

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

Today's Date: March 15, 2007

Recipient: Family Service, Inc.

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Reporting Period (February 14, 2005 – October 31, 2006):

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Abstract:

Family Service, Inc. is a non-profit social service agency located in Lawrence, Massachusetts. Originally established as a relief agency for immigrant mill workers in 1854, the agency has grown and expanded its mission to meet the current needs of the Greater Lawrence community. Today, our mission, *to strengthen individuals and families by building skills for successful home, work, and community life*, is carried out in three areas of service:

- Family Service's *Community Prevention Programs* offer support and education to help parents, youth and elders build the skills they need to remain healthy and productive in their personal, academic and professional lives.
- Family Service's *Counseling Center* provides professional treatment to individuals and families struggling with mental health and substance abuse problems through our state licensed outpatient clinic
- The Family Service *Employee Assistance Program* (EAP) helps bridge the gaps between home and work, offering resources and support to employers and employees when demands are overwhelming.

Segunda Edad Saludable (Healthy Older Adults) is designed to provide pertinent risk reduction information to socio-economically disadvantaged older adults in Lawrence, MA, regarding environmental hazards in a manner that is welcoming, accessible and non-threatening. The program, implemented in collaboration with the Toxic Use Reduction Institute (TURI) at UMass Lowell, has trained five older adults, who are in the peer group of the target population, as community leaders and educators. The Project Coordinators have supported the Community Leaders as they relay the information they have learned to other older adults through information sessions, called "charlas". During the project period, each Community Leader hosted three charlas in their home, the home of a neighbor, a senior center, or at a congregate living facility to inform other older adults about the threats posed by environmental health hazards and steps they can take to reduce their exposure. These charlas enabled Leaders to share their knowledge in an intimate and familiar setting and provide residents with the opportunity to have their specific questions answered.

In addition, Community Leaders reached a larger audience through outreach at community events held throughout the City of Lawrence during the summer and fall. These venues enabled Community Leaders to connect with other residents who may be caring for an older adult.

Project Activities:

March 2005: The Project staff recruited five (5) Community Leaders. Each Leader was over the age of 60, Latino, and interested in working on the project (See attached list of leaders). Each Community Leader lives in a section of the City that has either a high concentration of auto body shops, industrial complexes, proximity to major roadways, or other environmental health threats. A contract was developed (see attached) to delineate roles and responsibilities of the Leaders, and to confirm compensation.

April-May 2005: An eight (8) hour training was developed, in collaboration with TURI, focusing on three areas (mold, mercury and toxic reduction in the home.) All the information was prepared in Spanish and English.

June 2005: Three 2.5-hour trainings (3:00–5:30 pm) were held on July 9th, 16th and 23rd at Family Service, Inc. The five Community Leaders attended these trainings and completed training pre/post questionnaire. One leader was unable to attend one session, and was provided with an individual make up session.

July and August, 2005: Twelve (12) charlas were held at a variety of locations around the City of Lawrence, including people's homes, community centers, churches and senior housing facilities. By the end of the summer, 154 older adults had attended a charla. A post-program questionnaire was developed which measured participant's gained knowledge in identifying and reducing their exposure to environmental health hazards and their future commitment to reducing their exposure to environmental health hazards.

June-July 2005: Community outreach events were conducted at Family Service's annual *Family Fiesta* and the Greater Lawrence Community Action Councils *Lead Fair: The Segunda Edad Saludable* staff had a table at both the events where they gave out educational materials and spoke to elders and their family members about reducing their exposure to toxins. The table displayed many of the toxic cleaning materials that are commonly used by older Latino's and also the alternative products that they could use. They offered raffle items, which consisted of baskets filled with alternative products. Additionally, many other community organizations had representatives attend these events, materials were provided for them to bring back to the elders they serve in their programs. Program staff estimates that they reached over 300 individuals at the two events.

October 2005 – January 2006: Project staff spent the majority of their time following up with leaders and participants to assist in collecting and completing the post-program questionnaire, which proved much more challenging and time consuming than anticipated. Please see the difficulties encountered section for more information.

February – March 2006: Project staff reviewed the evaluation forms and aggregated the data. The Project Director worked on gathering the necessary information to write the report and other program administration.

Project Success:

The key measure of *Segunda Edad Saludable*'s success is the degree to which older adults increased their awareness of environmental health hazards and increased their knowledge of how and why to reduce their level of exposure.

Each Community Leader who participated in the initial training was asked to complete a questionnaire at the beginning and end of the program. This questionnaire was designed to measure their commitment and capacity to be environmental leaders for the community of older adults in the City of Lawrence.

- 100% of Community Leaders reported an increased level of commitment and capacity to being environmental health leaders for the community of older adults in the City of Lawrence.

Each charla attendee was asked to complete a questionnaire designed to measure their thoughts on the relevance of the information provided and their perceived increase in knowledge.

- 99% of participants reported gaining knowledge on identifying and reducing their exposure to environmental health hazards
- 99% of participants reported a future commitment to reducing their exposure to environmental health hazards

The final number of people reached was as follows:

Through Charlas:	193
Through Community Events:	300+
Total:	493+

As is evidenced from the above evaluation data, *Segunda Edad Saludable* was successful in meeting its stated goals and objectives.

Program Innovation:

A number of factors contributed to the success of this project which can be considered innovative. First, the use of older adults who were familiar with the community and were the same age as the target population helped in the effectiveness of the program. Secondly, the use of a variety of venues ensured that the information reached a diverse group of at-risk elders. Venues included community centers, churches and residential housing facilities. Lastly, having the Toxic Use Reduction Institute assist in the development of the materials ensured that all information was accurate and up to date.

Difficulties Encountered:

1. Difficulty reaching one Community Leader: One Leader was difficult to reach for a period of time. He participated in the training, but then was not following through on recruiting participants and providing the required charlas. However, the Program Coordinators remained persistent and soon found that this Leader had a number of personal issues that prevented him from completing his charlas. At that time, he had expressed that he was still interested in participating in the program, however, it turned out that due to his personal problems he was unable to fulfill his commitment. Since many of the other leaders had recruited more than the required number of participants, the goal of reaching 190 community members was completed with the four community leaders each providing 3 charlas for a total of 12 charlas.
2. Difficulties filling out post evaluations at charlas: It is very difficult for the participants to fill out the post charlas evaluations due to most participants having a low literacy level. Although the evaluation was written in simple terms, and in Spanish, many of the participants are in fact illiterate. This requires the community leaders and project staff to spend time individually helping participants fill out the evaluation. This was time consuming and burdensome. Due to this unexpected challenge, we only received 167 completed questionnaires out of the 193 total participants who attending a charla. One of the issues discovered, was that many of the older adults are embarrassed by this literacy issue and return the questionnaire blank. When possible, participants were contacted and given assistance with the questionnaire, however, a number of participants chose to remain anonymous and thus, we are unable to follow up. At this point, we expect the total number of completed post-program questionnaires to remain at 167.

Information Dissemination:

The outcomes of the *Segunda Edad Saludable* have been disseminated through several avenues. A press release has been sent to over media outlets in the Northeast Region of Massachusetts. An article on the program activities and its outcomes will be included in Family Service, Inc.'s quarterly newsletter which is distributed to over 2000 individuals and businesses throughout the region and the nation. In addition, a letter will be sent to all regional elder serving organizations including homecare agencies, senior centers and health clinics, regarding the activities and outcomes of the program. Finally, Family Service has written personal letters to our local, state and national legislative delegations to inform them on our activities and program outcomes. (See Attached)

Attachments:

- List of Community Leaders
- Community Leader Contract
- Copies of Training Materials
 - mold
 - toxics and pesticides
 - mercury
- Copy of Press Release
- Copy of Letter sent to elder serving organizations
- Copy of Letter sent to legislators
- Copy of Article which will go into next quarterly newsletter