Using Photovoice to empower Latina teens and parents in an obesity prevention program

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OVERVIEW

Using Photovoice to engage youth, providers and policymakers in community assessment and policy change.

ASSessment

Teens use Photovoice to assess community resources and barriers to healthy eating and physical activity, identifying common themes and an agenda for change.

ADVOCACY

Photovoice gives teens opportunities to express their thoughts and concerns about their communities and their physical surroundings by creating presentations and opening dialogues with city leaders and policymakers.

CHANGE

Photovoice has proven to bring about positive change for program participants and the communities in which they live.

BACKGROUND:

Healthy Tomorrows for New Britain Teens (HTT) is a five-year (2010-2015) initiative to reduce obesity among high school students in New Britain, CT. The HTT project is a collaborative partnership between community health centers, schools, state and local health departments, and youth-serving organizations. In 2011, Community Health Center Inc. (CHC), the Federally Qualified Health Center of New Britain, received a Community Health Block Grant (CHBG) from the state and federal government to pilot the HTT project. The CHBG provided $300,000 over 3 years to fund 2-3 new Community Health Centers in Connecticut to pilot the HTT project. The CHBG is a pilot project funded by the Community Health Resources and Services Administration.

School/Community Integration: For life-long Physical well-being

The second year of the HTT project included a state-wide initiative to increase access to physical activity and healthy eating resources that focused on community engagement and empowerment. In September 2010, CHC received a grant from the YWCA to provide trainings and guidance on using Photovoice in community and school settings. Photovoice is a participatory research methodology that enables community members to document their experiences, express their concerns and aggregate information to support positive change in their communities.

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Photovoice and the City of New Britain

In 2010, the city of New Britain received a John Bonham Social Change grant to conduct mid-course evaluations of HTT using Photovoice. Photovoice is a community-based participatory research methodology that enables community members to document their experiences, express their concerns and aggregate information to support positive change in their communities. Photovoice gives teens opportunities to express their thoughts and concerns about their communities and their physical surroundings by creating presentations and opening dialogues with city leaders and policymakers.

METHOD: Photovoice

The concept of Photovoice is based on the notion that people can best express their thoughts and experiences and identify solutions by being active participants in the process. Photovoice is a participatory research methodology that enables community members to document their experiences, express their concerns and aggregate information to support positive change in their communities.

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RESULTS:

• Teens and adults identified barriers and facilitators to healthy eating and physical activity in multiple settings (home, school, and community)
• Teens and adults expressed ideas to change perceptions and behaviors in their everyday lives
• Teens and adults identified common themes and an agenda for change
• Teens and adults were encouraged to discuss coping strategies in therapy sessions with a licensed provider

CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Photovoice is an effective community-based research tool that can be used to engage community members in meaningful discussions about community assets and challenges. In New Britain, teens and adults used Photovoice to document and express their experiences and concerns about healthy eating and physical activity as a way to promote healthy behaviors and policies that support healthy eating and physical activity.

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