

Title of Project: Keeping Children Healthy in Zuni

Agency Name: Pueblo of Zuni WIC Program

State: Pueblo of Zuni, New Mexico - ITO

Key Word Descriptors: Childhood obesity prevention, WIC collaborations

Description of Project:

The Pueblo of Zuni is an Indian Reservation in the West Central Mountains of New Mexico, adjacent to the Arizona border. The Zuni people have lived on this high desert land for over 1,000 years and today remains the largest of the pueblo tribes with a population of 8,000-10,000 people.

Traditionally, the Zuni people were very lean and active. Today, although Zuni remains among the most traditional of tribes, the eating habits and lifestyle of the current dominant culture has been adopted to a great degree and the availability of calorie dense foods and more sedentary lifestyle have taken their toll.

As a result, the rate of childhood obesity in Zuni is twice that of the national average and the rate of Type 2 diabetes in the Zuni population is 3-5 times the US average. Worse, the age of onset of Type 2 diabetes is becoming lower and lower with 11 and 15-year-old children being diagnosed.

In 1995, the "Keeping Children Healthy in Zuni Coalition" was formed. The coalition's goal is to promote a healthy body weight and suitable levels of fitness in Zuni children in an effort to prevent or delay the development of overweight, obesity and type 2 diabetes in this reservation community. "Keeping Children Healthy in Zuni" is a multi-agency coalition including the WIC director and nutritionist, the IHS nutritionist and HPDP physician, tribal leaders and program directors, teachers, Head Start personnel, the County Extension agent and community members. This coalition has tried to create community change through a number of interventions aimed at Zuni children, their parents and caregivers. It is also attempting to change public policy in developing and maintaining safe outdoor play spaces for children and their families, encouraging healthier food and beverage choices in vending machines at schools and worksites and in planning and organizing a community food pantry in Zuni.

Prior to and concurrent with the coalition's formation, the Zuni WIC Program was addressing the challenge of childhood obesity prevention in a number of ways. These WIC interventions included breastfeeding promotion, including a strong program of staff training, hiring a breastfeeding peer counselor and instituting an electric pump loan policy for high risk mother-infant dyads as well as mothers returning to work or school. An IHS mini-grant provided active play toys for children at risk for overweight at follow up appointments with the WIC nutritionist. WIC nutrition education lessons often include a food demonstration focused on "healthy family eating" principles and recipes. Articles are placed in the local newspaper to encourage "leaner" food choices and preparation methods and an increase in physical activity for the entire family.

In 2000, WIC sponsored the 1 % or less campaign with blind taste tests and education during voucher issuance. This involved extensive work to convince the vendors in the community to change their ordering practices based on projected change in demand after nutrition education. It also required follow up monitoring and continuous reminders for both clients and vendors.

Results of Project:

Primary prevention:

- Breastfeeding rates have increased from 34% at hospital discharge to 71 % and 6month duration rates are now 43%. Every WIC woman needing a breast pump for high-risk infant or separation due to work or school has access to one.

Eating behavior change:

- Vendor invoices show a dramatic decrease in purchasing and sales of whole milk and increase in 2% and 1 % fat milk.
- "Anti sweet beverage campaign" - the coalition initiated a campaign to promote drinking bottled water in place of soda, excess juice and "juice drinks" throughout the community. As a result, one local vendor no longer stocks cases of soda and sells bottled water instead. Schools have done the same and other local vendors have increased their stocks of bottled water as well.

Physical activity interventions:

WIC's work on the coalition's playground subcommittee lead to rehabilitation of two abandoned playgrounds using primarily in-kind contributions from Tribal Housing, Community Corrections and funding from the IHS Diabetes Prevention grant. Currently, two small grants have been received to prepare land for a new "Shiwi Tsana Park" or Zuni "Playground of Dreams". The coalition has brought WIC together with multiple other agencies whose focus is, simply put: "Keeping Children Healthy in Zuni".

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