



Much to the surprise of director Sue Schooner, the Ann Arbor-based ["Girls Group" was given a statewide "Hometown Health Heroes" award](#) during Michigan Public Health Week in spring 2012. "So then I decided I'd better figure out what public health was," **Schooner declared, only half in jest.**

Because the Girls Group was founded to mentor and empower teenage girls for better health and education outcomes, a day at the University of Michigan School of Public Health was a natural destination for one of the after-school group's outings. Schooner and her Girls Group assistants worked with SPH's Director of Academic Diversity Initiatives Chanel DeGuzman to plan a multipurpose visit for 20 group members in August 2012 that would:

- Expose group participants to the field of public health including education and career opportunities (how it connects to the goals like being healthy)
- Provide role-modeling for higher education, leadership, and character development.
- Support this local community organization advance its mission.

A half-dozen faculty, staff, and recent graduates from U-M SPH were enlisted to describe their career paths and answer questions from the girls about the challenges they had encountered and overcome. Research Investigator Belinda Nelson, for example (at left in photo above), explained that she gone from being the first person in her family to graduate from *high school* to earning four university degrees and doing important work with asthma, diabetes, and other chronic diseases. Key to her academic success was always believing that she could move forward with each goal, rather than giving up or succumbing to doubts, she explained.



Other activities during the visit included a scavenger hunt through the school, a web tour of school social media channels, and a lively in-depth discussion of the nine-portion U.S.D.A. fruit and vegetable recommendations. "The girls received such a diverse spectrum of experiences and views of public health," reflected SPH's DeGuzman after the visit, noting that follow-up activities are being planned to further explore their interests in nutrition, higher education, and public health as a career.