

The Steps Community Heroes Award Program is a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Steps Program initiative to acknowledge “Steps Heroes” who, without expecting personal recognition, have unselfishly contributed their time, talents, and expertise to make significant and often sustainable contributions in their communities, making them a healthier place to live.

This year, a winner from Minneapolis was chosen for his passion, creativity, and dedication to his community and a healthy lifestyle. For the past nine years, Bernard Turner has worked in low-income communities, promoting healthy living through fitness classes and supportive services to people of all ages. With all he has done for his community, Bernard’s reputation and resume made him a vital candidate for the Steps to a Healthier Minneapolis Community Consortium, which he joined in 2007.

Bernard willingly does television appearances and radio interviews on behalf of Steps and makes presentations in the community, including conducting a radio interview to motivate residents of North Minneapolis (a Steps’ target community) to participate in a metro-wide, Steps-sponsored fitness campaign. Bernard’s willingness to voluntarily teach fitness classes in south Minneapolis has yielded fun, affordable and culturally-inviting fitness options in a low-income community where there are few affordable options for adults. In addition, he’s been a featured speaker at the Minnesota Diabetes Conference, Women’s Expo and the National Conference on Health Promotion and Education. His message of “fitness for everyone” is inspiring and accessible to people who are just beginning their journey to a healthier lifestyle.



Throughout all of this hard work, Bernard has lived with pulmonary sarcoidosis, a chronic lung condition that he is able to manage, in part, through a regular fitness routine. Prior to developing pulmonary sarcoidosis, he was physically active, ate well and felt great, but gained weight and was unable to be physically active due to his illness. However, this allowed him to empathize with people who are overweight, unfit and generally feel unhealthy. His notions about the type of people he wanted to serve and his career goals changed, as he became committed to helping people to prevent illness and lead healthier lives. After being diagnosed, he left the upscale fitness clubs where he once was employed and began teaching and promoting fitness in Minneapolis' predominately low-income communities. As he put it, "Fitness became my ministry."

Today, he teaches fitness classes for community-based organizations in south Minneapolis' low-income communities of color. When organizations or participants can't pay, he teaches for free. Though Bernard could easily get a stable, well-paying fitness position, he stays because his classes are among the few fitness opportunities available in this community. In addition, Bernard is pursuing a Masters degree in Business with the goal of launching a chain of fitness centers specifically for people living with chronic conditions.

Congratulations, Bernard for being recognized as a Steps Hero!