



Connecticut Health
FOUNDATION

In-Depth

Executive Summary of a CT Health Evaluation

March 2009

CONNECTICUT HEALTH FOUNDATION HEALTH LITERACY IN ADULT EDUCATION SETTINGS GRANT PROJECT

Final Evaluation Report

*Summary of the full report prepared by Community Science, Gaithersburg, Maryland, www.communityscience.com
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OVERVIEW

The Health Literacy in Adult Education Settings grant project (“Health Literacy Project”) funded by the Connecticut Health Foundation (CT Health) began in October 2007 and ended in December 2008. The primary purpose of the grant project was to increase the capacity of six adult education centers to teach their racially and ethnically diverse learners to become health literate. The six adult education centers were:

- Capitol Region Education Council (Hartford)
- JUNTA for Progressive Action, Inc. (New Haven)
- Mercy Learning Center for Bridgeport
- New Haven Adult and Continuing Education
- Norwich Adult Education
- Stamford Public School Adult Education

The six adult education centers received grants from CT Health totaling approximately \$72,000 and 36 hours of professional development.

Twenty-one teachers participated in a series of “study circles” facilitated by a trained professional from the Literacy Assistance Center in New York to develop skills in integrating health literacy instruction into their classes. These teachers were expected to transfer their knowledge and skills to other teachers at the six centers.

Each of the following topics was addressed over the course of the study circles:

- Health care access and navigation (October-November 2007)
- Chronic disease management (January-February 2008)
- Disease prevention and screening (April-May 2008)

Integration of health literacy instruction into the curricula taught by adult education centers appears to be an effective strategy...

QUESTIONS & EVALUATION

CT Health sought answers to the following evaluation questions:

- To what extent did the teachers implement or modify the health literacy curriculum?
- Did the adult learners improve the health literacy skills needed to navigate systems, manage chronic diseases and engage in preventive behavior?
- Did self-efficacy for health literacy increase among the adult learners?
- How did the adult education centers increase their capacity (i.e., staff professional development, partnerships with health care organizations, institutional support, knowledge transfer, and sustainability of health literacy education) to teach health literacy skills to adult learners from racial and ethnic minority groups?

Evaluation of the Health Literacy Project consisted of five primary activities:

- Pre- and post-test of adult students' health literacy and related self-efficacy (at the beginning and end of each semester for two semesters)
- Survey of teachers' experiences with the study circles and health literacy instruction (at the end of each semester)
- Interviews with adult education center directors (at the beginning and end of the grant period)
- Review of progress reports submitted by the adult education centers in May 2008 and February 2009
- Analysis of student story essays (at the end of the fall 2008 semester)

OUTCOMES

All the teachers implemented the health literacy curriculum as planned.

Most spent the amount of time expected to prepare for and teach health literacy: between 20 percent (minimum amount of time expected) to 50 percent of their total preparation and teaching time. This pattern remained fairly steady during the spring and fall semesters, suggesting that it may be reasonable to expect adult education teachers to spend between 20 percent and 50 percent of their time preparing for and teaching health literacy.

As expected, the majority of teachers had to modify or create new lessons, and most modification and innovation occurred with lessons about chronic disease management. This was the biggest challenge faced by teachers because of the amount of time it took to tailor the sample lessons to their specific student populations, especially ESL/ESOL (English as a Second Language/English for Speakers of Other Languages) students.

As the teachers became more familiar with their students' health needs and capacities, they focused more on specific health topics instead of attempting to cover as many subjects as possible.

Students improved their knowledge about health issues and increased their confidence in their ability to navigate the health system, manage their health conditions and seek preventive care.

Approximately 2,400 adult learners were exposed to health literacy instruction during 2008. A sample of 565 students from the classes taught by teachers who participated in the study circles was tested at the beginning and end of the spring and fall semesters for changes in their health knowledge and self-efficacy in health literacy.

Test scores improved and the differences were statistically significant. Essays from students confirmed the trend observed in the quantitative findings.

All six centers clearly improved their capacity to teach health literacy.

By the end of the Health Literacy Project, almost three-quarters of classes across all six centers included some type of health literacy instruction. This finding includes classes beyond those taught by teachers who participated in the study circles due to diffusion of health literacy information or curricula at each center.

Additionally, each center developed an average of six partnerships with other health care providers (e.g., local hospitals and clinics). The centers also purchased more health-related materials and have instilled the value for health literacy among the leadership and staff of the centers.

Further, almost half the teachers participating in the study circles have continued to attend professional development activities for health literacy beyond the circles. They also have continued to share their knowledge and skills with other teachers at their centers and statewide. For example, a panel of teachers presented the initiative at the 2009 Connecticut Association for Adult and Continuing Education Conference. These capacities will be sustained, which, in turn, increases the likelihood that health literacy will continue to be taught at the six centers. Progress reports from the centers and interviews with the center directors confirmed this likelihood.

CONCLUSION

Integration of health literacy instruction into the curricula taught by adult education centers appears to be an effective strategy for increasing the capacity of racial and ethnic minorities to care for their own health. With sufficient support, including training, funding and leadership commitment, health information can be used as content to teach adult students English, computer skills, and conservation and writing skills.

Evaluations like this one reflect CT Health's commitment to collecting and disseminating knowledge, and ensuring that the foundation continues to pursue the most effective course in achieving its mission of improving the health of Connecticut's residents.

For a copy of the complete report, email: info@cthealth.org.