

12<sup>th</sup> World Congress on**INDUSTRIAL HEALTH, HEALTHCARE AND MEDICAL TOURISM**

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**Youth nutrition and culinary education: Effective programs and initiatives in engaging, educating and empowering young people to make sustainable healthy choices****Haile Thomas**

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The need for nutrition and culinary education in elementary and middle schools in underserved/at-risk communities is significant. Recent reports by the World Health Organization estimates that the childhood obesity epidemic in the United States affects more than 23 million children and teens. Obese children face increased risk of premature onset of illnesses, including cardiovascular disease, type-2 diabetes, highly disabling degenerative disease of the joints and some cancers. The effects can also lead to social discrimination, low self-esteem and a wide range of barriers, including physical and psychological consequences, which impact education attainment. These consequences then trickle through into adulthood and pose economic consequences for youth, their families and our society. Affordable, fun, engaging and innovative approaches for delivering nutrition and culinary education programs are essential for these communities to be able to receive life-changing health and prevention education that helps to minimize their risk and empowers them to make healthy food choices and fully understanding why they should. Our programs have been significant in changing kids' perception of healthy foods, as well as in educating them about the benefits associated with embracing healthy eating habits. Youth in our programs enjoy engaging in hands-on cooking classes using fresh fruits and vegetables, learning about basic plant-based nutrition, taking field trips (to farms, grocery stores and farmers' markets) that serve to inform them about where real whole-foods come from, how they are grown and or processed. Kids also learn about risks associated with consuming unhealthy food products, how to read and understand food labels, how nutrients work in their bodies and the best way to cook and eat for optimal health.

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