CENTER BRIEFS

Health Risk Factors and Service Delivery Needs in Rural Areas of Southern Illinois: An Assessment Leading to a Participatory Dialogue

As a part of our effort to assess the needs of the health and social service delivery agencies, we mailed a brief survey to approximately 129 agency administrators. These agencies either provided direct service in one of the 22 county areas of southern Illinois or operated a service outreach program. We received responses from 39 agency administrators. The respondents represented community health centers, hospitals, women’s centers, substance abuse agencies, home health, long-term care, rehabilitation, and public health facilities. The subjects were asked to respond to service delivery needs of their agencies, major health issues of the target population, type of agency they operated, and approximate funding they received from various sources.

We found that on priority ranking, on a 15-item ‘Service Delivery Needs’ scale, the respondents identified the top 5 challenges/needs to be: Reimbursement; Recruitment & Retention; Client/Patient Inability to Pay; Transportation; Staff Development; and Fiscal Viability. On a 16-item ‘Health Issues’ scale, the top 5 priority health issues identified were: Behavioral Health; High Blood Pressure; Diabetes; Substance Abuse; and Obesity. These findings validated the ‘need to address’ issues of health risk factors and health service delivery needs of rural areas as identified in the Rural Healthy People 2010. It also provided credence to our secondary objective of calling upon grassroots level community agencies to initiate a dialogue around these issues. We are planning to accomplish this by hosting a one-day mini conference in the Fall.

Current literature on health issues often reflect on what areas of ‘rural health service’ ought to be researched. Should research on ‘rural health’ be dealt with separately from mainstream health research? Are the needs of rural health service providers different from the urban health service providers? What unique challenges do they face? Discussions on such topics will enable us to identify and formulate a research agenda for the southern Illinois region on the basis of a consensus among key stakeholders.

Whether the strategy is to collaborate with each other or to develop creative strategies, we feel that it is essential to have a participatory forum. While the primary objective of the survey was to identify the needs of local agencies, the secondary objective was to evaluate whether the findings significantly related to issues focused in rural health literature, and to refine research objectives. Please be on the look out for future announcements about the mini conference to be held on October 7, 2003.

This brief report is prepared by Ainon N. Mizan and Vijaya Kancherla (student volunteer with CRHSSD). For full information on the evaluation report contact Ainon at 618-453-4283.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

PROJECT ANGELFOOD

Project AngelFood was a collaborative community service effort to solicit donations of food and baby supplies for southern Illinois food pantries and child care centers. Representatives from the Center for Rural Health and Social Service Development (CRHSSD), the Laborers’ Union, Kiwanis Clubs, and the JALC-Child Care Resource and Referral Center formed a committee to develop a project to increase the supply of food for local food pantries and baby items for area child care centers.

The committee sent out surveys to local food pantries and child care centers to determine what needs, if any, they had for supplies of food and baby items. An analysis of the responses showed that local food pantries were always in need of food items, especially in the spring and summer months. Many child care centers indicated that they, too, were often in need of emergency baby supplies for times when parents forget or cannot afford to leave diapers, food, etc., for their children.

The campaign dates for Project AngelFood were set for March 10 through June 7, 2003. Flyers were designed by the SIUC Printing and Duplicating Department. They also designed a billboard advertising the project, which was erected on Illinois Route 13 near the Marion Mall. The flyers and the billboard were paid for by the Laborers Employers Cooperation and Education Trust (LECET).
Project AngelFood was further promoted by the committee members. Dan Shannon (representing the CRHSSD and the Carbondale Early Bird Kiwanis) along with Mark Robinson (serving as Lt. Governor of Division 36 Kiwanis and a member of the Carbondale Noon Kiwanis Club), enlisted the aid of the Kiwanis Clubs and their sponsored youth in Division 36 of the Illinois-Eastern Iowa District of Kiwanis International. Dan also spoke on radio stations to encourage food and baby supplies donations. Further media promotion of the project came from SIUC Public Affairs office. Bill Orrill, with LECET, enlisted the aid of the local Laborer’s Union Halls to collect food and baby items from their members. Nina Wargel and her staff at the JALC-Child Care and Referral Center distributed flyers to the area child care center staff for posting these in their communities. Other committee members also helped with flyer distribution and just “spreading the word.”

The dedicated effort of the committee for Project AngelFood paid off. Literally thousands of food and baby items were collected and distributed to the local food pantries and area child care centers. The items collected included canned goods, non-perishable food items, and toiletries for the food pantries. Baby food, diapers and wipes, baby cereal, and formula were collected for the child care centers. A few agencies and individuals also contributed money. Plans for a well-rounded AngelFood project are already underway for next year. In a true sense this was a successful community outreach effort!

For information regarding the project contact Dan Shannon at 618-453-7118 or dshannon@siu.edu.