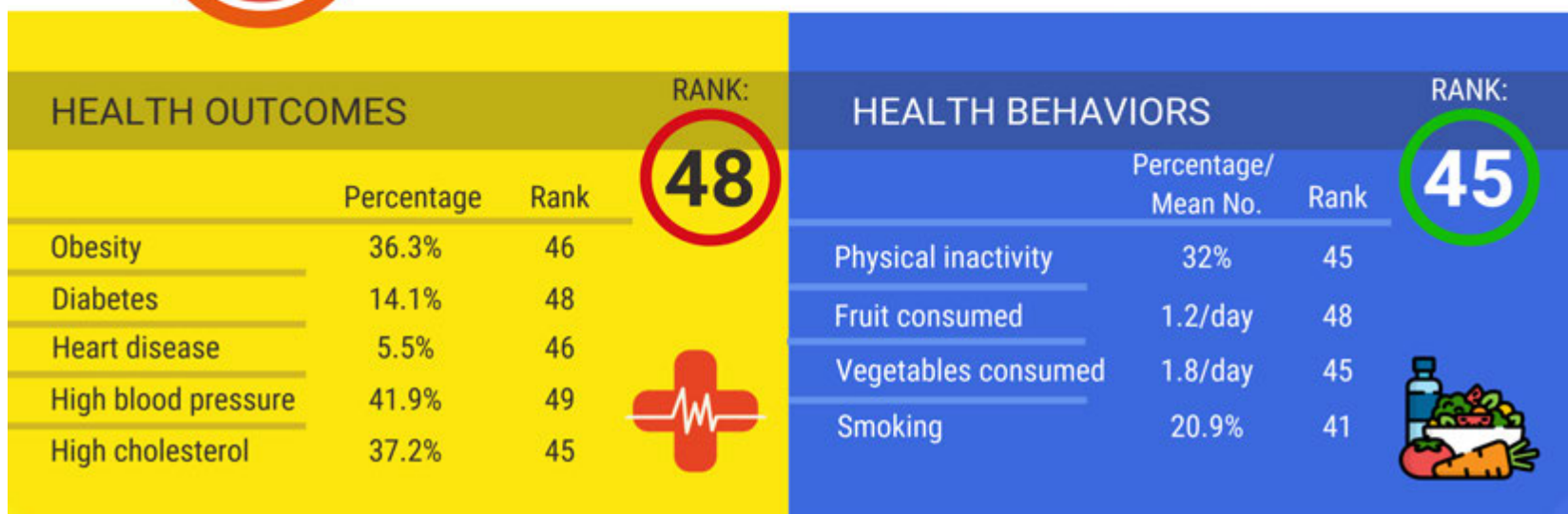
Small Beginnings

When Mona Fouad first embarked on what was to become a career-long endeavor to transform the health of those struggling with disproportionate health burdens, she was working as a research fellow at UAB. Part of the team working on a grant from the National Institutes of Health, she had launched health education classes for Birmingham city sanitation workers, who suffered disproportionately from high blood pressure.

Fouad had reserved a room at the Birmingham Public Library for conducting the afternoon classes. There was only one problem: nobody was coming.



48 OVERALL HEALTH RANKING





Undaunted, Fouad spoke to the sanitation office supervisor, who told her that exhausted workers, who began their shifts at 4:00 in the morning, were unlikely to leave the work site in the afternoon for a class. So Fouad began holding the classes in the cramped break room of their offices. The health education classes were so successful, and Fouad’s relationships with the men and women she worked with so meaningful, that this endeavor was the subject of an American Heart Association documentary.

Sheer tenacity earned Fouad a place in the communities she was hoping to reach; she was determined to overcome any obstacles that arose. When she first visited one of the economically marginalized neighborhoods in Birmingham in the hopes of launching a community partnership, a door was literally closed in her face. With implacable spirit, she opened the door again to ask, “Can I come back some other time?”

She did return, and another long-lasting community partnership was forged.

Community Relationships: Building from a Powerful Foundation

The MHRC discovered the importance of engaging community on its terms early in its operations. One of the early projects involved trying to develop an effective way to encourage minority women to

attend regular breast and cervical cancer screenings. Distrustful of the medical establishment and largely without access to regular health care, racial and ethnic minority women in rural areas of Alabama were not receiving potentially life-saving screenings.

“We realized that the essential factor was trust,” said Mona Fouad. “Without trust, we had no chance of improving the rate of screenings and the health outcomes for these women.”

This key realization spurred the development of what would become a cornerstone program for the MHRC: the creation of Community Health Advisors (CHAs). CHAs were “natural helpers” who were recruited from the community to serve as ambassadors for health interventions. They received training and support from the MHRC, and were instrumental in encouraging their friends and neighbors to be screened for cancer.

By the time the intervention concluded, black women were being screened at a higher rate than white women. For women who tested positive for cancer, a new initiative was developed: the Patient Navigator program, in which a cancer patient was paired with an experienced professional who could help guide them through the often labyrinthine healthcare system.

Fouad recalled one young woman speaking about her experience with the Patient Navigation program. The young single mother had been diagnosed with breast cancer, and was being shepherded through the care



process by Patient Navigators. Fouad remembered: “She said, ‘What people don’t understand is that if you have breast cancer and you’re a single mom, you can end up homeless. This program saved me. Not only did you get me treatment, you helped me keep my home, my job, and my family.’”

The guiding value of meeting and working with the community on their own terms has informed much of the MHRC’s operations over the years. Because of this, when Joanice Thompson, former Director of Community Engagement for the MHRC, launched the “Building Healthy Communities” initiative under Fouad’s direction in 2006, she wasn’t sure what form it would take. Birmingham’s urban sprawl included 99 neighborhoods, clustered into 23 communities; after forming a 26-member coalition representing all walks of the community, Thompson and her team asked the following three questions: first, were they interested in the health of their community? If so, what did they want to do about the health of their community?

The coalition came up with a list, ranging from access to healthcare, to eyeglasses for school children, to environmental spillage from major plants. “The community led the way,” Thompson remembered, “and UAB provided support.”

West End, Norwood, Fountain Heights, Bessemer, Eastlake, and Kingston are some of the Birmingham neighborhoods touched by the MHRC’s community engagement. Now, with the addition of Orrville, outside of Selma, and Prichard, near Mobile, the “Building Healthy Communities” program spans the state.

The MHRC is also an anchor partner for the Birmingham Housing Authority’s “Campus of Hope,” a center which offers resources to public housing residents in Mark’s Village and several other public housing communities nearby. Long recognized as one of the Birmingham area’s most economically disadvantaged areas, residents of these targeted public housing communities have experienced challenges related to education, economic mobility, and health.

The Campus of Hope serves as a point of connection between public housing residents and healthcare delivery, as well as other factors impacting health, such as job training. Serving roughly 3,000 public housing residents and other non-housing members of the community, Campus of Hope’s goal is to offer a pathway to improved health and self-sufficiency.





Tiffany Osborne is the MHRC's Director of Community Engagement. In her role, she manages everything from local health screenings to after-school health interventions, such as the "Healthy Happy Kids" program that has been educating school-aged children about exercise and nutrition for more than a decade. Much of her role involves encouraging local engagement, and identifying areas in which the MHRC can provide much-needed support and reinforcement.

Four of the communities with which the MHRC has cultivated a relationship will serve as the initial Demonstration Zones for the Grand Challenge: Eastlake, Ensley/Bush Hills, Kingston/Woodlawn, and Titusville. In these areas, existing connections will be deepened and new ones formed as dialogue is opened with local businesses, schools, faith-based organizations, and community and local governmental organizations.

Schools, businesses, and other organizations will be equipped with the criteria to earn a "Live HealthSmart Alabama" designation. These sites can earn the designation through targeted interventions dealing with physical activity, good nutrition, and prevention and wellness. Walkability will be enhanced through improvement of green spaces and an increase in the number of trails and safe walking areas; initiatives to combat blight will be instituted; community gardens will be developed and expanded; access to farmer's markets and healthy food will be improved; special incentives will be put in place for companies that meet wellness requirements. These measures in general, and the process of earning the "Live HealthSmart Alabama" designation in particular, will

empower communities to take charge of their own health and wellness, and provide meaningful tools to ensure success.

"For many years, we've understood that if the problem is in the community, the solution can be found in the community," Fouad explained. "We will solicit insight and feedback as we move forward with communities as full partners in this process. This approach has led us to great success in the past, and we will rely on the wisdom of communities moving forward."

Rigorous Research

The Minority Health & Health Disparities Research Center (MHRC) has always relied on a foundation of solid and verifiable scientific data in order to inform its initiatives. One of the ways in which this research has been conducted is through the work of research centers which include scholars from across numerous disciplines. One such center was the Mid-South Transdisciplinary Collaborative Center (Mid-South TCC), an initiative funded by the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities.

Bringing together six states, three academic institutions, and more than 100 community partners, the Mid-South TCC spearheaded and funded collaborative projects throughout the mid-south region. These research endeavors led to myriad insights about the ways in which targeted interventions can best assist marginalized communities, and offered a wealth of research to the body of knowledge about health disparities.

Over its six-year existence, the Mid-South TCC funded many community pilot projects, but its signature regional community engagement project brought into focus the MHRC's underlying philosophy that the community has the wisdom to help innovate solutions to its chronic challenges. Mayors Mentoring Mayors (3M), a project initially developed by the Arkansas Coalition on Obesity Prevention (ArCOP), advances a model in which the mayors of towns throughout the country lead the way to building innovative, healthy communities.

Through sharing their ideas with, and mentoring, other mayors, leaders in the 3M project were able to impact communities in other states and regions. From small beginnings in Arkansas in 2013, launched under the leadership of Katrina Betancourt, PhD, ArCOP's chair, 3M ultimately boasted an online toolkit for mayors, and the program expanded to Alabama, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee.

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People want to know, 'How can I transform my community into one where healthy living is the easy, default choice?' . . . If we do it effectively, we can truly make a difference.

Theresa Wallace, Ph.D.



Through the Mid-South TCC and two other center grants, the Gulf States Health Policy Center (GSHPC) and the Center for Healthy African American Men through Partnerships (CHAAMPS), the MHRC has developed a pipeline of scholars to study and research interventions for tackling health disparities. From exploring the causes and impact of violence, to examining differential cancer rates, health disparities researchers are exploring the multitude of factors impacting the different health outcomes among marginalized groups in the United States.

The initiatives implemented under the framework of a series of grants administered through the Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) program at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. REACH is a national program, and through grant awards endeavors to reduce racial and ethnic health disparities. Through REACH grant funding, the MHRC was able to initiate and cultivate powerful community connections and launch initiatives such as Parks Rx, which offers exercise prescriptions through physicians at a number of clinics, including the Jefferson County Department of Health.

Looking Forward

“If we are to change the health standing of the state of Alabama,” said Mona Fouad, “it will require a comprehensive, dedicated effort. We are all interconnected;

none of us exists in isolation. When we boost the health of the communities that need it the most, everyone benefits.”

The MHRC’s mission and lengthy track record of research and collaboration placed it in a unique position to assemble to more than 90 partners on the UAB Grand Challenge team, from business leaders to government representatives to educational leaders, and many more. More than this, the MHRC’s extensive experience in leveraging the particular genius of communities to solve their biggest challenges provides an invaluable foundation to fulfill the lofty vision of the Grand Challenge.

Theresa Wallace, Ph.D., serves as the Program Director for “Live HealthSmart Alabama,” and has worked with Fouad and the MHRC for 17 years. She has been leading local discussions dealing with the hopes and desires of communities for their own health.

“People talked about modifying the built environment so physical activity is easier or more accessible, changing the food environment to promote good nutrition, and transforming the health care setting to facilitate prevention and wellness,” Wallace said. “People want to know, ‘How can I transform my community into one where healthy living is the easy, default choice? How can I proactively take my health into my own hands?’ If we do it effectively, which we’ve done in the past, we can truly make a difference.”





Grand Challenge, Grand Partnership

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I'm here to offer the Mayor's voice in making sure that [the Grand Challenge] reaches the masses and the people that it's intended to impact.

**Birmingham Mayor
Randall Woodfin**

by Laura Heider

The Grand Challenge is forging grand partnerships in Alabama – partnerships which already span more than 90 organizations on the community, academic, and governmental levels.

Most recently, the Minority Health & Health Disparities Research Center (MHRC) is partnering with Birmingham Mayor Randall Woodfin and his office in order to bring the initiatives planned by the Grand Challenge – improving good nutrition, physical activity, and prevention and wellness in Birmingham and the surrounding areas – to fruition. Mayor Woodfin has made improving the health of Birmingham residents a priority, which supports and reinforces the objectives of the MHRC in general and the Grand Challenge in particular.

“I fundamentally believe that, with any issue that faces our citizens, there are more solutions than there are problems,” said Woodfin. “The work that the MHRC is already doing is improving the lives of our residents. In my role as mayor, I am supposed to amplify the work that you're doing. The MHRC has done a lot of heavy lifting for a lot of years – you already have the message. I'm here to offer the Mayor's voice in making sure that this reaches the masses and the people it's intended to impact.”

VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY

Bessemer

Bessemer is southwest of Birmingham, with a population of 23,000. The Building Healthy Communities coalition was established in 2018, with a focus on **communication, educating residents about wellness and preventive care, and bridging the intergenerational gap.**

Accomplishments include:

- The Bessemer Healthy Jam, a city-wide health fair which provided free health screenings, healthy foods, and information on healthy lifestyles. Plans are underway for Bessemer Healthy Jam 2020.
- The largest class of Healthy Happy Kids to date, with 89 children, held at the Legacy YMCA in October 2018.
- A partnership with the Bessemer Recreation Center, which is giving Bessemer children increased access to physical activity.



“The MHRC has made it easy for us to come together as neighbors and rally around some big issues . . . We all knew what the problems were, but we were overwhelmed by how to get started. The MHRC was the network that helped us connect all of the important things.”

Dominique Villanueva, Fountain Heights

Fountain Heights

Fountain Heights is a 1,188 square foot community inside the City of Birmingham, with 873 residents. The coalition was established in 2018 with 15 members - representing residents, city officials, community partners, and interested stakeholders- who identified three issues affecting community health: **access to healthy food, community pride, and healthy children and families.**

Accomplishments include:

- A partnership with the Community Food Bank, whose Mobile Grocery Market makes monthly visits to Fountain Heights, offering fresh fruits and vegetables, meats, dairy, and pantry items at wholesale prices.
- In spring of 2018, Healthy Happy Kids was implemented at Tuggle Elementary School, where 30 students learned how to live healthier lives.
- Through a new partnership with the Fountain Heights Farm, the coalition will install a water collection system and a produce preparation station, increasing the amount of fresh produce that farmers can grow, harvest, and deliver to neighbors in need.



Kingston

Kingston has 11,539 residents. The coalition identified **improving communication** and **relationships with each other, opportunities for children, and violence prevention and safety** as its key issues.

Accomplishments include:

- The first initiative was producing a fun “Get To Know Your Neighbor Day” for over 300 people in 2016.
- Almost 85 of Kingston’s children participated in Healthy Happy Kids at Independent Presbyterian Church’s Fresh Air Farm and learned healthy living tools.
- MHRC is a major partner at the Campus of Hope, a social service hub for residents of five public housing communities.
- The coalition developed the Richard Ireland Pigford Memorial Kingston Teaching Farm with assistance from community partners, such as ArchitectureWorks, Birmingham Botanical Gardens and the Jefferson County Cooperative Extension.
- A group of boys ages 11-14 recently graduated from MAVERICKS, a violence prevention research study, led by Determined 2 Be Mentoring and Leadership Program, as well as researchers from the MHRC.



“ This health program has been a blessing from God for this community. We are so grateful to the MHRC and all of our partners . . . It’s changing the community a whole lot. They never had a health clinic down here that’s free. This helps so much. We’re helping people get the medical care that they need, helping them get the medications that they need.

Brenda Collins, Orrville



Orrville

Orrville is a rural community, outside of Selma, in Alabama’s Black Belt. The coalition was established in 2019 and is focusing its efforts on **increased access to medical service, more options for physical activity, and education and communication.**

Accomplishments include:

- A partnership with Selma and Dallas County United Way and the UAB Family Practice Medical Residency Program in Selma, which established the “Doc on the Spot” free monthly health clinic for residents of Orrville, offering free medical services for uninsured residents.
- Coalition members are planning improvements to an existing green space, adding a walking trail and playground, since the nearest playground is a 40-minute drive away.



Prichard

Prichard is outside of Mobile with a population of 22,000. The Coalition was established in 2019. The Mayor hopes that the coalition will act as an enabling platform to coordinate existing services and bring in new partners and resources to improve the health of Prichard. Key issues for the coalition include: **increased access to fruits and vegetables, programs for seniors, programs for children, and increased communication.**

Accomplishments include:

- In the spring of 2019, the WALK! Feel Alive community walking program was introduced at the ribbon cutting for a revitalized community trail.
- Healthy Happy Kids was introduced to 65 children participating in the city's summer enrichment program for children. Notably, 40 volunteers from the community were trained to implement the program, demonstrating their commitment to investing back in the community and the next generation.
- The newest project of the coalition is the construction of a new raised-bed community garden at Rebel Road Park.



“ We’ve been doing a lot with the MHRC, which has been very helpful to the city. We’ve done a walking trail, and we’re working on a community garden that would be open to everyone. We’re most excited about Healthy Happy Kids. Some of the kids in the program had never heard about healthy eating . . . We’ve really enjoyed having the MHRC here with us. ”

Grenetta Ward, Prichard





“ Kingston is a nice place. We have good people living in this area. I enjoy the help the MHRC is giving us here in Kingston - I am seeing good things happen in our community. I appreciate what they're doing to help us, and I'm hoping that there will be more things done in our area. The most exciting thing about this is getting those two gardens. They're helping our kids.

Juanita Foster, Kingston



The OHDR Building Healthy Communities Coalitions are supported by funding from the NIMHD (U54MD00502).

FOND REMEMBRANCE

The last two years witnessed the loss of two remarkable individuals whose contributions to the MHRC will be forever treasured.

Richard I. Pigford: Architect, Leader, Friend

by Hannah Bae

His renowned architectural career and innovative designs were noted throughout the Birmingham community and beyond. However, if Richard I. “Dick” Pigford had to be described in two words, it would likely be community servant—he was well known for his philanthropic nature and services.

Pigford volunteered with various community organizations and institutions throughout his life, including the UAB Minority Health & Health Disparities Research Center (MHRC). His participation with the Center began in 2016, when it expanded the Building Healthy Communities (BHC) Programs. BHC Coalitions, a partnership between local community institutions, residents, and the MHRC, build community capacity for the implementation of prevention and wellness initiatives that support improvements in minority health and health disparity. Since Pigford was already working in Kingston—a location suggested to him by former Chief of Police A.C. Roper—with Holistic Neighborhoods, his own pro bono design initiative for underserved neighborhoods in Birmingham, the connection was made.

He quickly became one of the most engaged members of the coalition. Pigford participated and was committed to various initiatives in Kingston, such as the numerous projects at the Morton Simpson Community Center and Get To Know Your Neighbor Day. He even designed,

fundraised, and assisted in negotiations with contractors for the Kingston Community Garden and the Kingston Teaching Farm. As Chairman of the Kingston Development Committee, Pigford also fundraised for many of the mentioned projects and for future developments. Recently, the Kingston Teaching Farm was renamed the Richard Ireland Pigford Memorial Kingston Teaching Farm in recognition of his efforts, support, and vision.

“Mr. Pigford was not only a member of our Kingston BHC Coalition, but also a friend,” said Tiffany Osborne, MHRC Community Engagement Director. “He was always eager to collaborate on ideas so we could continue the work of eliminating barriers for the residents in the community.”

While mostly involved in Kingston, Pigford began some work in Fountain Heights six months before his passing.

“Dick was a tremendous presence in Birmingham and surrounding communities and one that will be sorely missed,” said Dr. Mona Fouad, director of the MHRC. “We’re grateful to be able to carry on some of his many legacies and sustain the impact he made on community health.”

Pigford passed away in March 2019, leaving behind a living legacy that can be seen in the community projects he supported and generously assisted throughout his life.





Helen Shores Lee: Community Giant

by Laura Heider

Every once in a while, a visionary community leader arises, one with a passion for building bridges and crafting change in a such a way that the world is forever altered. The Honorable Judge Helen Shores Lee was one such leader.

Many Alabamians are familiar with Lee's judicial record, including her prestigious service on the Tenth Judicial Circuit Court of Alabama, where she was the first African American woman to serve in the Civil Division of the Circuit Court of Jefferson County.

Perhaps less well known is the fact that Lee fought against health disparities, working hand in hand with the Minority Health & Health Disparities Research Center (MHRC) to reach underserved communities and create programs that would have a great impact on people at greater risk for chronic disease.

When the MHRC began programming to improve health outcomes for at-risk communities, Lee was the first community leader engaged.

With Lee's help and guidance, other community health advocates were recruited and trained. Lee chaired the MHRC Community Advisory Board for 12 consecutive years, and in that capacity she not only provided essential insight to researchers, but acted as a liaison to community members who were initially distrustful of scientific interventions.

The daughter of a civil rights attorney, Lee brought her own passion for community health to the table. Together with Dr. Mona Fouad and Joance Thompson, and under the auspices of the MHRC, Lee helped develop the concept of Building

Healthy Communities – a program that now spans numerous communities throughout Alabama.

"Helen carried our message to the community," said Dr. Mona Fouad, Director of the MHRC. "Her involvement gave us validity and integrity in our approach to community members. Helen helped us move to the next level with our research. Thanks in large part to her hard work and dedication, 200 collaborations and partnerships have been developed."

Lee was an anchor of the MHRC for 16 years. When her illness began to impede everyday function, her kindness and humility led her to reach out to the MHRC to make sure that the leadership of the Community Advisory Board was secure.

Lee passed away in July, 2018, leaving both a loving family and a grateful community behind. Although this remarkable community advocate is no longer present to continue her critical work, the legacy of health she created will continue for years to come.

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The legacy of heroes is the memory of a great name and the inheritance of a great example.

Benjamin Disraeli

Healthy Happy Kids



Poor nutrition and a lack of exercise, are problems which plague many Birmingham residents, creates a host of challenges, including obesity, poor health, and chronic diseases.

Since 2008, Healthy Happy Kids, developed and implemented by the Minority Health & Health Disparities Research Center (MHRC), has been helping children learn healthy lifestyle skills.

For six weeks, children in after-school programs learn about healthy eating and staying active. HHK is an evidence-based program to provide youngsters in under-resourced communities with healthy lifestyle skills.

The hands-on curriculum, taught by UAB nutritionists and exercise physiologists, provides practical lessons for children on what their bodies need to stay healthy in a fun, interactive setting.

Childhood obesity

is a growing epidemic in the U.S., and is even more severe in

Alabama.



1/3



of Alabama's children are either overweight or obese, placing them at the top of the National obesity charts.

For African American and Hispanic children, obesity rates are even

higher.



Obesity can lead to chronic diseases such as stroke, heart disease, diabetes, and cancer, which cause devastating consequences and increased mortality.



Obese children are at increased risk for becoming obese adults.





A Healthy Happy Kid Gives Back

by Hannah Bae

At ten years old, Kelsey Johnson tried hummus for the first time. She was in fourth grade when Healthy Happy Kids (HHK), a six week after school nutrition- and exercise-based program developed by the Minority Health & Health Disparities Research Center, came to her school.

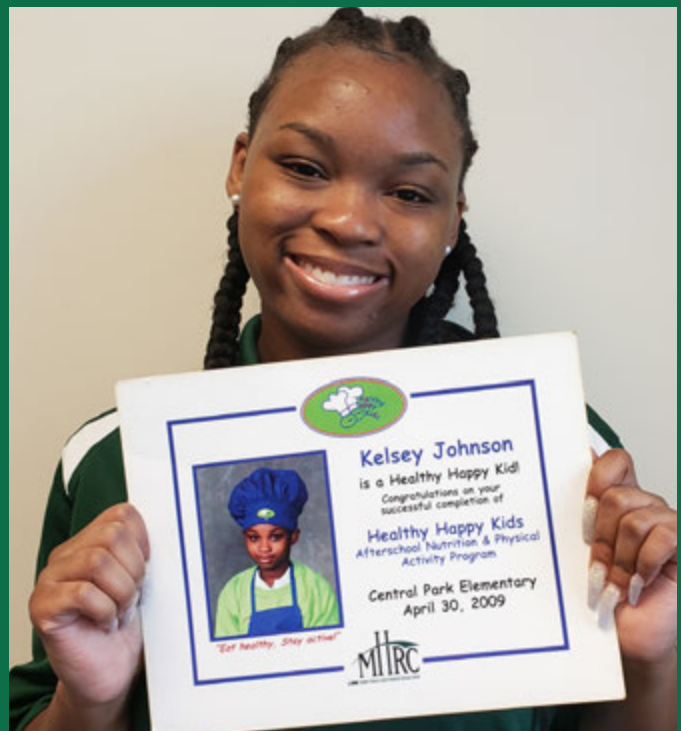
“I remember the nutrition part of the program more distinctly than the exercise portion,” said Johnson. “After school, volunteers helped us find different meals we could make and we would all be in the cafeteria making food. We received a hat and an apron at the graduation ceremony, as well as a green tee shirt that I still have.”

Recalling the program’s impact, Johnson noted, “I went from being passive to active. Before the program, my mom made dinner and I just ate it. After the program, I was suggesting things to make because I knew how to make them.”

Now a junior nursing major at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, Johnson has rejoined HHK—this time as a volunteer. Her involvement started back up when another member of the Blazer Women Mentoring & Excellence Network (BWOMEN), an on-campus student group Johnson is in, said she knew of an organization that needed volunteers.

“Hearing the name was very nostalgic since I personally went through the HHK program and have a lot of fond memories,” Johnson said. “It’s a great obesity prevention initiative that empowered me to take more ownership over my own health. I’m thrilled to have come full circle and now be in the position to help kids learn to lead healthier lives.”

Kelsey, then and now:





Growing a Legacy: MAVERICKS

by Hannah Bae

“I could’ve been in so many bad situations.”

In a clip from the night of commencement for the inaugural class of graduates, a young man can be heard talking about the personal impact of MAVERICKS: “When I was about to make a risky decision, I would think about what we learned. I kept tight on my inner self, because I could’ve been in a real bad situation—the MAVERICKS program helped me realize that, I’m telling you.”

MAVERICKS, a youth violence prevention research study, is a collaboration of the Minority Health & Health Disparities Research Center (MHRC), Determined To Be Mentoring and Leadership Program (D2B), 100 Black Men of America, Inc.,

and is funded through the Center for Healthy African American Men through Partnerships (CHAAMPS). Dr. Selwyn Vickers, Dr. James Shikany of UAB and Dr. Badri Konety of the University of Minnesota are the principal investigators.

“This program is about violence prevention, but we don’t focus on violence. We talk about how to cancel out violence, essentially social and emotional education,” said Milton King, founder of D2B and lead MAVERICKS mentor. “In many of our underserved communities, we have a social and emotional deficit, which produces frustration and violence. Limited identification of emotions prevents community members from managing their emotions—in

turn, it impacts them setting and achieving positive goals; feeling and showing empathy for others; making responsible decisions; and establishing and maintaining positive relationships.”

Every Monday for 12 weeks, MAVERICKS taught five main competencies, including self-awareness and responsible decision-making. Young men in the program also participated in community service projects in the Kingston community.

“That consistency is key,” agreed Romeo Stockett, Ph.D., president of the 100 Black Men of DeKalb County, GA chapter and CHAAMPS representative. “These kids have lives that are, to say the least, complicated. There are issues that impact their ability to engage. The



mentors' consistency is the glue which keeps the boys engaged. They know even if they'd rather not be at the meetings, Milton and the other mentors still care about them and welcome them back."

MAVERICKS was supported by the Kingston Building Healthy Communities (BHC) Coalition. Kingston is one of the five BHC Coalitions across the state, working to build community capacity for the implementation of health-related initiatives that support improvements in minority health and reduction of health disparities.

Since its formation, the Kingston Coalition has identified violence and safety as issues that community members most desired to address and recommended strategies in the action plan, such as establishing a mentoring program and organizing community improvement activities. MAVERICKS addressed several of these issues and Kingston community partners have expressed enthusiastic support of the project.

Milton said, "The MAVERICKS program wouldn't be here had it not been for the MHRC. When UAB connected with Determined to Be, a grassroots program, and came into the community... it created the perfect bridge. The momentum for MAVERICKS came from that one conversation, and I wanted to be part of the solution."

To educate himself on mentoring, Milton became a mentee himself. His mentor? Dr. Stockett.

"Meeting Milton was like meeting myself as a young man," said Stockett. "Additionally, mentoring is a very complicated relationship and at all levels. One of my roles in this project was to have conversations with Milton and his men on mentoring and make mentoring resources available."

The impact of MAVERICKS in Kingston is tangible.

"Being able to partner with local groups, such as Determined to Be, already existing in Kingston was so critical to making an impact on adolescent lives – not just in the short term, but later on in life, especially since the mentoring could continue after the official project window ended," said Yu-Mei Schoenberger, Ph.D., lead principal investigator of MAVERICKS. "We heard the boys take pride in the community activities that they accomplished during their time in MAVERICKS, as well as ownership of their love for their community and giving back."

Schoenberger hopes to return to Kingston to collect more data from participants to see the long-term impact of MAVERICKS and possibly expand the program to other communities in Birmingham.

She said, "In terms of data collection, we had such a short time with them; three months isn't very long. I'd love to visit again much later down the line and conduct a focus group with the boys to more definitively see whether the mentorship and interactions facilitated through MAVERICKS can prevent violence."

MAVERICKS is supported by funding from the NIMHD (U54MD008220).



PROMOTING HEALTH IN STYLE: HARLEM IN THE 'HAM

by Hannah Bae

On Saturday, September 29th, 2018, The Harbert Center was transformed into a 1920's casino. Over 300 guests enjoyed good food & cocktails, great entertainment, gaming fun, and chances to win prizes as the UAB Minority Health & Health Disparities Research Center (MHRC) presented Harlem in the 'Ham.

A highlight this year was the Jack Daniel's Gentleman Jack VIP Lounge, where Jack Daniels flowed freely all night for very special guests. Everyone enjoyed games of chance and skill such as poker, Blackjack, roulette and craps. And they were encouraged by Diamond Dealers Abra Barnes, Barnes & Associates, Realtors; Armika Berkley, Director, Cooper Green Mercy Health Services; Arlillian Kate Bushelon, Bushelon Funeral Home; Danny Carr, District Attorney, Jefferson County; Courtney French, Attorney, Fuston, Petway, French; John Hall, Chef & Owner, Post Office Pies; Gabriel Henderson, Realtor, Keller Williams; Jermaine "FunnyMaine" Johnson, Writer, Comedian, Actor; Kre Johnson, DO, Brownstone Family Medicine; UAB Medicine; Chuck Price, Judge, and Ronnie Rice, Alexander Shunnarah Personal Injury Attorneys.



Proceeds from Harlem in the 'Ham benefit Healthy Happy Kids, the MHRC's childhood obesity intervention. Since the first Casino Royale in 2009, more than 3,000 young professionals, business and community leaders have raised more than \$400,000 to help children learn healthy living skills.

"In the United States, obesity occurs at higher rates in racial and ethnic minority populations. Also, cultural factors influence dietary and exercise behaviors, and research has shown these play a major role in the development of excess weight in minority groups," said Mona Fouad, MD, MPH, Director of the UAB Division of Preventive Medicine and Director of the MHRC. "We focus on these groups of children for this program to help them learn how to lead a healthy lifestyle."

"Without community support, we couldn't provide the resources needed to help children learn to live a healthy life," said Fouad. Over 1,400 students from 21 Birmingham City after school programs and summer camps have learned healthy living lessons and taking them home. "Each year we are moved by how much these children learn and are able to teach their families and community members," she said.

Although Harlem in the 'Ham experienced a 2019 hiatus as the YP Board focused on sharing the importance of preventing childhood obesity, the twenties will roll back around on September 26, 2020 - when Harlem in the 'Ham will return!





Kick-Off

Live HealthSmart Alabama

UAB's Grand Challenge Initiative

Tuesday, November 19, 2019 | 4:00-6:00 pm

UAB National Alumni Society House

1301 10th Avenue South | Birmingham

Learn about our plan to improve Alabama's health!

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and learn to live a healthier life.

Spin the Wheel of Wellness to win door prizes!