

Community residents are **Creating Greater Destinies!**

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Summary

To address the prevalence of diseases like diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and other chronic diseases that disproportionately impact low-income families and communities of color in the greater Cleveland area, HIP-Cuyahoga, with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, enlisted the help of local residents to support strategies to both prevent and manage health issues in their neighborhoods -- from incentivizing corner stores to provide fresh produce and other healthy fare, to creating shared use agreements with schools and other existing facilities in the neighborhood to increase opportunities for physical activity.

Challenge

While increasing access and opportunity for improved nutrition is an important goal for everyone in Cuyahoga County, there is a disproportionate burden among under-resourced communities, especially communities of color. Data from the Cuyahoga County Community Health Needs Assessment showed that one in two Cleveland residents live in a “food desert” area. These are neighborhoods that lack grocery stores and other retail outlets that carry fresh produce and other healthy options. The assessment also revealed that one in three adults in Cleveland is obese and therefore at risk of chronic diseases.

Solution

To provide opportunities for all residents of Cuyahoga County to access healthy food and safe and engaging places for recreation and physical activity, HIP-Cuyahoga has partnered with residents in several under-resourced neighborhoods including Glenville, Collinwood and East Cleveland, to create Resident Teams. These teams of local resident volunteers took part in a Community Ambassador workshop series developed and implemented by HIP-Cuyahoga partners – Neighborhood Leadership Institute and Strategic Solutions Partners. This nine-week series focused on topics such as public health, equity, social determinants of health, branding and communications, and conflict management. Participants were presented with local data that provided an important overview of health challenges in their respective neighborhoods. The teams will use their learnings to advance the work of HIP-Cuyahoga and to help shape their own policy agenda for community change including the identification of local priorities important to them.

"Creating Greater Destinies"



What makes this program different from other efforts at building healthier communities?

“A lot of times, with the best intentions, we try to make evidence-based programs work, but they’re not really tailored for specific neighborhoods,”

said Erika Hood, Community Fellow and Strategy Coordinator for REACH (Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Public Health). “Our resident teams have ownership of this particular effort. They can appreciate it more. They can make it more effective because it’s a resident-driven approach, not some top-down model.”

Mark McClain, a resident of Cleveland who was recruited to one of the Resident Teams, agrees that better health happens when local residents become part of the solution.

“If you can take care of health issues, you can make a better community overall,” said McClain, minister of a local church and a former Cleveland prosecutor. “Our philosophy is health is the foundation of all life’s successes. If you live in a food desert, you send your kids to school with a bowl of Fruit Loops, which doesn’t help their concentration. If you can’t concentrate, you can’t learn well. If you can’t learn well, you can’t graduate, you can’t get a job. If you can’t get a job, you end up on a street corner doing some illegal activity. Then you end up in the criminal justice system. At the root of all these problems is health. And it’s time we make good health a priority so we can get to these larger, more complex problems that are impacting our communities.”

Results

Providing community capacity and leadership building opportunities to residents like Mark McClain offers an opportunity for them to see the larger picture, which is an important step in addressing the structures, systems and environments that undermine health. More than 30 residents from Glenville, Collinwood, and East Cleveland neighborhoods demonstrated their commitment to working with HIP-Cuyahoga to improve health in their communities by participating in at least one or more Community Ambassador Workshop sessions. More importantly, many of the Community Ambassadors took part in other capacity building and outreach opportunities such as HIP-Cuyahoga’s Shared Use Agreement training and Chronic Disease Self-Management Leader Training, conducted by Fairhill Partners. On September 26, 2015, HIP-Cuyahoga hosted its first Community Day and the Community Ambassadors were actively involved in shaping the agenda, participating as speakers, and providing their input through focus groups. In addition, these passionate and committed residents shared their collective story through a video which they created and produced, and through their personal reflections of hope and opportunity.



Sustainable Success

When you empower a community to come up with their own, community-specific solutions to issues impacting their health and the health of residents in their neighborhoods, you see the effects for generations to come.

Your Involvement is Key

To learn more or to get involved in HIP-Cuyahoga, go to www.hipcuyahoga.org.

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