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The Unity Project: Camden Community Health Center Building Authentic & Impactful Relationships Through the Ask-First Model

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The Unity Project: The Camden Community Health Center

Building Authentic & Impactful Relationships Through the “Ask First” Model

Introduction

In Spring 2017, the Camden Community Health Center (CCHC) launched an initiative aimed at fostering relationships with various Camden, New Jersey organizations. CCHC wants to not only educate community members about the clinic’s services, but also collaborate with said organizations in improving Camden’s health. This initiative was appropriately titled the Unity Project. Although the CCHC has been in Camden for over 15 years, we have experienced that a number of organizations, with the same goals and missions, have been unaware of our presence within the community. Similarly, we found that there was a disconnect amongst the Camden organizations, themselves.

Goal

Working towards affecting long-term change by forming authentic and impactful relationships with organizations that are currently championing meaningful outreach in Camden, New Jersey.

Methods

We needed to remodel the traditional approach of medical school outreach, which tends to be short-term and superficial. We are often lost in our enthusiasm to help and a critical first step is overlooked: simply asking “What do you need?” Thus, when the Unity Project contacts organizations, whether it is a knock on a door or a phone call, we change the narrative by asking this question rather than offering our suggestions. We have termed this approach the “Ask First” method. In addition, the Unity Project coordinates a bi-monthly newsletter, which includes each organization’s flyer and highlights any special events or services they are offering. This allows all organizations to have access to a list of resources to best address the needs of their persons. The newsletter aims to better facilitate communication between CCHC and the community of Camden organizations and as well as Camden organizations with each other.



Image 1, 2, & 3: Physiology presentation to Urban Promise 5th graders

Results

“Ask First” method in mind, we started with 6 organizations, and in just less than one year, we are now at 20. These organizations and services are:

- New Visions Homeless Day Shelter
 - Vitals workshop with care bag distribution
- Joseph’s House of Camden
 - Medical Management presentation for staff
- Camden Area Health Education Center (AHEC)
 - Tabled for annual Kroc Center Healthy Living Fair[§]
- Respond PATH (Providing Assistance To the Homeless)
 - Vitals Workshop with care bag distribution
- Covenant House of New Jersey
- Camden County Women’s Center (CCWC)
 - Donations towards emergency funds: ~\$750
 - Holiday Gift Drive: ~\$800
 - Tabled for annual Kroc Center Healthy Living Fair[§]
 - Education in Domestic Violence presentation to RowanSOM[§]
- Center for Family Services
 - Holiday gift drive, ‘adopting’ 13 children: ~\$800
 - IMANI Partial Care
 - 3 part educational series: nutrition, exercise, mindfulness
 - DREAMS
 - In progress: monthly educational classes and mentoring project
 - GrandSlam
 - In progress: Physicals for proper foster care placement
 - HomeBase
 - Promise Neighborhood Family Success Center
 - “Back 2 School Bash”- Advocacy for children with ADHD
 - Services Empowering Rights of Victims (SERV)
 - Unity Project services presentation at volunteer training
- Hispanic Family Center of Southern New Jersey
 - Vitals workshop at Family Night
 - PrEP presentation to HIV+ MSM support group
- Urban Promise
 - Physiology presentations to supplement for 5th grade biology course
 - In progress: Urban Trekkers volunteering
- Coriell Institute for Medical Research
- Helping Hand Behavioral Health Corp
- LIFE at Lourdes
- VITAS Healthcare
 - Hospice Benefits and Basics presentation to RowanSOM[§]
- Lourdes Health System (LHS) Health Network
- Parent Bereavement Support Group

We expanded our community partnerships by being the spotlight presentation at the **Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers’ November Camden Care Management Meeting**. This is a monthly networking forum for community members and professionals interested in transforming healthcare and improving the wellbeing of individuals.

[§]Service to Unity Project

Conclusions

“Ask First” establishes a new tone in the conversation that allows organizations a chance to describe their challenges and discuss how we can be of help. We have been able to provide a variety of services that benefit organizations, and more importantly, the people they serve. We have partnered with these organizations providing health educational presentations, donating basic necessities, vital sign screenings, and monetary donations for medical emergency funds. Collaborating with our membered organizations and being available for personal meetings in a comfortable setting enables us to establish a trusting relationship and work towards bridging the gap between a community in need and a medical field willing to help. We are excited to continue forming relationships and expand our outreach efforts through the employment of the “Ask First” model.

Implementing the “Ask First” model, we hope to work towards lessening health disparities and improving access to quality, primary medical care for underserved populations, providing comprehensive care for all patients’ health and social needs.

Future Directions

- Focus on strengthening partnerships with current organizations and provide consistent services through the “Ask First” model
- Host regular networking events for leaders of partner organizations
- Establish lecture series for RowanSOM faculty and students with speakers from our partner organizations

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Image 4 : CCWC table at Kroc Center Healthy Living Fair



Image 5: Medical management presentation to Joseph’s House of Camden staff