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Moves that Matter

by Andrea White, OAC Member since 2012

"I'm taking belly dancing lessons." A few hastily muffled chuckles and wide-eyed stares greeted my announcement. I watched the reactions of a few of my "friends" during a dinner get-together and pretended not to notice the silent shock.

Having been affected by excess weight for the majority of my life, I was used to such behavior. Though no one said the word aloud, I felt as if I could hear what they were thinking, "Why in the world would someone her size dare to do something like belly dancing?" Even though I was used to this type of behavior, I was not unaffected by it.

I made a habit of including regular exercise into my daily routine. I learned that even moderate levels of physical activity could make a major difference in my mood and overall health.

This incident would later become one of the defining moments in my adult life. Reflecting back on that conversation helped me to realize something that changed the way I think about my body. I learned that it wasn't my body that kept me from enjoying physical activity, it was the fear of what other people would think or say that often stopped me from taking that new dance class, going on a hiking trip, or any number of activities that I had shied away from throughout the years. I decided to do the things I enjoyed regardless of whether other people approved or not. I was tired of letting my size, and other people's reactions to it, dictate every aspect of my life. I took my belly dancing class and loved it!

That decision led me to develop a true appreciation for moving my body. I made a habit of including regular exercise into my daily routine. I learned that even

moderate levels of physical activity could make a major difference in my mood and overall health. I managed to lose 80 pounds and maintain a level of consistency with my weight that I had never really had. While still considered "overweight" at a size 16, for a girl who hadn't seen that size since the age of 10, those 80 pounds were significant. My 20-year battle with Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS) and a myriad of other health concerns were all significantly improved. My small moves had made a big impact on my health.

However, it wasn't until two of my former schoolmates died due to complications from severe obesity that I began to realize how powerful my small moves could be.

Could I have done more to encourage small lifestyle changes for my friends?

Would sharing my story have a positive influence on others struggling with some of the same issues?

In some small way, could I help someone dealing with weight stigma feel empowered to do something about it?

I didn't know the answers to these questions, but I figured that the possibility of saving someone's life was worth me finding out. That's why I created the Make a BIG Move Campaign, an initiative born out of the struggles of myself and all of those people in my life who have been challenged by weight issues.

The goal is not necessarily to associate physical activity with weight-loss, rather we want people to learn to enjoy physical activity and then reap the rewards (weight-loss, improved mood, better physical health) that may come because of it. More information about the Campaign and ways for those interested in getting involved may be found in the box to the right.

Sounds like a great idea, right? I thought so too... until I realized that my friends and I aren't the only ones who could use some extra encouragement to exercise. I started to wonder how in the world I would get the word out about the Campaign. Who would allow me a platform to tell others about the Campaign? My love of fashion provided the answer.

My old hobby of plus-size modeling introduced me to plus-size beauty pageants. One thing that beauty pageants, plus-sized or not, have in common is that they encourage the contestants to have a platform or a cause that they feel strongly about promoting. Bingo! I entered my first national plus-sized pageant

About the Make a BIG Move Campaign



The premise of the Make a BIG Move Campaign is simple:

To encourage people of size to engage in regular physical activity in order to promote positive physical and mental health outcomes, dispel the myth that all people of size are lazy, build a network of support for those dealing with weight-related issues, and develop habits that support long-term lifestyle changes.

The Campaign is YouTube based and we are asking plus-sized individuals to submit videos of themselves engaged in their favorite physical activity (all videos will be subject to review). The video should include a brief explanation of the activity, why the person enjoys it, and how it impacts their overall physical or mental well-being. These videos will serve as a repository of hope for people of size who want to get out there and move. Videos will be judged based on their content, and the individual who submits the most compelling video will receive a prize package and featured on the Make a BIG Move Web site.

If you want to join me in making a BIG move, submit a video to the Campaign from July 31 - October 31 at www.makeabigmovecampaign.com. The winning video will be announced on December 1, 2013. Let's Make a BIG Move together!



and began researching organizations and groups that had the advancement of initiatives for people-of-size as part of their mission. My search led me to the Obesity Action Coalition (OAC).

I was excited to see that the goals of the OAC correlated with those of the Make a BIG Move Campaign. The advocacy efforts of OAC made me

decide that if there was any way that I could promote its mission to other people of size, then I would do my part.

I got that opportunity in March 2013 when I was blessed to win the Ms. Exquisite Full-Figured USA Pageant. With the title serving as a national platform to discuss the issues impacting people of size in the U.S., my hope is that I can promote the work of the OAC and the Make a BIG Move Campaign. I don't want to waste any more time worrying about what people think I can't do. I don't want to lose another friend to the complications of obesity.

“We can choose to let other people’s negative perceptions paralyze us or empower us. I chose to be empowered, and I encourage you to do the same.”

We can each do our part to help each other to be more responsible about our physical and mental health. The end of weight-related stigma and body shaming starts with us. We can choose to let other people's negative perceptions paralyze us or empower us. I chose to be empowered, and I encourage you to do the same. Take the energy engendered from past hurt, anger, fear, and embarrassment and use it as the impetus to make positive changes in your life and in the lives of others. That's the biggest move of all.

- Andrea White



Obesity Action Coalition

ABOUT THE OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.



PUBLIC EDUCATION



ADVOCACY



ANNUAL CONVENTION



NATIONAL AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS



VIBRANT COMMUNITY

LEARN, CONNECT, ENGAGE

The OAC knows that the journey with weight can be challenging but we also know that great things happen when we learn, connect and engage. That is why the OAC Community exists. Our Community is designed to provide quality education, ongoing support programs, an opportunity to connect, and a place to take action on important issues.

**Through the OAC Community,
you can get access to:**

- Weight & Health Education • Community Blogs
- Community Discussion Forum
- Ongoing Support • Meaningful Connections
- AND MUCH MORE

JOIN TODAY: GO TO OBESITYACTION.ORG/JOIN

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