

**LILLY MAKEE** is a seventh grader at West Geauga Middle School. She enjoys playing her oboe and all kinds of artistic pursuits—cake decorating, drawing, sewing and acting. She is also involved in sports and hopes to be either a gym teacher or pastry chef.

Did you know that Ohio has one of the highest teen obesity rates in the United States? More than 20% of teens in Ohio have a weight problem. This stems from hours of inactivity such as sitting in front of the TV playing video games and watching shows, as well as staring at a computer screen. Not only does teen obesity cause problems such as high blood pressure and cholesterol and heart disease, but it also leads to further health problems later in life. Just as important as physical well being, mental health in teens is vital for their success. So many obese teens are bullied at school, losing confidence and hurting self image. At my middle school, I watch so many overweight teens struggle in gym class, camping trips and fitting in with peers. They are the last picked for teams, for partners in projects and sometimes end up eating lunch alone in the bathroom. It bothered me last year when I watched an overweight teen in my class get left out of cabin picks for camp. My friends and I took her into our group because we were upset by how rude our own classmates were to her. If they had seen her on the inside instead of judging her appearance, they would have realized the loss was theirs. How do we stop this hate from turning into a larger problem?

I have become a member of a four person team called Kids for HOPE (Healthy Options and Physical Exercise) which educates teens at our middle school about the risks of teen obesity and how healthy eating options and increased physical activity can change a person's life. I want to make a difference for these teens struggling with weight everyday and bullying as a result of their physical appearance. Teens have enough pressures, and weight should not be one of them. We organized a Walk for HOPE at our school where 6th graders walked a mile and we are using a patio garden at our school to grow vegetables. The vegetables we grow will be used in Life Skills classes in healthy, easy recipes so kids can see how simple and delicious eating healthy is. We also plan on using the patio to have fun exercise options available during lunch such as jump ropes, corn hole games, Frisbee and hula hoops. This will get kids moving and active with the hope that they will continue these types of activities at home. We also hope that the patio will be used for kids to mingle with other teens outside of their peer groups which will hopefully end some of the bullying the overweight students encounter.

I am working to Stop the Hate! in my own school and my community and hope that my efforts keep my peers from becoming teen obesity statistics. I want them to be healthy and active later in life! I want them to be successful so they can contribute to society!