



Physical Activities Changing Communities

Challenge:

Overweight and obesity have reached nationwide epidemic proportions. In Houston's East End, an area that is largely Hispanic of Mexican descent has 68% of the families living below 139% of poverty. This area has an estimated 66% of adults and 55% of children who live with unhealthy weight (obese or overweight). This has resulted in high health care costs and many premature deaths from the expected chronic conditions – diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, etc.

While this is a park-rich community, with centers providing physical activity programs such as Zumba, dance and aerobics classes, these are sparsely attended because 1) they are offered during the workdays when people are striving to earn a living for their families, and 2) they expect a certain level of fitness in order to keep up with the instructor. In addition, there are walking and bike trails that are not used due to the plethora of feral dogs and appropriate fear of crime.

Solution:

There was a need for programs to be offered at locations where people already went to reach new potential participants, and these programs needed to be offered in a way that all people at any level of fitness felt that they could be successful.

CAN-DO Houston, a partner of East End REACH, is a not-for-profit organization that has been in the community for 5 years. While initially focused on preventing and reducing childhood obesity through healthy eating and physical activities, CAN-DO soon identified a need to expand its focus to include the adults in those children's lives. As a result, it created "Let's Move Magnolia!" which offers Zumba classes 4 nights a week at one of the community parks, and twice a week at the Magnolia Multi-Service Center. The program has been life changing for many in the community, however they were unable to continue year-round programming because they could not continue classes at the park over the summer.



When Let's Move Magnolia! needed to find a place to continue offering classes over the summer, the East End REACH program stepped in to help. We worked with another partner, Community Family Centers (CFC) to hold summer classes at their J P McGovern Sports and Recreation Center. Even after Let's Move Magnolia was able to move back to their park home, classes have continued to be offered through the CFC recreation center, creating opportunities for a group of participants who would not go to a park or to the multi-service center to engage in physical activity.

Results:

Without East End REACH bringing together diverse partners, it would CAN-DO would have had to stop their programming over the summer because they were unaware of the resources that were underutilized at CFC. By enabling CAN-DO to continue their programming, East End REACH has helped keep momentum with the participants all summer long. These participants were able to easily change locations, new people became aware of CAN-DO's programs and the program expanded once the summer program was completed.

This success can be illustrated through the story of one person, Mrs. Bertha Galvan. Mrs. Galvan is 65 years old and was born in Nuevo Leon, Mexico. She was diagnosed with diabetes eleven years ago, when her weight was 189 pounds. Due to her weight, her diabetes was constantly out of control. She knew that she needed to do something because her husband had died 8 years ago from the disease.

Three years ago, she began attending the Let's Move Magnolia! program at the Magnolia Multi-service Center, where she was going daily for lunch. She has been in the Zumba class from the very first day. She proclaims that "Zumba has changed my life!" Because of her participation, her sugar levels are controlled and she now eats in moderation. And, as can be expected, she has shed pounds in a healthy way in the three years of twice weekly classes and modified diet. She says her life has changed in many ways. For example, she says that she now enjoys walking to the bus stop that takes her to shopping centers because she has no problem walking and carrying her groceries. She continues to receive positive reinforcement, with her doctor congratulating her each time he sees her, and being rewarded by her insurance company with a \$15 dollar gift card.

But, what is most important to our project is that Mrs. Galvan tells her personal story to motivate others to change their sedentary lifestyles through exercise and to learn how to change their diets to a more healthy level of nutrition. Her story inspires others to make the changes necessary and while this is done on a one-on-one basis, results are being seen with more people coming to classes. Ambassadors that are of the community, such as Ms. Galvan, are an important part of change because they are living examples of the fact that change is possible.