

All The Food You Can Eat: The Whittier Street's Healthy Weight Management Story

Introduction

Eating healthy can be a challenge for many of us but particularly for children and teens. Today's offerings of sugary drinks and easy to grab low nutrition snacks are tempting. Over the past three decades, childhood obesity rates in America have tripled, and today, nearly one in three children in America are overweight or obese¹. As a result, the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) is responding to the obesity epidemic through its support of the Healthy Weight Learning Collaborative <http://www.collaborateforhealthyweight.org/About/Collaborative.aspx>. Many members of the collaborative are finding creative ways to increase healthy eating knowledge in their communities. Whittier Street Health Center (WSHC) is one collaborative participant that put its learning into practice.

This grantee spotlight focuses on the strategies and lessons learned from WSHC's proactive approach to reduce obesity amongst its participating youth that you can apply to improve your health center's obesity outcomes. Their two programs are: "**Race Around Roxbury**," an after school program for young people and "**Healthy Weight Clinic**," a multidisciplinary weight management clinic for youth and their family members.

About WSHC

WSHC, a HRSA-funded health center since 1991, was established in 1933 to provide services to the urban area of lower Roxbury, Massachusetts. Among 16 neighborhoods in Boston, according to the Health of Boston 2010 Report², Roxbury has the highest rate of low birth weights, infant mortality, emergency room visits and hospitalizations for children under the age of five due to asthma, and hospitalizations due to heart disease and diabetes. Twenty-nine percent of the population in Roxbury is obese compared to 22% city-wide.³ The service area population has expanded and includes 18,500 residents from over 20 countries. The diverse target population is 43% Hispanic or Latino, 43% Black/African American, 1% American Indian, 5% White, and 8% other, including immigrants and refugees. In 2011, WSHC served approximately 18,000 patients. Over 45% of WSHC patients speak a language other than English. There are 17 languages spoken by the staff at WSHC, such as Swahili, Arabic, Bosnian, Farsi, Haitian Creole, and Spanish. Services include community outreach, wellness, and prevention. Patient navigation and connection to primary care are key components of WSHC's strategy to eliminate health and social disparities in the communities they serve.

The Approach: Two Healthy Weight Programs

These programs began in 2007, with the concept championed by a key pediatric provider.

¹ <http://www.letsmove.gov/learn-facts/epidemic-childhood-obesity>, accessed 6/28/12

² <http://www.bphc.org/about/research/Pages/Home.aspx>, accessed 6/28/12

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http://www.bphc.org/about/research/hob2010/Forms%20%20Documents/HOB11_Figs_30_SelNeighIndic_HOB11_PrintCopy_14Nov11.pdf

An after school nutrition and exercise program, **Race Around Roxbury**, is provided for patients referred by their provider or Healthy Weight Case Manager. The clinic accommodates children from ages 6-14 years old. The program runs on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 4-6 pm. On Tuesdays, participants have a nutritious snack and engage in a nutrition class. After the nutrition classes, the patients participate in a program called Girls' LEAP (Lifetime Empowerment and Awareness Program), a self-defense training and safety awareness program for middle school females, or other planned physical activities. On Thursdays, the children participate in a cooking class led by the nutritionist. During the class, the nutritionist teaches the children how to make a healthy meal or snack and also gives them additional tips on nutrition. In addition, the nutritionist also provides recipes for the participants to take home to their families. After the cooking lesson, the Program Coordinator leads the children in a 45-minute session of fun physical activities.

The **Healthy Weight Clinic** consists of a visit entirely separate from the primary care visit – it focuses only on weight and lifestyle changes. Incorporated into the pediatric department delivery of care, it is scheduled Wednesday afternoons. The clinic has a multi-disciplinary team approach to providing care; the patients meet a nutritionist, case manager, and a pediatric nurse practitioner for education, goal-setting, and referrals for physical activity programs. Patients are required to come to the clinic monthly. The clinical measures tracked are primarily patients' BMI and also frequency of physical activities, screen time, and diet choices. The case manager talks with the client about food choices and how to make better choices when grocery shopping, video (TV, computer) screen time, and physical activity. The visit continues with the nurse practitioner's assessment of medical risk factors. Then self-management goals are created and the team discusses with the client and family how they plan to keep those goals. The goals are reevaluated at the next visit. The

amount of time for the visit varies, with a new visit taking from 45 minutes to 1 hour and maintenance visits in the range between 30 to 45 minutes. In between visits, the case manager and the nutritionist follow up with the patients on their self-management goals (physical activities and nutritional counseling.) Support for the pediatric case manager position and other Race Around Roxbury costs come from Children's Hospital. In addition, WSHC bills under the nurse practitioner for the Healthy Weight Clinic visits.

Healthy Weight Clinic Visit

- *BMI measurement*
- *Assessment of self management goals*
- *Counseling on food choices*
- *Risk factor assessment*
- *Goal setting for next visit*

The Challenge: Getting Provider Team Buy-In

The acceptance for the two programs was not difficult: more than 30% of the clients were obese and presented the pediatricians with a number of medical issues to assess. With multiple clinical issues to treat during the medical visit, the providers were frustrated in how to find sufficient time to devote to weight management counseling. They welcome

an alternative that both reduced the time burden on providers and allowed nutrition and weight management staff experts to focus entirely on the child's obesity needs.

How Do the Healthy Weight Programs Help WSHC Patients?

The WSHC helps pediatric patients and their parents to take healthy steps towards healthy lifestyles. The health center runs two different programs to empower and engage patients in healthy lifestyles. Both programs target pediatric patients with body mass indexes (BMI) at or above the 85th percentile of their age and sex. The nurse practitioners that currently run the clinic are Julianne Walsh and Jaeger Ashton; Kerry Ann Mendes is the registered dietitian and Fuad Conteh is the case manager and also oversees the afterschool program, Race Around Roxbury.

Results and Impact

WSHC has a committed staff willing to continue these programs –as evidenced by this account from Kerry Mendes as an example:

“There are so many things that I love about the program- But one of my most favorite things is when a child comes back to tell me that they now eat a new vegetable that they didn't think they would like. In the after school program I make sure to include vegetables that the kids may not typically like or never have tried before, and often they are surprised by how good the recipes come out! We have a rule that the kids have to at least try the foods that we make, and they sign a contract saying they understand this concept. We made Tuscan style vegetables the other day and a couple of the girls had never tried an orange pepper. I urged them to try a piece before we even added it to the recipe. We almost didn't have enough to cook, because they wanted to cut up pieces and eat them raw because they liked it so much! It's a safe environment and it eases the fear of trying vegetables or new recipes. I think when kids are actively involved in the process of preparing the foods; they become far more committed to tasting it.”

Of the total number of patients that have gone through the clinic (306), 172 have returned for at least two follow-up visits. Data for these 172 patients reveals that compared to their initial visit:

- 47% increased their physical activity
- 40% showed a decrease in BMI (54% showed an increase)
- 55% decreased their video/media screen viewing time
- 42% showed an increase in fruit and veggie consumption
- 41% showed a decrease in sweetened beverage consumption

WSHC's proactive approach in assessing their patient needs resulted in the Race Around Roxbury and the Healthy Weight Clinic programs. After four years, the results are

promising but challenges remain. For more information about this data and the two programs contact these WSHC staff:

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Caption: Race Around Roxbury client learning how to prepare a healthy dinner.