

Community Health Service Learning Through Development and Implementation of Need-based Hygiene and Nutrition Intervention

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Background:

Community health is the study and improvement of the overall health characteristics of a community. Aspects of community health include physical and mental health encompassing nutrition promotion, hygiene, self-love, healthy relationships, and overall happiness in a community. This project focuses on the general health of children in Salamanca, New York. The City of Salamanca is unique in that it resides almost entirely on Seneca Nation Territory. Significant events in the region's history, such as forced assimilation of Indigenous people, forced removal from ancestral lands, and decline of industry has led to poverty and poor health outcomes, placing Cattaraugus County as 60th out of 62 in overall health outcomes according to countyhealthrankings.org. Salamanca is a hub for violence, drug use, and obesity contributed by poverty. The availability of public education is directly related to resources within a community; the Salamanca Youth Center (SYC) serves the City's youth by engaging them in health education programming providing a safe haven during after school hours, while working with a limited budget. Our project serves to supplement existing programming in health education.

Methods:

Utilizing Lawrence Green's widely accepted PRECEDE-PROCEED model, we worked with our community collaborators to identify educational needs: hygiene and nutrition (Green, 1974). We researched effective pedagogical methods to deliver these content areas. From our research, we developed lesson plans including novel activities modified from current proven approaches. All activities were approved by our community collaborators. The group traveled to Salamanca and spent two days immersed in the community learning about its strengths and needs. During our trip, we delivered our lessons at two different venues. On day one we discussed healthy snacking with children and parents while assisting them with a fun Halloween craft of filling plastic gloves with air popped popcorn during the local elementary school's Trunk or Treat event. On day two we discussed and simulated disease transmission during play and during snacking using the product Glogerm (Glogerm).

Results:

Our health programming objective was to increase awareness of healthful hygiene and snacking habits among school-aged children in Salamanca. We will report the impact of our program as it was observed through both participation and comprehension.

Program Participation:

During the Trunk or Treat school event, 400 bags of popcorn were distributed, meaning that about 400 children received a healthful snack.

Our programming at the Youth Center was also well-attended. During our discussion on hand-washing and disease transmission, approximately 20 children participated. After the educational activity, approximately fifteen children remained to sample our healthy snack of pumpkin seeds.

Lesson Comprehension:

While simply choosing a healthful snack on Halloween (as opposed to candy) is a first step towards a more balanced diet, Trunk or Treat also proved to be an important site of community health promotion. Several children and their families stopped to engage with us about our snack and our vegetable costumes, allowing for a number of light-hearted discussions on the vitality of eating a variety of fruits and vegetables to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Almost every child appeared highly engaged and entertained at the Youth Center during our lesson and exercise on germs. Each child present lined up to view the simulated “germs” on their hands underneath the black light, and each child practiced proper hand-washing technique. Several children had to revisit the sink after their first round of hand-washing failed the black light test. Our program provided a successful dialogue about the spread of disease, and reinforced the importance of proper hand hygiene and snacking.

Barriers to Measurement:

Since our time spent observing the children at the Salamanca Youth Center was confined to our two-day trip, we presently lack data on the long-term effects of our health programming. We remain in contact with our community collaborators and are receiving updates regarding impact and current practices.

Discussion and Conclusion:

Our time spent at the SYC illustrates innate curiosity for children to want to learn about health. However, we noted that some teaching methods were more effective than others in eliciting engagement with content. As future health professionals this service learning experience provided an invaluable opportunity for us to further research and develop our skills necessary to serve as community health educators.

Bibliography:

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