Promoting Faith-Based Collaborations to Address Obesity Across the Lifespan:

HOPE2 Prevention Programming in 35 Churches in Jackson, Mississippi

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BACKGROUND

In the US, at least one-third of children are overweight or obese, and the prevalence is higher in the Deep South. In the Deep South, faith-based institutions play a key role as community leaders and gathering places, and thus are ideal locations to deliver evidence-based obesity prevention programming.

Learning Objective 1 Describe a faith-based obesity prevention program that is part of a community-wide, multi-sectorial nutrition and healthy living initiative.

Learning Objective 2 Design a faith-based obesity prevention program with components that link to and support a community-wide intervention including schools, child care centers, afterschool/summer camp programs, and other socializing institutions of children.

Learning Objective 3 Design a minigrant program to build capacity of community partners to improve the health of their communities via contextually-specific activities.

Learning Objective 4 Discuss how community-based partners, such as Cooperative Extension Nutrition Educators, can provide trainings and technical assistance to faith-based leaders as they jointly implement nutrition and healthy living/obesity prevention education as part of weekly faith assemblies/meetings.

DESCRIPTION OF PROGRAMMING

Churches in Jackson, MS became HOPE2 partners through the Healthy Incentive Project (HIP) minigrant program. HIP minigrants acted as the community outreach arm of HOPE2 that extended school-based programming into the community by providing resources for implementation of obesity prevention initiatives.

Through the Healthy Incentive Project (HIP) minigrant program, the community outreach arm of HOPE2 that extended school-based programming into community by providing minigrants for implementation of obesity prevention initiatives, churches in Jackson, MS became HOPE2 partners. Specifically, 35 faith-based institutions applied for and received HIPs. Personnel from 35 churches participated in a train-the-trainer event that raised awareness about obesity prevention and helped identify strategies for communities to work together to encourage healthy lifestyles. Each church received obesity-prevention materials (books, games, posters, etc. from The OrganWise Guys, Inc.). Using these tools and trainings, faith-based groups took the lead in presenting programs about making healthy choices related to nutrition and physical activity to children, parents, and senior citizens in churches, libraries, community centers, childcare centers, etc.

Comments from the Hinds County Extension Agent (MS State University) who led the initiative:

Our goal was to spread the word about the importance of practicing good nutrition and physical activity on a daily basis.

Our target audience was youth; however, many adults took part in the activities.

We had a lot of FUN!!!

What Can We Do? (Focus areas as described by church program leaders):

- Make healthier food choices
- Get enough rest
- Drink more water
- Minimize stress

Exercise

Help teach others

Dr. Lorrie Anderson, of the Poindexter African American Community Cultural Outreach and Learning Center, wrote, "Our focus was on introducing the OrganWise Guys with emphasis on diabetes and healthy eating habits. Thanks for your time!"

Margaret Perry, of New Way Mississippi, Inc. wrote, "I have really enjoyed presenting organ wise to the people in my community and I will continue to inform them about how important it is to eat and stay healthy. Thank You for allowing me to be a part of organwise."







- ¹ Healthy Networks Design & Research—a nonprofit organization (www.HealthyNetworksDesignandResearch.org)
- ² The OrganWise Guys, Inc. (www.organwiseguys.com)

LESSONS LEARNED

Faith-based organizations can successfully lead prevention education programming in their churches as well as in their outreach ministries in the community.

Key faith-based leaders accept, and enjoy, being trained on evidence-based obesity prevention materials, and then lead implementation in a systematic, ongoing manner.

Obesity prevention education in the faith community successfully can be integrated into many church activities including Sunday services, covered dish suppers/lunches,

community meetings, and ongoing outreach to their community partners.



Because faith-based organizations are strong cornerstones in most communities in the Deep South, they are ideal settings for promoting obesity prevention efforts, and enhancing existing community-and school-based nutrition and healthy living education. Cultivation of faith-community partnerships can support expansion of HOPE2 efforts, and ideas for targeting "at risk" subgroups for specialized outreach, such as teens and dads, should be considered to help reverse obesity trends in the Southern US.





