

State Health Improvement Process
Supporting Local Health Improvement Coalitions (LHICs) to Implement Action Plans

Mid Shore Health Improvement Coalition (LHIC12-001)

Final Narrative Report (May-November 27, 2012)

SHIP Objective: Reduce the proportion of children and adolescents who are considered obese.

Purpose: The Mid Shore Health Improvement Coalition will address obesity among African American adults and children residing in the mid-shore region through a nutritional intervention targeting African American churches.

Recruitment

The Mid-Shore Body & Soul project was outlined by the Project Director, Nicole Morris, at the May 14th LHIC meeting. Local Health Departments and Minority Outreach and Technical Assistance (MOTA) representatives were tasked with identifying African American churches in their respective counties. These partners delivered application forms to the identified churches, with the goal of recruiting 15 churches (3 per county). To be considered for inclusion, Church applicants were to agree to at a minimum: Identify 2-3 peer health coaches, attend a half-day training, offer health risk assessments to their congregation, implement a “healthy food policy” for church sponsored events, and demonstrate Pastor support (as evidenced by a signature). After reviewing the applicants received by the deadline of June 15, it was decided to include all 16 Church applicants. Pastors were notified on June 22, and were asked to identify 2-3 peer health coaches to attend an introductory training on the Body & Soul Project.

Trinity AME Church	Caroline
Union Bethel AME	Caroline
Abrams Memorial Church	Caroline
Cambridge Church of Christ	Dorchester
St. Luke UM Church	Dorchester
Mt. Olive AME Church	Kent
Graves Chapel UAME Church	Kent
Bethel AME Church	Kent
The Potter's House Ministries	Kent
Bethel AME Church	Queen Anne
New Life Community UM Church	Queen Anne
Abundant Life Restoration Center	Queen Anne
Chester/Stevensville Charge	Queen Anne
Union Baptist Church	Talbot
New St. John's UM Church	Talbot
Scott's UM Church	Talbot

Table 1 Initial Church Partners

Training

To accommodate churches from across the 5-county region, two training sessions were offered; the first at the Caroline County Health Department in Denton on July 16, and the second on Saturday, July 21, at the Talbot County Free Library in Easton. All pastors were in attendance with their chosen peer health coaches, as well as a ‘local liaison’ from each of the Local Health Departments. A healthy catered lunch was provided. The Project Director welcomed the attendees and introduced the Body & Soul

Project, providing background on SHIP and the Mid Shore LHIC, and detailing Chronic Disease and Obesity data for African Americans on the Mid Shore. Churches were also guided in the four pillars of Body & Soul: emphasizing 1) Pastor support 2) Church activities that promote healthy eating 3) Church environment that promote healthy eating 4) Peer Counseling. To expand upon the core pillars of Body & Soul, it was also discussed how to implement on-site health risk assessments at their church. Churches had an opportunity to discuss how they planned to customize the program within their congregation, and share inspiring ideas such as starting a weekly walking club, planting a vegetable garden on-site, training their kitchen committees on healthy cooking techniques, etc. At the end of the training each church was tasked with setting a kick-off date to launch Body & Soul at their church, and was provided with a binder with reproducible materials.

After churches set a kick-off date, program materials were delivered to the church including: paper health risk assessments, pencils, blood pressure kits, privacy screens, tape measurers, pedometers, 8-weeks to Wellness manuals and instructor CD, Down Home Healthy Cookbooks, know your #s pocket-cards, a small digital camera, and a vinyl Mid Shore Body & Soul banner. Time was provided to answer questions about their kick-off events. Churches were given instructions on how to accurately measure height, weight, and waist circumference. If the churches did not have someone trained to perform blood pressures checks, the Project Director coordinated with Local Health Departments to offer that service.

Implementation

All 16 churches initially set a kick-off date between August 5 and October 14, yet several postponed their events until late October/early November. To date, all 16 churches have held their kick-off events. The events have begun with a motivating opening by the Pastor, linking the connection of a healthy body and soul. As completed Health Risk Assessments from the kick-off events are scanned into the Wellsource software, 14-page personal reports are being generated for the participants.

While Pastors’ initial estimates suggested 1,500 people among all congregations, we witnessed that far fewer attend church regularly. Many of the churches have extended their health risk assessments into the weeks following their kick-off event to extend the reach beyond those present at church. Body and Soul “Ambassadors” from Local Health Departments have offered to assist in repeat events if necessary.

To further extend the reach of the project, partnerships with four additional churches are being established. Kick-off events will be scheduled between December and February 15, with additional supplies being ordered.

New Beginnings	Caroline
Waugh UM Church	Dorchester
Bethel AME	Dorchester
Holy Trinity AME Church	Kent

Table 2. New Church partners

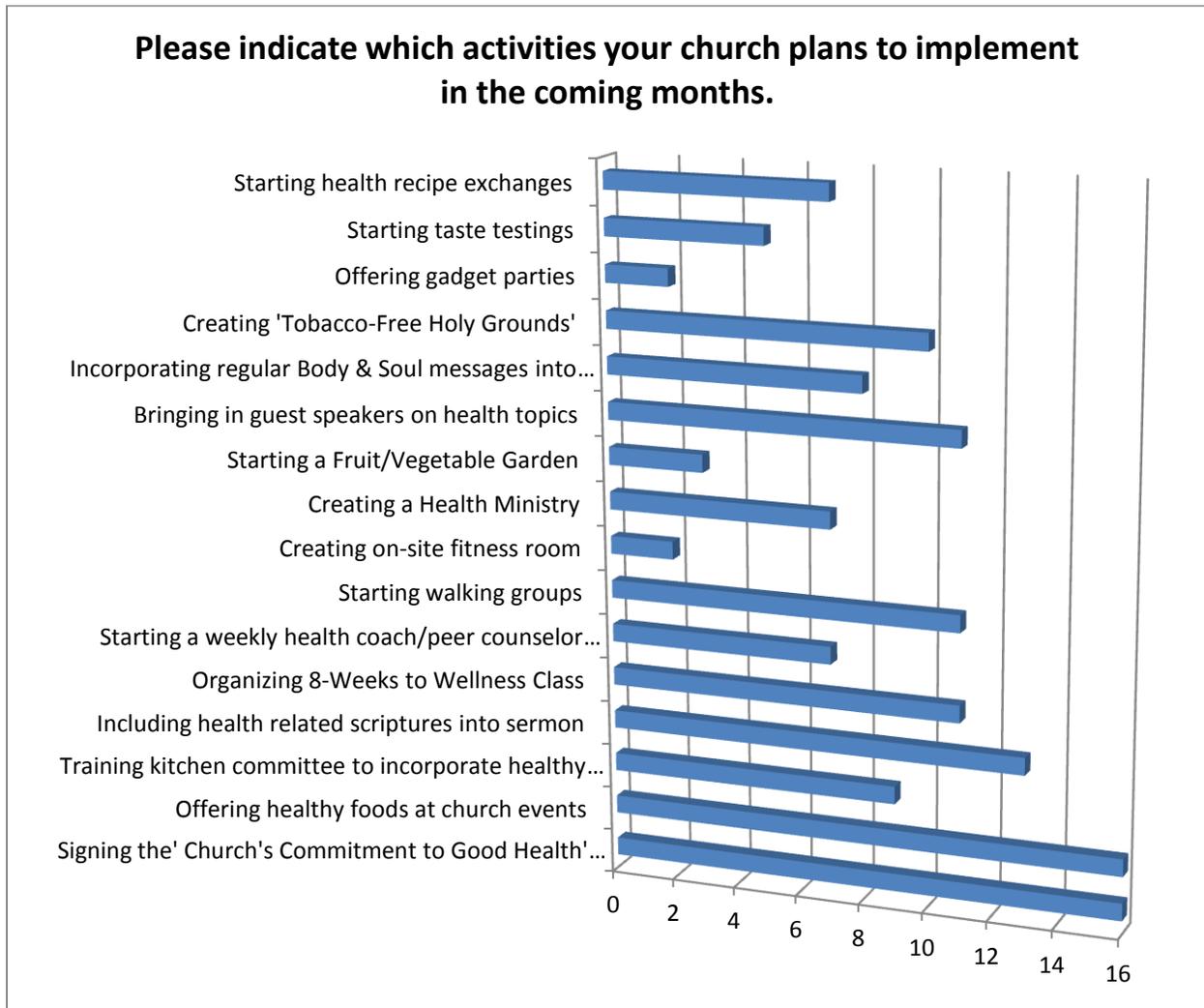
Results

To date, 489 people have been screened by taking health risk assessments, (and it is anticipated that an additional 200+ people will be screened in the next two months). The average age was 59, approximately 65% were female, and 35% male, and 98% identified themselves as African

American/Black. Obesity was measured by BMI or waist circumference if weight was not provided. Alarmingly, 56% of adults were classified as being obese, exceeding our projection of 46%. Also startling was the issue of hypertension. It was projected that 27% of adults would have a measured blood pressure of 140+/or 90+, yet direct measurement revealed that 49% were hypertensive, many of whom were also taking blood pressure medications. 28% of adults also reported having a personal history of diabetes. As projected, only 28% of adults reported eating five or more servings of fruits and vegetables per day. Of the 79 children reported, 15% were obese and 25% ate five or more servings of fruits and vegetables.

Sustainability

Churches have taken ownership of this project and have looked for creative ways to promote healthy living within their congregation, largely by focusing on policy and environmental supports. Some have started “Biggest Loser” challenges, weekly walking groups, and healthy recipe exchanges, and one has broken ground on a vegetable garden. *The chart below indicates churches’ intentions after attending a Body & Soul training session over the summer.*



By reaching out to the University of Maryland Cooperative Extension and the Maryland Food Bank, we were successful in establishing formal partnerships with 11 of the 16 churches to be “Produce Drop Sites”, receiving weekly donations of fresh produce from local farmers. This accomplishment will remove yet another barrier to eating more fruits and vegetables. The produce delivered to the churches reaches not only members of the church, but the community at large.

Each church has been equipped with scales, privacy screens, and blood pressure equipment, giving them the capacity to monitor biometrics, and provide follow-up to their congregation. Additionally, 54 people have been trained to be “health coaches”, assisting their congregation and/or community in locating resources, and interpreting and using health information. This network of individuals may play a critical role in assisting the Mid Shore LHIC address other prioritized objectives including reducing adolescent tobacco use and preventable ER visits related to diabetes.

Lessons Learned

Making an impact in five counties has meant taking a coordinated approach, and using resources wisely. This “Train the trainer” program has built capacity in underserved areas, bringing needed supplies and education to those who are trusted leaders in their communities. Reaching out to established partners such as Local Health Departments and Minority Outreach and Technical Assistance representatives, was critical in making in-roads with churches quickly. Communication to pastors and health coaches was difficult at times since many did not use email frequently, or at all. To avoid missing information, redundant forms of communication (email/phone/and mail) were used.

To most accurately collect data on childhood obesity, and nutritional habits without direct measurement, we adopted questions from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS). Adults that completed a health risk assessment were also asked to complete the questionnaire, answering the BRFSS questions for any children residing in the household. To avoid duplicates, birthdates were requested for the children. It is possible that participants were uncomfortable answering these questions or were concerned about privacy issues, resulting in fewer returned questionnaires. To increase the number of children and adolescents assessed, direct mailings will be sent to adults who completed an HRA, reassuring them of privacy and confidentiality concerns. It is also possible that since the average age of the adult participants was 59, many do not have children in the home.

Leveraging Resources

While additional direct funding was not leveraged from partners in the community, this CRHC grant funding allowed relationships to be developed and/or strengthened with community partners. The Maryland Food Bank used their allocated funding to expand their reach into the Mid Shore African American community by tapping into the network of churches participating in Body & Soul. Through the LHIC, additional resources have been made available through Priority Partners, United HealthCare, the American Diabetes Association, and the American Cancer Society, all of whom have offered no-cost

materials and programming to members of the churches. All of these partners will be present at the Mid Shore Body & Soul post Celebration scheduled for December 1st at the Talbot County Historical Society in Easton. Churches will be able to network with these LHIC partners directly, accessing additional resources to sustain their Body & Soul projects.

Visuals of Body & Soul



Figure 1. Making Fruit Smoothies at St. Luke's in Cambridge.



Figure 2. Celebrating Healthy Foods at Mt. Olive AME in Worton.



Figure 3. Measuring height and weight at Potter's House Ministries in Kent County.



Figure 4. Playing Ball at Cambridge Church of Christ.



Figure 5. Zumba!



Figure 6. Congregation shows Food Inc. for their Kick-off!