
Nassau County Health Department

Summary of Community Leadership Interviews and Focus Group Sessions

May 1, 2009

Nassau County Community Leadership Interviews

Introduction

The Nassau County Health Department (NCHD), in an effort to collect feedback on how to best develop new public health initiatives and deliver services to the local community, interviewed six individuals with strong leadership abilities and experience representing marginalized populations. On January 2, 2009, the first of six interviews began with Jim Mayo, a representative of Nassau Baptist Medical Center Hospital. Following the first interview, five other community leadership interviews included Laureen Pagel, Sutton Place Behavioral Health Center; Dr. Washburn, Barnabas Center, Nassau County Homeless Coalition; Lynn Peterson, Salvation Army Hope House; Pastor Serrano, Promised Land Ministries; and Mr. Coakley, West Nassau High School.

Methods

Six interviewees were recruited by the Director of the Nassau County Health Department and follow-up communications were conducted to schedule one-hour interviews with each participant. All six leaders were interviewed by telephone and the majority of interviews lasted from 45-60 minutes. Responses were entered and analyzed in "Survey Monkey," an online survey tool designed for developing surveys and collecting qualitative and quantitative data. In the following results section, when an answer was mentioned by multiple interviewees, a number in parenthesis was inserted at the end of the sentence to indicate the number of times the response was received.

Results

Question 1:

Interviewees were asked to describe their greatest achievement as a community leader. Lynn Peterson's response was her work experience as a crisis consoler with The Department of Children and Families where she spent five years assisting at-risk families affected by domestic violence, sexual abuse, and divorce. Lynn's work helped reunite countless families and find safe places for children to live. Lynn mentioned "We don't respect the wisdom of the elderly. As a kid my parents and I sung to the elderly and they would come to our home and hold my brothers and sisters. The elderly were such a big part of our lives as a kid. They were not related but they were part of our family."

Jim Mayo recounted his involvement in the Nassau Chamber of Commerce and Economic Board where he contributed to a decision making process which helped expand Nassau County's economy and shape the area's future.

Laureen Pagel recalled her role in expanding preventative services at Sutton Place Behavioral Center to reduce the rates of substance abuse in middle and high school age groups, an intervention that was awarded a best practices award in 2007.

Dr. Washburn recounted a lifetime of service while providing healthcare to underserved populations in Baltimore, Maryland and Manatee and Nassau counties in Florida.

Pastor Serrano's work as a translator linked Spanish speaking individuals in Nassau County with translation services to help persons overcome communication barriers and gain access to available services.

Dr. Coakley provided mentorship to children in Callahan as a physical education coach and principle. He cites making an impact in the lives of adolescents to be his greatest joy and professional accomplishment.

Questions 2-4

When asked to cite what they would consider the three most important issues to citizens of Nassau County, 33% of interviewees mentioned the following three issues to be of highest importance:

- 1.) Improving transportation
- 2.) Providing services for non-English speaking individuals
- 3.) Creating a more unified effort to reduce health disparities

The following issues were listed as the top three issues of 16.7% of those surveyed: affordable housing, green spaces for recreational activity, access to affordable and healthy food options, social network venues for the elderly, social network venues for non-English speaking individuals, and additional services (non-specified) for non-English speaking individuals.

The following three issues were not ranked in the top three lists of those interviewed: services for low-income individuals, mental health services, and rural health services. Fifty percent of participants answered "other" unlisted topics to be their major concern.

When asked to prioritize what interviewees consider the number one most important need of the Nassau County population, health care was mentioned by 50% of the six persons surveyed, making it the most important topic repeatedly cited by interviewees. Other topics mentioned were developing more affordable recreational activities for the youth, dental care (1), transportation (1), affordable housing (1), mental health services, and medications for the uninsured youth (1).

When asked where they see the most marginalized populations in Nassau County the following areas were identified: between 8-14th streets (Amelia Island), rural areas (undefined), and the low-income population (all locations).

When asked what the marginalized populations would ask from their government, the following needs were identified: decent living conditions and affordable housing (4), access to health care, assistance with addictions issues, counseling for mental health issues, services for low-income persons, local health services, better water sewage and waste disposal, better communication from the government about available health

services, reducing the victimization of persons with criminal histories, and improved employment opportunities.

Questions 5-10

When asked what are the most difficult career challenges they face, the following responses were gathered: recruiting medical staff who are willing to live in Nassau County (2), meeting the mental health needs of the community, a lack of mentoring programs for children and elderly persons, assisting the community with receiving adequate shelter and food, and the lack of flood protection for homes and businesses. One interviewee stated, "I would like to see a program to facilitate the elderly and children to co-mentor one another. The elderly would feel needed and would have a reason for living. Because the children and elderly populations get along so well, this would be an ideal population partnership."

When asked to list the strengths of existing care networks in Nassau, the following were identified: partnerships between community leaders and networks (i.e. personal relationships), the development of the Homeless Coalition, Barnabas Center, The Hope House, The Nassau County Health Department, Sutton Place Behavioral Center, Council of Aging, and Baptist Medical Center.

Barriers identified were: health care, mental health services, primary care in west Nassau, education, opportunities for moving up in the economy, lack of resources, and the competition between similar agencies for the same resources.

Interviewees were asked how they think the local government could better serve the needs of marginalized populations in Nassau County and what suggestions they have for increasing the dialog between the community and the local government. The following three responses were received:

- 1.) Health care issues need to be addressed nationally to create change because the state has limited funds.
- 2.) Local organizations need more stability in funding. Government should do an analysis of the relationship between poverty and income and look at the local low-income community first as a place for interventions.
- 3.) Utilizing local resources and experts is an important part of the process.

Interviewees suggested that a forum should be established in the form of a town hall meeting as a place for the community to have County Commissioners hear their ideas. They suggested hosting one meeting per quarter throughout the community. It was mentioned that County Commissioners need to be more fully educated about the needs of marginalized populations.

Community leaders mentioned that local organizations need to stop competing with each other and should recognize their common goals. It was noted that affordable housing should be available to low-income persons and those with disabilities. Also taxes should be lowered for the elderly and there should be more advocacy groups for the elderly. The need for improved education, health-care, and more bi-lingual language classes for students to learn English were all identified as concerns. One interviewee commented that there should be more surveys of marginalized populations like this NCHD survey effort.

When surveyed regarding what populations have been left behind in terms of economic development, as Nassau transitioned from a service economy to a tourist economy, the following feedback was gathered. The first interviewee did not agree that Nassau is changing. He mentioned that tourism is really suffering but tourism dollars are only a small portion of the economy. He said the people “left behind” in terms of economic development are not “taking advantage of the educational system.”

Three interviewees suggested assisting non-English speaking populations with language barriers and citizenship status to help them become better represented in the community. Two interviewees mentioned that the African American community on Amelia Island needs assistance since they tend to be a low-income population (2). It was also noted that the elderly population needs assistance. It was mentioned that persons earning less than \$10,000 annually need jobs and small businesses need tax breaks.

All interviewees were asked to list three specific solutions that they think would address the problems stated above as well as to best advise the Nassau Health Improvement Coalition to improve the health outcomes of the most marginalized persons in the county. The following solutions were documented:

- Need better access to primary care services
- Need to educate students about all the things they can accomplish, especially for low-income students
- Improve housing for low-income individuals
- Host focus groups in areas where the affected populations live
- Bring services to the community through a mobile van from St. Vincent's
- Identify spokespersons in the African American and Latino communities and ask them what they think are the most important needs in their communities
- Improve access to dental services
- Create a NCHD mobile health clinic at the Peck or MLK Center to provide care there instead of the Nectarine clinic
- Provide services and economic assistance for the elderly to assist with fuel, electric, food, water bills, house cleaning, and pest control
- Improve client services. One person stated that, “People who do not have health care are treated worse than those who do. Healthcare is a very big issue here, because people who have a part-time job do not qualify for welfare”
- Educate people on how to improve their health and also teach them how to get out of poverty
- Assist youth by providing anger management classes
- Give pregnant women more leave of absence time from school

Question 11

Introduction

Each interviewee was read the following background statement and asked to respond to the four main themes generated during the feedback sessions which followed the NCHD “Unnatural Causes” film screenings.

“In March of 2008 the Nassau County Health Department aired two community screenings of the film Unnatural Causes, a film that challenges viewers to consider the role of economic disparities and how health is affected by income, stress, financial stability, social stratum in society, and genetics. This film generated a moderated group discussion on these and other topics and community feedback was elicited, recorded, and used to extract key themes that describe the public reaction to the film. Four main points were identified and I will ask you to react to each and discuss the methods you would apply to solve each issue. The following feedback was gathered at the Unnatural Causes film screenings and the sections below ask each key informant to respond to these four themes: food, education, funding, and prevention.”

Theme One: Food

Community Feedback: To improve access to healthy foods and lifestyles, more economic investment is needed to make healthier food options more affordable. People want to improve their health, but finding the resources (time/money) limits their efforts.

Community Leader Response: Low-income individuals may consume cheaper and often less nutritious foods. “It is easier to eat things that are high caloric rather than things that are more nutritious and take longer to prepare. It is important for young children and pregnant women to get nutrition for healthy development. During these tough economic times people do not have funds to buy healthier food options. Money is an issue and people eat frozen food because they do not have time to prepare better options.” Another interviewee stated “I guess it is not as bad as some urban areas but I think many low-income persons do not have money for the products. A community gardens is starting near St. Peters Church and there are areas in the African American community where they could have a community garden.”

Theme Two: Education

Community Feedback: Engaging key stakeholders and persons from all educational backgrounds is important to advance awareness so that policy changes can be made. Many highly educated people attended the film screenings but it would have been better to have more diversity in educational levels as well as more elected officials present.

Community Leader Response: “We need to do more to solve these issues than simply put a program in place and say the problem is solved. The whole goal of a program is to say it needs to ends suffering, but we need to monitor the programs to make sure they are effective. I think we spend so much time worrying that maybe we are giving services to those that do not need it that we are not giving them to those that need the services.”

When you do random surveys, they need a representative to show un-biased data and have a diversity of input. One person commented that, “The middle class pays attention because they can; lower classes are more interested in making money and surviving. Middle classes are taught differently and are more attentive to these things.” It was suggested that we must present this idea to city officials at one of their meetings. The NCHD could ask to present at one of their meetings and address the city officials at their own events to let them know what is going on in their community. Phone and emails are not effective, in person meeting are the preferred method for communication.

Theme Three: Funding

Community Feedback: Connecting the efforts of local community organizations and providing stability in funding is integral. Good programs are ended due to lack in funds and existing organizations are segmented. Local organizations are working on different pieces of the same problem, but need to be unified under a common purpose.

Community Leader Response: The funds being cut are the funds that go to the ones who need it most. “Funds come too sporadically. If we don't apply for grants we run out of money. Surviving on donations is hard, most money we get through donations pays administration costs and we need more money to go back to the community.”

Theme Four: Prevention

Community Feedback: Prevention is instrumental because many of the problems faced by the community are preventable. Key community needs identified were: opportunities for improving healthy lifestyles (food, transportation, green spaces, community networking/social environments), support from local leadership, access to healthcare, and a unified effort to reduce health disparities.

Community Leader Response: Leaders should create a community center where people can come and learn how to eat and live a healthier lifestyle. “People don't know how to be healthy. There should be a community center for low-income persons, for the people who really need it. I think the government is not going to be able to come up with enough programs, the churches and organizations need to step up. Utilizing the caravan is hard, everyone is waiting for it. Also there needs to be an elderly day center for people to go to.”

Focus Groups Final Report

Introduction:

In order to gather community feedback NCHD hosted two focus groups with residents of Nassau County at two locations. This first focus group was held in conjunction with the annual "Railroad Days" at the Callahan Historical Society on March 28, 2009. The facilitator for the event was Becky Lazensky, MPH, Regional Environmental Epidemiologist. The recorders were Dr. Seidel, MD, MPH, Nassau County Health Department Director, and Karen Scoggins, MPH, Epidemiologist. The second focus group was held on March 30, 2009 at the Martin Luther King Center in Fernandina Beach in conjunction with the "Children's Day" event. Karen Scoggins facilitated the discussion. Dr. Seidel and Kim Geib, MSN, ARNP, Disease Control Manager, served as the recorders.

Methods

The sessions both lasted for 45 minutes with a five minute introduction from the facilitator and recorders. A survey tool containing four questions was used as an interview guide for the sessions. The group had 10 minutes to give feedback on each question. Feedback was recorded with written note taking and a tape recorder. Each participant signed a consent form disclosing that their identifying information would not be solicited or released. In addition, each participant was asked to remain anonymous throughout the session. Four participants attended the first focus group on March 28 and 13 attended the second on March 30. Participants were selected by convenience sampling by the NCHD by choosing known community representatives or recruiting, at random, citizens who attended the Children's Day and Railroad Days events.

Results: Focus Groups

Participants identified the following themes to be a priority: access to affordable healthcare and transportation. It was stated that although there are assistance programs, they are not able to meet the high demand of the public. Barriers to receiving services were listed as: limited services are available and long waiting for appointments. The highest need population was identified as city residents, rural populations with no public transportation, underinsured and uninsured (3), and working poor with no insurance or limited insurance.

It was mentioned that use of the Emergency Room for primary care by at-risk persons with uncontrolled diabetes and high blood pressure is a problem. There needs to be preventive services for at-risk persons and health departments need more funding to be able to see more people. It was also said that minorities have been negatively impacted by an increasing unemployment rate.

It was stated that when people perceive that a service is not "good" or if they were treated poorly, they will travel far distances to another county or state to receive that service. Also being treated poorly can be an experience that "scars" the individual. A story of a recent shooting at a pharmacy was due to how an employee treated customers poorly and unfortunately a patient with mental illness responded violently.

A comment was made that health care is more accessible in other states and that the Health Department was more accessible when it was located downtown rather than the new location.

Question 1

Several health and lifestyle topics were identified in recent community interviews with residents of Nassau County. Several key themes were considered of high importance to those who live in the Nassau community. These include: access to affordable healthcare, improved transportation, and services for non-English speaking individuals. How would you respond to these topics and if you had to prioritize these, which would you rate of highest importance?

When asked to prioritize the most important factor in improving health in their community, access to affordable healthcare was identified. It was stated that some families cannot afford “KidCare” which is designed to be an affordable solution. Single moms were identified persons who have difficulty “making ends meet.” Over time it was observed that “things are getting worse” in terms of everyone’s ability to make ends meet.

Pride issues exist and even if services are available people might not want to take advantage of the services. One suggestion was to have a community town hall meeting in the different towns or at health fairs so people can find out what services are available in their local communities. Another vulnerable population identified was widows who have minimal incomes.

Comments were received regarding medical services which are located in Yulee, Jacksonville, and Fernandina Beach, but which are not available in Callahan. People mentioned that there are no specialized services in west Nassau.

Question 2

If you had to choose a specific population in Nassau County that you think has the highest need for governmental assistance in order to experience a healthy lifestyle, where do you see that the needs of residents are the highest and who do you think would benefit from additional spending of grant monies the most? You can choose a specific population/s (race or ethnic group) or a specific location (neighborhood or city).

The following highest need populations were identified: the elderly (in particular those living in west Nassau, widows, those living off social security paychecks, grandparents serve as the primary guardians of their grandchildren, and migrant workers who are often of Hispanic ethnicity. One chief concern for migrant populations was their lack of insurance and transportation and the language barriers that make acquiring these services difficult. One comment was that migrant workers contribute to their communities by spending money, attending church, and “behaving”.

Question 3

If you could improve your local community by providing a health program, project, or service for disadvantaged or low income persons, what would you create and for what reasons did you choose this particular health initiative?

Responses included designing a preventive program, teaching self-sufficiency, and improving disease prevention knowledge. When asked how participants would design their initiatives, they mentioned that the following conditions would be most important: hypertension, stroke, cancer, heart disease, and diabetes. One participant mentioned that even though health information is available, additional funding is needed to provide services. In order to access services, when transportation is not available, participants need home health nurses to provide services. It was mentioned that when community health programs are available to the public, program administrators need to be non-judgmental by refraining from making recipients feel “below” service providers. One comment received was that homeless persons, substance abusers, and inmates are often treated poorly by those in the “ivory towers.” It was mentioned that empathy is important when providing services. Participants mentioned the need to have immediate needs met, such as receiving access to food. One participant was quoted saying, “All the teaching won’t fill my baby’s stomach.”

When participants were asked what type of health project they would develop, free health exams were mentioned. Participants stated that many people do not seek services because they cannot afford the associated fees. Free exams are needed especially for those in the 30-50 year age group. One participant mentioned that there needs to be a pediatrician at the Health Department more frequently. Another comment was that dental exams are too expensive to afford, therefore free dental services are needed for adults and children. Services should be available to those with and without insurance.

One person commented that young women need regular health exams and gynecological services. Younger women need more routine checkups. A participant inquired if NCHD provides sex education in school. Persons asked if transportation to NCHD is available to students and whether students know what services are available.

Participants noted that childhood nutrition is important in both home and school environments. Teachers are finding alternative rewards for students that diverge from the common practice of giving candy as a reward for good behavior. Schools now offer a balance in food choices, but high school students can choose any item off the menu. Students need more nutritional guidance on making better food choices. Parents who are at work cannot supervise children and because they are in a hurry they cannot prepare nutritional food.

A comment was received that service providers can be difficult to reach especially by phone when users have to push numbers rather than speaking to a live person. Participants mentioned that it is even more difficult for those with no phone or those calling by payphone.

Participants stated that some churches operate food banks for low-income persons. One participant mentioned that there are groups of homeless persons living in the woods near I-95 in Callahan.

Question 4

What do you consider the best or most effective way/s for health information to be communicated to you and on what topic/s would you like to receive more information? (Examples: video-conferencing, newspapers, magazines, snail mail, internet/web-based learning, town hall meetings, lectures, television). Alternatively, what non-virtual locations are best for you to receive health information? (Examples: local library, health department, community college, school)

Participants were asked what the best ways to receive health information are and the following responses were gathered. The best ways listed were word-of-mouth, newspaper, internet, local free newspapers, health fairs, churches, school assemblies, senior citizens dinners, grocery store parking lots, and anything mobile (i.e. blood banks). One participant commented that pamphlets are not effective because people discard them quickly. The Health Department should give lectures about the available free services at senior dinners and school assemblies. Those interviewed thought it would better if health services were brought to their house, removed from the “ivory tower” of educators and government officials, connected through transportation services, and presented at health fairs and community events. The following communication methods were identified as effective: newsletters, word-of-mouth, radio (difficult as many stations are based in Jacksonville and the reception is poor in Nassau), and flyers.

One participant mentioned that teens would benefit from receiving health information on pregnancy as students are more likely to listen to trusted individuals. Teens are more willing to discuss personal information with healthcare workers than teachers and parents. Teens need a trusted individual they can talk to about issues surrounding pregnancy because trust and confidentiality are paramount. Participants commented that children are raising themselves. Parents send their children to school when they are sick because parents have to go to work. Counseling is needed because many children suffer from emotional issues stemming from being raised in broken homes.

Participants stated that agencies should refrain from selectively inviting people because certain events announce that all are welcome, when it is not the case. Community organizations need to work together as many agencies are not sure what the mission statements are for other local organizations. The more agencies know about each other, the more they can refer clients to other resources. Several suggestions were received such as: agencies should share their email distribution lists, limit barriers to access, and make persons feel comfortable because people are tired of being lied to when seeking care.

Nassau County Community Leadership Interviews and Focus Group Conclusions

One of the most common initiatives voiced by community leaders and focus groups participants was providing health care services which are affordable and accessible to the community. When asked what their top priorities are for improving the lives of people in Nassau County, health care access was listed as the top priority by greater than 50% of the community leaders interviewed.

One common theme in the data collected was the importance of meeting people where they are (i.e. deliver services to individuals so they do not have to travel beyond their homes, places of employment, and schools). Common themes identified were the need for affordable housing and transportation for Nassau County residents. The importance of marketing and coordinating services was highlighted due to a need to have a better knowledge of available health services, an issue that was repeated several times.

By bringing together participants from a variety of backgrounds and professional experiences, the focus group sessions and community leader interviews helped establish a channel of communication between governmental agencies and the local communities they serve. A continued dialogue is necessary to design a project which is community supported and universally adopted by multiple persons.

Appendix 1: Community Leader Survey Questionnaire

Mapp Project

1. Default Section

The Nassau County Health Department has chosen you to participate in a study of local community leadership and their capacity to improve the health and wellbeing of the local community. The purpose of this survey is to draw upon the experiences of local experts who have worked in the field of public service in Nassau County. Your opinions regarding the most critical and important issues will be counted in this interview as a way to direct the future outreach activities of the Nassau County Health Improvement Advisory Coalition.

1. Fill in

Name:
Company:
City/Town:
State:
ZIP/Postal Code:
Country:
Email Address:
Phone Number:

2. Describe the opportunities you have had in your lifetime to serve your local community and please describe your greatest success as a community leader?

3. Please choose 3 issues that you think should be of greatest concern to Nassau County's community leadership.

- access to affordable healthcare
- housing needs
- transportation
- green space for recreational activity
- services for non-english speaking individuals
- services for low-income individuals
- access to healthy/affordable food
- mental health services
- rural health services
- social network venues (SNVs) for the elderly
- SNVs for non-English speaking individuals
- unified effort to reduce health disparities
- more stability in funding for local non-profit orgs working to serve the citizens of Nassau County
- other

Mapp Project

4. Of the 3 issues you previously mentioned, chose ONE that you would consider the most important issue for the Nassau community?

5. Where do you see the most marginalized populations in Nassau and if you had to be their spokesperson what do you think they would ask from their local government and health authorities?

6. What is the most difficult part of your job and how would additional support (infrastructure/resources) reduce these challenges?

7. What strengths do you see in the existing care networks in Nassau County? Where do you feel that are gaps in the local care community (those who provide services to marginalized populations)?

8. How do you think local government can better serve the needs of marginalized populations in Nassau? What would you suggest be done to increase the dialog between the Nassau community and their governmental leadership?

9. What populations do you think have been left behind in terms of economic development during the last 10 years as Nassau transitions from a fishing/service economy to a more tourist economy and which populations were most economically isolated and strained during the transition?

10. How would you advise the Nassau health improvement coalition to improve the health outcomes of the most marginalized persons in the county? Please list three specific solutions that you think would address the problem.

Mapp Project

11. In March of 2008 the Nassau County Health Department aired two community screenings of the film Unnatural Causes, a film that challenges viewers to consider the role of economic disparities and how health is affected by income, stress, financial stability, social stratum in society, and genetics. This film generated a moderated group discussion on these and other topics and community feedback was elicited, recorded, and used to extract key themes that describe the public reaction to the film. Four main points were identified and I will ask you to react to each and discuss the methods you would apply to solve each issue.

1.) Improving access to healthy foods and lifestyles, more economic investment is needed to make healthier options more affordable. People want to improve their health, but finding the resources (time/money) limits their efforts.

2.) Engaging key stakeholders and persons from all educational backgrounds is important to advance awareness so that policy changes can be made. Many highly educated people attended the film screenings but it would have been better to have more diversity in educational levels as well as more elected officials present.

3.) Connecting the efforts of local community organizations and providing stability in funding is integral. Good programs are ended due to lack in funds and existing organizations are segmented. Local organizations are working on different pieces of the same problem, but need to be unified under a common purpose.

4.) Prevention is instrumental because many of the problems faced by the community are preventable. Key community needs identified were: opportunities for improving healthy lifestyles (food, transportation, green spaces, community networking/social environments), support from local leadership, access to healthcare, and a unified effort to reduce health disparities.

Appendix 2: Nassau County Health Department Focus Group Questionnaire

1.) Several health and lifestyle topics were identified in recent community interviews with residents of Nassau County. Several key themes were considered of high importance to those who live in the Nassau community. These include: access to affordable healthcare, improved transportation, and services for non-English speaking individuals. How would you respond to these topics and if you had to prioritize these, which would you rate of highest importance?

*(Read the 3 topics again: access to affordable healthcare, improved transportation, and services for non-English speaking individuals)

2.) If you had to choose a specific population in Nassau County that you think has the highest need for governmental assistance in order to experience a healthy lifestyle, where do you see that the needs of residents are the highest and who do you think would benefit from additional spending of grant monies the most? You can choose a specific population/s (race or ethnic group) or a specific location (neighborhood or city).

3.) If you could improve your local community by providing a health program, project, or service for disadvantaged or low income persons, what would you create and for what reasons did you choose this particular health initiative?

4.) What do you consider the best or most effective way/s for health information to be communicated to you and on what topic/s would you like to receive more information? (Examples: video-conferencing, newspapers, magazines, snail mail, internet/web-based learning, town hall meetings, lectures, television). Alternatively, what non-virtual locations are best for you to receive health information? (Examples: local library, health department, community college, school)