



STUDENT SUCCESS STORY

Gilberto Castellon, TEEN SUCCESS TRAINING PROGRAM Graduate
First Teen Board Member of WFIT / College Student

A native of inner-city Los Angeles, Gilberto Castellon joined A World Fit for Kids! (WFIT) afterschool program in the first grade and remained with it through middle school. In 9th grade he received training in youth development, conflict resolution, leadership and work readiness through WFIT's Teen Fit for SuccessSM program and then spent all four of his high school years as an Assistant Coach/Mentor for WFIT elementary school programs. During his Junior year, he participated in the advanced fitness and nutrition program, lost 15 pounds over seven months, and became a peer mentor and family advocate for healthy eating and activity.

He is the first teen member of the WFIT Board of Directors, and in 2007 when the California Governor's Council on Physical Fitness awarded WFIT the Gold Medal for its positive impact on children and youth, Governor Schwarzenegger presented Gilberto with his own Gold Medal for the work he has done for other kids.

In May 2007 Gilberto traveled to Washington, D.C., where he was one of only four teens to take part in a youth panel convened by the Institute of Medicine's Standing Committee on Childhood Obesity Prevention. The panel was an opportunity for youth leaders who have designed, led or participated in community youth programs that address obesity issues and healthy living to share their experiences. For two hours, the 18 member committee, comprised of national leaders in public health, public policy, medicine, nutrition, and physical activity, listened as the students offered their perspectives on what makes a successful program.

In addressing the committee, Gilberto showed himself to be a confident, articulate spokesperson. His knowledge led to interesting insights, including the idea that successfully promoting healthy options requires a focus on fun not just obesity prevention. His personal story created a deep interest in how WFIT programs work, and as the panel drew to a close and committee members shared their impressions, it was clear they had come to a realization that could broadly impact youth programs in the future -- investing in youth leadership is a worthwhile and highly effective way to engage youth and address obesity. As one member commented, "I feel like we've been in an ivory tower. Now my eyes are open."

Following the panel, Gilberto made a successful round of visits to the offices of Senator Barbara Boxer, Congresswoman Lucille Roybal-Allard, and Congressman Xavier Becerra. The impression he made on these important legislators reinforced the important role that quality afterschool programs play in promoting healthy students, families and communities.

Gilberto graduated from Belmont High School with honors in June 2007 and received a scholarship to California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. His motivation, accomplishments and commitment to health, education and positive choices have made him a role model for others and a hero in his community.