

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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PRESS RELEASE

Columbia selected as a leading site in new national program to combat childhood obesity

City of Columbia and University of Missouri join PedNet Coalition project to implement policies that will create a healthy community for healthy kids

Columbia, MO -- December 2, 2008 -- The PedNet Coalition, the lead agency of Columbia's Active Living Partnership, which includes the City of Columbia and the University of Missouri, has been awarded a \$400,000 grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) to improve opportunities for physical activity and access to healthy, affordable foods for children and families.

Based on demonstrated success in increasing active living and healthy eating, Columbia is one of nine leading sites selected for the Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities initiative. This \$44 million national program is RWJF's newest and largest investment to date in community-based solutions to childhood obesity. By late 2009 it will include approximately 70 communities across the country.

"This grant will enable the healthy community movement in Columbia take the next logical step in developing effective strategies that prevent childhood obesity," said project director Dr. Ian Thomas, executive director of the PedNet Coalition. "Columbia's selection as a leading site is a considerable honor which reflects the national reputation developed by our Active Living Partnership, with initiatives like the Walking School Bus, bicycle safety education, and effective health advocacy work. As a leading site for this new national program, we'll continue to serve as a model for other communities that are trying to create healthy changes."

Columbia's Active Living Partnership, formed in 2003 and led by PedNet, includes the City of Columbia, University of Missouri, Columbia Public Schools, The YouZeum and other non-profit and business organizations.

Today, nearly one-third of American children and adolescents are overweight or obese, greatly increasing their risk of developing heart disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke, asthma, and other serious health conditions. The most vulnerable children are those from low-income and minority families, who typically live in neighborhoods where social problems such as crime, poverty, low educational achievement, and a dysfunctional local economy create enormous barriers to healthy lifestyles, making healthy food unavailable or unaffordable and routine physical activity unsafe or unattractive. For example, Columbia's First Ward, where the median family income is \$17,168 and the head of household in 60 percent of homes is a single female, suffers from these disadvantages and the associated health risks.

"To tackle these issues, we should employ proactive policy advocacy initiatives whose foundations are built around creating healthy choices," said Minister Samuel Robinson of Urban Empowerment Ministries, a community partner, based in the First Ward.

"What excites me most about the Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities project is the chance to inform and advocate for policies that will create healthier communities," said Stephanie Browning, Director of the Columbia/Boone County Department of Public Health and Human Services, PedNet's leading partner in the project.

Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities is a cornerstone of RWJF's five-year, \$500 million commitment to reverse the childhood obesity epidemic in the United States by 2015.

"The program will provide replicable, real-time solutions for addressing the epidemic," said Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, M.D., M.B.A., president and CEO of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. "We expect that this vital

work by the PedNet Coalition and its partners will help Columbia become the kind of community where all children can have healthier lives.”

The eight other communities named as leading sites and receiving four-year grants are Baldwin Park, the Central Valley, and Oakland in California; Chicago, Illinois; Louisville, Kentucky; Seattle, Washington; Somerville, Massachusetts; and Washington, DC. All were selected because of strong leadership and a readiness to make lasting change in their communities. Soon they will be serving as models and mentors for approximately 60 additional partnerships to be funded in December 2009.

RWJF today released a call for proposals for that second round of Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities funding. Partnerships from across the United States and its territories are eligible to apply. Preference will be given to applicants from communities in 15 states where rates of childhood obesity are particularly high — Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and West Virginia. About five dozen grants of up to \$360,000 will be awarded to qualified community partnerships. The deadline for brief proposals is Feb. 3, 2009.

Visit www.healthykidshealthycommunities.org to download the call for proposals.

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About the PedNet Coalition (www.pednet.org):

The PedNet Coalition is a grass-roots non-profit organization whose mission is to encourage walking, bicycling and other active modes, and advocate for a transportation system in Columbia that supports pedestrians, cyclists, and wheelchair-users. With funding from RWJF, GetAbout Columbia, and other sources, PedNet delivers numerous encouragement and education programs that empower citizens to adopt healthy, active lifestyles.

About Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities (www.healthykidshealthycommunities.org):

Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities (HKHC), a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), advances community-based solutions that will help reverse the childhood obesity epidemic. It focuses on changing policies and environments to support active living and healthy eating among children and families. The program places special emphasis on reaching children who are at highest risk for obesity on the basis of income, race/ethnicity and geographic location. It will support RWJF's efforts to reverse the childhood obesity epidemic in the United States by 2015. The HKHC national program office is housed at Active Living by Design (ALbD), part of the North Carolina Institute for Public Health at the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health in Chapel Hill. Established in 2001 as a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, ALbD now serves funders and partnerships across the country that are fostering community-led change to build a culture of active living and healthy eating.

About the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (www.rwjf.org):

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) focuses on the pressing health and health care issues facing our country. As the nation's largest philanthropy devoted exclusively to improving the health and health care of all Americans, the Foundation works with a diverse group of organizations and individuals to identify solutions and achieve comprehensive, meaningful and timely change. For more than 35 years RWJF has brought experience, commitment and a rigorous, balanced approach to the problems that affect the health and health care of those it serves. When it comes to helping Americans lead healthier lives and get the care they need, the Foundation expects to make a difference in your lifetime.