

# Finding Her Path:

## ABRI'S *Journey* TO HEALTH and SELF-ADVOCACY

*by Kendall Griffey, OAC Communications Manager; and  
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**ABRI WOLFGRAM**, A TEEN FROM COLORADO, HAS FACED HER FAIR SHARE OF CHALLENGES FOR SOMEONE WHO IS JUST AROUND THE CORNER FROM HER EIGHTEENTH BIRTHDAY. ALREADY HAVING DEALT WITH THE STRUGGLES OF OBESITY AND WEIGHT BIAS FROM A YOUNG AGE, **SHE'S NOW WORKING HARD TO FIND THE RIGHT PATH** FOR HERSELF INTO ADULthood WHILE FINDING THE TREATMENT PLAN THAT FITS HER BEST. HER STORY CAN OFFER ENCOURAGEMENT AND INSPIRATION FOR OTHER TEENS WHO SEE THEMSELVES FACING THE SAME TYPES OF CHALLENGES.



## ENCOUNTERING *Weight Bias*

Early in her journey, Abri was faced with a lot of skepticism from several medical professionals who didn't take the time to understand the complexities of obesity and how difficult it is to manage. Her doctors often believed that weight-loss should be straightforward and implied that her inability to lose weight indicated a lack of effort or compliance on her part.

But this perception is a significant misconception. And unfortunately, many individuals with obesity are all too familiar with this type of bias from healthcare providers. Encountering weight bias, especially as a young teenager, has profound impacts. Stigma against people with obesity not only harms emotional health but can also worsen physical health, potentially leading to further weight gain. This cycle of bias and its consequences show that we need a more compassionate and knowledgeable approach in healthcare to support people with obesity.



## FINDING *Support*

Eventually, after discussing her concerns with a more empathetic pediatrician who had experience treating obesity, Abri was referred to a lifestyle intervention program. As part of the program, she had the opportunity to meet with various doctors and dietitians and explore different strategies to manage her weight. She found that the doctors associated with this program were much more supportive than other doctors she had met with previously, but it still took time for her to find the right treatment path.

With additional support from her family, Abri was able to manage her treatment and learn how to stand up for herself. She often says she is the only one who truly knows how she feels each day. She considers herself an expert on her own experiences and speaks up about her health. Fortunately, she has another advocate alongside her on her journey. Her number one supporter is her grandmother, Rogene, who has stood by her side every step of the way. Together, they've become an unstoppable team in Abri's journey to improve her health through weight management.

Along the way, Abri's determination and confidence have grown tremendously. Even though she initially had fears and insecurities, she continues to push herself outside of her comfort zone. She's tried different exercises with guidance from professionals in the lifestyle program and discovered that one of her favorite new activities is weight training! By trying new things and embracing different ways to be active, Abri refuses to let weight define her limitations. She's excited to try activities like yoga and dance as her health improves.



## ATTENDING THE *Your Weight Matters* NATIONAL CONVENTION

Last year, Abri's doctor referred her to the Obesity Action Coalition's (OAC) Empower Early Youth and Families Initiative, which took place at the *Your Weight Matters* National Convention. The OAC proudly introduced this program at the convention, tailored specifically for teenagers dealing with obesity. The initiative brought together 11 families from across the country, providing a unique experience that combined education with the opportunity to join a supportive and understanding community.





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Abri particularly enjoyed the OAC's convention, with personal highlights including her introduction to Water Zumba and the new recipes she and her grandmother, Rogene, learned from event speaker and celebrity dietitian Dawn Jackson Blatner. However, the most rewarding part of the event for Abri was forming friendships with other teens, maintaining these connections and planning future meetups. She is eager to attend the next *Your Weight Matters* National Convention!

### WHAT'S NEXT FOR *Abri*?

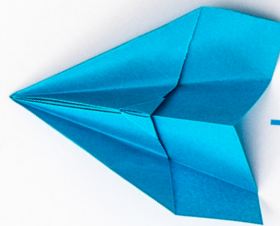
The next step for Abri in her weight management journey is bariatric surgery, a procedure she hopes will open doors to a healthier future filled with possibilities. By making decisions with her doctor and family, she is collaborating on the most effective treatment path for herself. Abri insists that her treatment plan may look different from others, and that's okay. The key is to discover what works for each individual with the help of a qualified and compassionate healthcare provider.

Throughout her journey, Abri has learned the crucial lesson of self-advocacy: speaking up and demanding the care and support she deserves. It was a tough lesson to learn, but it has made all the difference. She says, "If you don't stand up for yourself, you're only hurting yourself in the end." She also believes that you'll know when you're ready to begin your treatment path, and you can't let anyone else make that decision for you.

Additionally, Abri has learned to prioritize self-care and her mental well-being while managing her weight. She likes to remind herself that there is nothing wrong with her body — she just needs a little extra help, and that's nothing to be ashamed of. Having a team of healthcare professionals, including a clinical psychologist, is key to taking care of herself.

Abri will graduate from high school in the next year and head off to college, where she plans to pursue her passion for psychology and earn a degree in the field. With a supportive network, including her grandmother Rogene, Abri is ready to embrace whatever new challenges lie ahead, knowing she has the strength to overcome them. She envisions a future where she can help other people navigate similar challenges and experiences. Her advice for other kids and teens struggling with weight is to keep your parents involved, talk to your doctor or find a doctor who will listen, and be your own advocate!

Abri's journey is truly inspiring. As she moves forward on her path to improving her health, she encourages us all to embrace our strength and stand up for ourselves.



### DO YOU WANT TO MAKE AN IMPACT FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS LIKE ABRI?

Donate to support OAC's youth-focused programs like the Empower Early Youth and Families Initiative. Your contribution can help change lives and create healthier futures for children affected by obesity across the nation.



#### **About the Authors:**

*Kendall Griffey, OAC Communications Manager, graduated from the University of North Florida with a B.S. in Communications, focusing on public relations. Kendall is passionate about her work in the nonprofit sector and is driven to make a meaningful impact.*

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# 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.



**VIBRANT COMMUNITY**



**NATIONAL AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS**



**ANNUAL CONVENTION**



**ADVOCACY**



**PUBLIC EDUCATION**

## 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](https://obesityaction.org/join)**

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