

## Austin Walking Group Inspires BIG Changes

### SUMMARY

Shirlet is a registered nurse who was focused on taking care of others, but not herself. She didn't even realize she was unhealthy until she started noticing symptoms- she could no longer pick up her 2 year old daughter without pain. Knowing she had to change, she rallied up her friends and family and began a walking group. Together, they tracked their vital signs and saw their health improve. Feeling empowered, Shirlet became involved in community-level work such as Walkability Assessments and a "No Soda" and "Physical Activity" Challenge.



### CHALLENGE

Accepting that she had health problems was the first challenge. Shirlet was so focused on others that she hadn't noticed her own declining health. Her weight and cholesterol were high and she was prediabetic. She was having nerve pain that made it difficult to engage with her daughter. Once she realized the need for change, she took vitamins for a month to get up the energy to start being active. It was hard to get people to try walking at first too. But, the accountability and benefits of walking with friends and family kept them coming back. It gave them a chance to catch up on each others lives and talk about what they ate that day. It was like a support group! After this success, she was thrilled at the opportunity to reach out to even more people by championing community-wide challenges that would address the epidemic of obesity.

### YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY

**Shirlet's call to action is to value yourself as much as you value others. She thinks that women, in particular, have a tendency to put so much emphasis on others that they sometimes lose themselves. Get yourself going and once you're making healthy changes, volunteer to help others. Start a walking group, do a walkability assessment or partner up with local groups and inspire a No Soda or Physical Activity Challenge in your community.**

"Value yourself as much as you value others. You matter too."

- Shirlet Fowler, RN

## SOLUTION

On June 23, 2012 Shirlet began a walking group with her friends and family. They began walking two miles every day. Six months later, they were walking 5 miles a day. Now, they get together every month to celebrate, share recipes, and test their cholesterol and blood sugar.

Teaming up with the Alliance for African American Health, Shirlet took her dedication to another level by doing Walkability Assessments to improve the neighborhood's infrastructure. She also became a spokesperson for a No Soda and Physical Activity Challenge through a partnership with Dell Children's Medical Center and the school district.

## RESULTS

Shirlet and her group enjoyed great results from the walking group and by participating in the No Soda Challenge. In just 8 months, her cholesterol went from 254 to 145 and her blood pressure is in the low 100's over 60. Her waist went from 38" to 33". Her cousin lost 15 pounds and her aunt's doctor told her that if she hadn't made those changes, she would be diabetic by now. Shirlet also hasn't experienced any pain since she began exercising and now holds her daughter, Christiana, every chance she gets. Shirlet is particularly happy that she is modeling a healthy lifestyle for her. Recently, Christiana told her mom, "We don't drink soda, right momma? Soda's not good for you." The No Soda Challenge received earned media and hundreds of text-in pledges. The Alliance, Shirlet and other community groups, have also begun a blog, Healthy Living on the East Side, at [atxeastsidehealthnet.blogspot.com](http://atxeastsidehealthnet.blogspot.com).

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## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Shirlet wants to do even more volunteer work to help others take their own health seriously. Now that she knows it for herself, she wants to inspire others to make the changes in themselves. Even if she can get just one more person to be healthier, it'll be worth the effort. Modeling a healthy lifestyle is more powerful than just telling others what to do. Shirlet truly believes, "If you don't have your health, nothing else matters".

For the community groups Shirlet is involved in, they will now also begin focusing on tobacco-free living. Their blog has already begun educating about the dangers of tobacco use and secondhand smoke and they hope to get more people to quit tobacco and more youth to never start.