



Champions for bringing healthy choices to life.

A CASE REPORT:

COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS



THE PROBLEM

Childhood obesity has more than tripled in the past 30 years. Now, one in every three children in the United States is overweight or obese. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), approximately 17% (or 12.5 million) of children and adolescents ages 2-19 are obese. Obese children are more likely to become obese adults leading to chronic obesity related health problems like heart disease, high blood pressure, cancer, diabetes and asthma. The American Heart Association (AHA) now reports that childhood obesity is now the number one health concern among parents in the United States, topping drug abuse and smoking.

"The more we instill in our children early in life these physical activity habits that will last them a lifetime, the better they're going to do. And so we'll try to do what we can to expand those opportunities before school, during the school day, after school... this is going to help a lot academically..."

-- Arne Duncan, U.S. Secretary of Education

According to the CDC, partnerships among schools, families and community members can enhance student learning, promote consistent messages about healthy behaviors, increase resources and engage, guide and motivate students to eat healthfully and be active. These three sectors of society influence the growth and development of children and adolescents and share the responsibility for nurturing them into healthy and productive adults.

THE SOLUTION

Committed to its mission of improving community health, the Highmark Foundation funded seven community-based organizations (CBOs) in central, southwest and southeast Pennsylvania with the purpose of building their capacity to provide evidence-based, quality physical activity and nutrition programs and, subsequently, showing measurable changes and improvement in the health status of the children and youth they serve. In April 2011, CBO grantees were charged with the task of improving and expanding children's health through a variety of activities and strategies with dollars provided by the Highmark Foundation.

GOALS

- expand or increase capacity of CBOs with existing year-round after school physical activity and/or nutrition programs that are coordinated and accessible
- educate and engage parents and families about the importance of children's health by providing strategies for adopting healthy behaviors
- partner with schools to further the health and wellness agenda
- increase awareness among families through a series of education forums, workshops or presentations.

OUR APPROACH

Penn State Hershey PRO Wellness Center, in partnership with the Highmark Foundation, developed a practical and comprehensive approach for the CBOs to implement nutrition education and physical activity programs in their after-school and summer programs. This approach included:

- specific interventions in the area of physical activity and nutrition
- school partnerships
- parent engagement
- sustainable changes beyond funding period
- evaluation and measured outcomes

In order for the CBOs to meet their funding goals and expectations, the PRO Wellness Center provided technical assistance to plan, implement and evaluate their intervention by offering a comprehensive and practical approach.

THE RESULTS

As a result of this funding, the seven CBO grantees (see table 1) have incorporated quality, evidence-based nutrition and physical activity programs into their existing after-school and summer programs with remarkable results and outcomes.

COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS	COUNTY	# YOUTH SERVED
Family Resources	Allegheny	998
Hosanna House	Allegheny	136
Lancaster Recreation Commission	Lancaster	483
Olivet Boys & Girls Club of Reading & Berks County	Berks	594
Salvation Army	Dauphin	435
Schenley Heights Youth Development	Allegheny	178
YouthPlaces	Allegheny	2030

Table 1

Participation ranged from 136 at Hosanna House to over 2,000 at YouthPlaces (with 16 sites). Although each CBO measured results and outcomes differently (through surveys, physical fitness measures such as Fitnessgram or other pre/post testing instruments), all have shown significant findings from intervention programs implemented as a result of the Highmark Foundation grant.

Nearly 5,000 youth in grades K-12 were positively impacted as a result of participation in one or more of these community-based organization's after-school and/or summer programs which included a year-round swimming program, a team sports program, teen health and fitness program, Kids in the Kitchen, tennis, soccer, basketball and Zumba.

Other results included:

- exceeding enrollment goals with some nearly doubling in number
- significant improvement in knowledge of nutrition and physical activity
- 160% increase in physical activity minutes
- 9.7% decrease in BMI percentiles in the 75th to 100th percentiles
- increased parent attendance at program events
- increase in number of sites offering after-school programs
- expansion of after-school programming as a result of school partnerships in all seven CBOs



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ABOUT PENN STATE HERSHEY PRO WELLNESS CENTER

Penn State Hershey PRO Wellness Center helps Pennsylvania communities live healthier lives using evidence-based strategies for measurable and sustainable results. Historically focused on childhood obesity prevention, the Center has helped children and their families eat well, engage in regular physical activity and incorporate healthy habits into their everyday lives since 2003.

Our approach of Prevention, Research and Outreach provides schools, communities and like-minded organizations with educational programs, technical assistance, collaborative partnerships and access to proven wellness interventions.

PREVENTION

The Center provides an evidence-based approach to understanding and reducing the risks of childhood obesity. We facilitate proven interventions and capacity building, and offer technical assistance and hands-on project management to overcome obstacles that prevent access to healthy alternatives. In addition to educating and inspiring people to make healthy choices, the Center focuses on environmental and lifestyle changes that remove barriers and increase access to healthy behaviors where we learn, work, play and live.

RESEARCH

We recognize the importance of integrating research, evidence and data into our programs to ensure value and credibility to those we serve.

OUTREACH

We strive to educate and inspire youth and families to incorporate healthy lifestyle choices daily. Our outreach efforts include increasing public awareness through regional event participation as well as providing various materials related to nutrition, physical activity and other obesity related issues.



*PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT & IMPLEMENTATION • ASSESSMENT & EVALUATION
CAPACITY BUILDING • TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE • COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS
TRAINING • ACCESS TO PROVEN WELLNESS INTERVENTIONS*



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