Mobilizing Rural Low-Income Communities to Assess and Improve the Ecological Environment to Prevent Childhood Obesity

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Abstract
A seven-state, multi-disciplinary integrated Research and Extension team implemented a community development intervention with a quasi-experimental design. The hypotheses: community coaching will enhance a community’s ability to address identified needs and will improve nutrition and physical activity environments.

The project GOAL is to mobilize capacity, including policy, system and environmental changes in communities, to create and sustain an environment and culture of healthy eating and physical activity to prevent childhood obesity in low income young children living in rural communities.

The seven partnering states are: Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota and Wisconsin.

Objectives
- Assess rural low-income communities pre-post
- Complete Coalition self-assessments annually
- Implement community interventions in seven states
- Engage Community Coaches with Intervention communities and professional development
- Collect qualitative data via interviews and reflections

Description
Two closely matched communities in each state (randomly assigned; intervention with a hired coach or comparison with no coach) were provided funding to support the promotion of healthy eating and increased physical activity of four-year olds in their communities. Community environments were examined before and after four years of implementation. Training on the methods of community coaching was provided to the comparison communities at the end of the project.

Lessons Learned
- Community Coalition functions improved most with intervention communities
- Community Coaching aided ability to address identified community needs
- Identified “Best Practices” are available as an online tutorial. http://go.osu.edu/CPCOtoolkit

Conclusions
- Ecological model was an effective foundation
- Use of a new community-based coaching model benefitted the intervention communities and they were able to address more policy, system and environmental approaches
- Ripple mapping reinforced collaborative achievements

Evaluation
- Assessments used previously validated instruments, reflections, coalition assessments, interviews and a final ripple mapping exercise.
- A mixed methods approach with MANOVA and corresponding non-parametric tests were used to analyze quantitative data.
- Dominant emergent themes from qualitative data with Ripple Effect Mapping highlighted the progress and the many steps required.

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