

EPA Final Report

**MAKING A DIFFERENCE FOR OLDER ADULTS AND THE ENVIRONMENT
PROGRESS REPORT
EPA AGING INITIATIVE**

Today's Date: December 18, 2006

Recipient: Temple University Center for Intergenerational Learning

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Agreement Project Period: January 1, 2005-November 15, 2006

Recipient Contact Person: Robin Dunn

Principal Investigator/Project Director: Nancy Z. Henkin and Nancy Rothman, PhD

I. Progress Achieved in Accomplishing Project

Goals/Objectives, Outputs and Outcomes:

Summary:

The Health Coaches Program was created to:

- demonstrate the effectiveness of engaging older adults in community education activities that raised awareness about environmental health hazards;
- increase knowledge of youth in grades 5, 6, 7 & 8 about environmental triggers for chronic health conditions; and
- help youth develop action steps to protect themselves, their families and their communities

A ten week training program was designed to prepare a diverse group of 23 older volunteers to become environmental health educators. Through didactic presentations, interactive exercises, and the sharing of personal stories, participants gained new skills and became a strong support network for each other. Armed with a deeper understanding of environmental health issues and an ability to use the arts to transmit this information, the health coaches and a facilitator conducted 12 performances and workshops for children in middle schools. The program was very successful- both for the older volunteers and for the groups that participated in their workshops and performances. The Center for Intergenerational Learning was able to secure additional funds to expand the program to include 15 performances at senior centers across the city.

Goal/Objective 1: Recruit and train 15 – 20 older adults from low-income Philadelphia communities targeted by the STEPS for a Healthier Philadelphia Initiative to become environmental Health Coaches.

A. Recruitment of Health Coaches

Recruitment for the Environmental Health Coach Project was a joint project between Experience Corps and Full Circle Theater. Our goal was to recruit and train between 20 and 25 older adults from low-income Philadelphia communities targeted by the STEPS for a Healthier Philadelphia Initiative to become Environmental Health Coaches. The Full Circle Director held two meetings in late August with Experience Corps recruiters to

explain the project and the criteria for volunteers. Recruitment flyers were created and a health coach job description was developed for use in their recruitment interviews. On August 17, 2005 and September 13, 2005, presentations were made at Experience Corps orientations, with 150 older adults attending each. In addition, the opportunity was announced in an interview on WHAT a.m. radio on September 15, 2005. Press releases were sent to numerous local papers and older adults were recruited from the current and former rolls of Full Circle Theater. A total of 29 were recruited; 23 completed the training and became health coaches.

Goal/Objective 2: Develop curriculum for a twelve-week non-credit training program at Temple University which will focus on the relationship between environmental hazards and chronic diseases, interactive and artistic techniques especially successful in working with young children, and skill development in areas such as community assessment and public speaking.

A ten week innovative curriculum was developed by Full Circle staff, faculty from the Nursing Department at Temple University, and Bridging the Gaps students interning with the Nursing Department for the summer. The curriculum focused on the relationship between environmental hazards and chronic diseases, interactive and artistic techniques especially successful in working with young children, and skill development in areas such as community assessment and public speaking.

Training of the older adults began on September 23, 2005. The first phase of the program was a community assessment conducted jointly with Temple Department of Nursing students to determine the extent of environmental hazards and pollution related disease in the community. A faculty member from the Department of Nursing and two of the outreach specialists from Temple Health Connection led a community walk. Participants were issued disposable cameras to document assets and detractors of health that they noticed in their communities, the neighborhood surrounding Temple University and/or home environments. The following week two of the student nurses presented their community findings and the group compared the students' findings with their own observations. Participants also reviewed demographics of asthma, lung disease, and lead poisoning and vacant building demolition in the targeted neighborhoods.

Training topics included:

- Neighborhood Assessment of Environmental Health
- Strengths and Dangers
- Asthma Triggers and Management
- Healthy Control of Household and Garden Pests:
- Tobacco and the Dangers of Second Hand Smoke
- Obesity and Diabetes
- Healthy Cooking Class- Urban Nutrition Initiative
- Dangers of Heavy metals (lead, mercury, aluminum)
- Interactive Theater Games and Techniques (e.g. ice breakers ,freeze tag, fluid sculpture)
- Presentations and Finale

By the end of the trainings, the growth of the group in their awareness of environmental health choices was amazing.

Goal/Objective 3: Engage approximately 150 elementary school students in a series of workshops designed to raise awareness about specific environmental dangers and increase knowledge about promising practices they can use to protect themselves and improve the environment.

Selection of Public Schools

A flyer was designed to advertise the Health Coaches Project to potential sites. It was sent to the Health Education office at the School District of Philadelphia, which in turn sent it to middle schools throughout the city. Full Circle was contacted by at least twenty school nurses for information about the Environmental Health Coach program. By the end of the month, all 10 performances/workshops in the middle schools were booked, and a pilot performance/workshop was booked, making the total number 12. The 12 school performances consisted of two periods back to back: first the performances and then the workshop. This design gave students one long intensive period to absorb the ideas of the program and develop their own interactive responses to the presentation. Following each interactive performance, health coaches facilitated discussions and activities with small groups of children. Evaluation was also conducted in the small groups. The School District Health Office provided follow up information and activities about nutrition and healthy eating for the classrooms who were involved in the project.

Expansion to senior centers and senior housing facilities: With a matching grant from the Philadelphia Corporation for Aging, the Health Coaches conducted workshops at 15 senior centers in addition to the 12 schools performance/workshops. The community performances focused on healthy choices and environmental issues.

Outcomes

The Health Coaches Program clearly had a significant impact on the older volunteers, the children who participated in workshops and the senior center members who experienced the Full Circle performances.

Impact on individual health coaches

Impact on older adults was measured by pre and post questionnaires, staff observations, and comments by the volunteers themselves. Impact was reflected in four areas:

- ***Knowledge:*** increased awareness of environmental health choices; increased knowledge about impact of air quality, pesticides, and exposure to second hand smoke on health.
- ***Attitudes:*** Many older volunteers expressed pride in their work, as evidenced by this comment: *“What we are doing is very important because we are trying to help children understand what happens in real life when they make bad choices. We have had a lot of experience and know first hand about the consequences of choices. It is wonderful that we are being asked to do this as seniors, because a lot of times seniors are kicked off to the sidelines.”* In addition, volunteers’ perception that “life is better than I thought as I get older” increased by 16%.
- ***Skills:*** Through the training and performances, the older volunteers enhanced their communication and group process skills as well as their ability to utilize the arts as a vehicle for teaching about healthy choices skills and environmental hazards

- *Behavior:* Health coaches reported that they have better eating habits and are exercising more. Two members said they are trying to stop smoking.

As to the health coaches course itself, on a scale of 1-5, where 1=not at all and 5=very much, the percentages of health coaches that gave 4 or 5 ratings for each of the evaluation statements are listed below:

87% rated the information learned as important and new;
 89% indicated the information learned has influenced their own behaviors;
 78% indicated they have used the information to influence others;
 73% found the “butterfly model” helpful to conceptualize health in an environmental context; and
 93% felt comfortable to co-facilitate workshops in environmental health.

Impact on middle school children

Interactive evaluation tools were created to assess the impact of the program on children’s understanding of their relationship with the environment. After each performance, children worked in small groups to answer the following questions: How do I help the environment? How do I hurt the environment? How does my environment help me? How does the environment hurt me? The goal of this evaluation activity was to help children translate what they heard in the performance into specific behaviors. Examples of behaviors that were cited for each of these areas include:

How do I help the environment?

Not littering, placing trash in bags or cans, not smoking or taking drugs, recycling, not pouring oil down the drain, car pooling, buying hybrid cars, not having weapons, conserving water and starting a community program to keep the environment clean.

How do I hurt the environment?

Graffiti, leaving the truck running while parked, littering, using chemicals to kill bugs, possessing a weapon, smoking and abusing drugs, and placing trash in sewers.

How does my environment help me?

Provides shelter, air to breath, and water to drink.

Trash is picked up on a regular basis and recycling programs exist.

Public transportation is available.

Laws and rules exist that help society interact without harming others

Health care facilities offer care and parents and neighborhoods offer support and love.

Murals and gardens provide beauty

How does the environment hurt me?

Air pollution, littering

Too many fast food restaurants and unhealthy menus at school.

Violence exists within some schools, homes and communities

Unnecessary chemicals in food and drinks

Pressure to use drugs, drink alcohol and smoke – peers and advertising

No where to go after school – lack of community recreation

Budget:

Money spent to date is in accordance with the budget after requested changes.

Discuss and Project Terms and Conditions required for this Agreement

The primary terms and conditions required for this agreement was to participate in a conference call on May 17, 2005. This requirement was met.

Report any Key Personnel Changes concerned with the project:

Robin Dunn is the acting director of Full Circle Theater. Nancy Z. Henkin served as the PI for the grant during the close out phases by contract.