ONGOING TOBACCO USE PREVENTION EDUCATION
FOR YOUTH IN BEAR COUNTY

Brief Evaluation Report
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Project Description

Background

Bear County is a rural county located in the northwestern portion of California. The county has four incorporated cities as well as an unincorporated area with 32 communities spread out over 3,509 square miles of mountains, redwood forest, and coastline. This environment results in the county’s isolation and low socioeconomic status.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau 2000 Census, Bear County has a population of 86,265 people, with 25.5% of the population under the age of 18. In 2000, the per capita income in Bear County was $19,443, $3,268 below the state average of $22,711. About 10.9% of families and 15.9% of the population were below the poverty line, including 21.5% of those under age 18. Based on the same census, the majority of the population is Caucasian (80.8%) with the second and third largest ethnic populations being Hispanic (16.5%) and Native American (4.8%).

After several years of decline, the prevalence of youth tobacco use has begun to increase. According to the County and Statewide Archive of Tobacco Statistics (C-STATS) 2006 report, the prevalence of youth smoking in Bear County was 17.4%. This figure is above California’s smoking prevalence of 15.4% (C-STATS). The need for ongoing tobacco use prevention education for youth ages 12-18 is high in order to turn this trend downward.

Objective

By June 30, 2010, at least two youth-serving groups (e.g., 4-H, Kids Club, Boys & Girls Club, etc.) will provide ongoing tobacco use prevention education using an evidence-based curriculum that provides instruction on the negative physiologic and social consequences of tobacco use, social influences on tobacco use, peer norms regarding tobacco use, and refusal skills to youth members. This is California Tobacco Control Program (CTCP) priority area Counter Pro-Tobacco Influences; it is a non-primary objective and addresses Communities of Excellence (CX) indicator #1.3.4.

The Bear County Tobacco Reduction Program (BCTRP) staff and the community advisory group chose this objective during the Communities of Excellence (CX) Needs Assessment process in February 2007. Community members participating in the CX process included representatives from the County Department of Public Health, the County Office of Education, Law Enforcement, youth-serving organizations, and concerned citizens. As a result of the data

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1 2000 U.S. Census, http://censtats.census.gov/data/CA/05006045.pdf. Bear County has a population density of 25 people per square mile in comparison to 235 people per square mile for California as a whole.
2 ibid.
3 ibid.
4 Communities of Excellence Indicator #1.3.4: Proportion of youth serving programs that provide intensive tobacco use prevention instruction using a curriculum that provides instruction on the negative physiologic and social consequences of tobacco use, social influences on tobacco use, peer norms regarding tobacco use and refusal skills.
gathered during the needs assessment process, BCTRP staff and the community advisory group found that youth in the community were in need of ongoing tobacco use prevention education using an evidence-based curriculum. Bear County has numerous youth-serving organizations that provide after school programs for middle school youth. However, due to limited funding, these programs do not have a system in place for providing ongoing tobacco use prevention education to participating youth.

Utilizing a “best practice” proven curriculum for tobacco use prevention education and Peer Health Educators (PHEs) to deliver the curriculum, the message of the negative aspects of tobacco use on health and well-being should be better accepted and adopted by the membership in youth-serving organizations as youth tend to value peer – rather than adult – input. With rising youth smoking rates, this curriculum will counter the influences of a tobacco industry that spends more than a billion dollars a year promoting tobacco use.

**Intervention**

The primary targets for this intervention were youth-serving organizations which provide after school programs to middle school youth in the incorporated city of Gold Town and the unincorporated community of Pacific Canyon, both of which are located in the northeast inland area of Bear County. These communities were chosen because of the prevalence of youth smoking. In Gold Town the smoking prevalence was 26%; in Pacific Canyon 29% (C-STATS). These figures are above Bear County’s smoking prevalence of 17.4% and California’s smoking prevalence of 14.5% (C-STATS). The secondary targets were high school youth in these communities who would develop knowledge and leadership skills necessary to provide peer education, as well as community education and policy advocacy activities. The settings for the interventions were high school and middle school facilities, as well as the offices of BCTRP.

To prepare for the media and training activities, BCTRP completed the activities listed below:

- Recruited Native American, Latino and white, non-Hispanic youth from local high schools, middle schools and youth-serving programs.
- Researched, identified and purchased a “best practice,” evidence-based tobacco use prevention curriculum, the Triple T Project. This curriculum was chosen because it is “activity-based” rather than a lecture format.
- Contacted various local youth-serving organizations, schools and a Native American health center, and identified those that were willing to provide ongoing, evidence-based tobacco use prevention education.

To promote the provision of ongoing tobacco use prevention curricula in the youth-serving organizations, BCTRP staff met weekly/biweekly with the PHEs in Gold Town. The meetings

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5 County and Statewide Archive of Tobacco Statistics. Youth smoking prevalence was 17.4% in 2006 compared to 15.2% in 2004.
6 American Lung Association State of Tobacco Control 2008, p. 55. Additionally, according to the Cent of Tobacco, www.youthtoday.org, Philip Morris USA and RJ Reynolds Tobacco donate millions of dollars each year specifically to youth organizations such as 4-H, Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, Boy Scouts of American and others. Critics say youth organizations are sending the wrong message by accepting these donations.
7 According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Gold Town has a population of 5,073; 87.2% of which are White, 5.8% Native American and 14.7% Hispanic. http://censtats.census.gov/data/CA/05006045.pdf.
8 According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Pacific Canyon has a population of 1,175; 44.9% of which are Native American, 55.9% White and 8.1% Hispanic. http://censtats.census.gov/data/CA/05006045.pdf.
covered the negative physiologic and social consequences of tobacco use, social influences on tobacco use, peer norms regarding tobacco use, and refusal skills to youth members. The weekly/biweekly meetings also provided opportunities to learn leadership, presentation, classroom management, and facilitation skills. In addition, three members of the Gold Town PHEs traveled to a statewide leadership and peer education conference, California Youth Advocacy Network’s (CYANs) Reality Unfiltered Conference, which provided anti-tobacco advocacy training. BCTRIP staff also made arrangements for the Gold Town PHEs to make presentations at community events and several tobacco use prevention education activities were also conducted including the Butts Clean Up and Adopt A Smoker campaign. This provided youth leaders an opportunity to pass on newly learned tobacco education content to students and their schools, the business community, members of the general public, and local key opinion leaders.

Bear County TRP staff served as the coordinator of the Gold Town PHEs while a non-BCTRIP staff person served as the coordinator of the Pacific Canyon PHEs. BCTRIP staff provided the Triple T Project curriculum training to both the Gold Town and Pacific Canyon PHEs in a joint, one-day training. Following the training, BCTRIP staff provided technical assistance to the Pacific Canyon PHEs via a 5-hour training, demonstrating how to do the “Lung’s Presentation.” BCTRIP staff also provided technical assistance to the Pacific Canyon Coordinator with respect to managing the weekly/biweekly meetings and scheduling presentations.

Presentations were subsequently scheduled with youth-serving organizations in Gold Town and Pacific Canyon, and were conducted by the BCTRIP staff or the Pacific Canyon Coordinator and the PHEs. Two organizations, Gold Town Kids Club in Gold Town and the Pacific Canyon Elementary School after school program, agreed to provide the six-lesson, evidence-based tobacco prevention curriculum. Each program was subsequently provided a certificate, a picture of program staff was taken, and a press release was submitted to the local media.

**Evaluation Methods**

**Evaluation Design**

This evaluation had a non-experimental design; only process measures were collected. Limitations of the study include the absence of outcome measures or a comparison group. We can, therefore, not draw conclusions on the effect of this intervention.

**Sampling, Data Collection and Analysis**

Data were collected through training evaluations and key informant interviews.

**Training Evaluation**

All PHEs trained (n=19) were included in a post-training evaluation focus group. Two Training Evaluations were conducted: one each for the Gold Town and Pacific Canyon PHE groups; net sample sizes were ten and five, respectively. One BCTRIP staff member conducted the focus groups. The questions assessed the effectiveness of the training and the Triple T Project
Curriculum, and how the training could be improved. One BCTRP staff member took notes during the focus group, and the data were later analyzed by three BCTRP staff.

Key Informant Interviews

Key informant interviews were conducted after the intervention by the Local Evaluator. Key informants included the Gold Town and Pacific Canyon Coordinators, an afterschool program coordinator, Pacific Canyon PHEs, and Gold Town PHEs. Fourteen interviews were planned and 18 were actually scheduled. However, seven youth did not show up for the interviews, resulting in a net sample size of 11 key informants. Interviews were completed in-person or by phone. A content analysis of the open-ended responses was used to determine the successes and challenges related to providing ongoing tobacco use prevention education using an evidence-based curriculum.

Evaluation Results

As a result of the intervention activities, BCTRP trained a total of 22 individuals – 19 youth and 3 adults – to conduct the six-lesson Triple T Project curriculum. Two after school, youth-serving groups agreed to provide the curriculum. Six lessons were provided at the Gold Town Kids Club and six lessons were provided at the Pacific Canyon Elementary School’s afterschool program.

Process Data Collection Results

Training Evaluation

The responses to the post-training evaluation indicated that both the Gold Town and Pacific Canyon PHEs believed that the Triple T Project curriculum was successful, that the after school students were responsive to their presence, and the students enjoyed the lessons. Suggestions for improvement had to do with recruiting other PHEs, possible presentation venues, and exploring enhancements to the curriculum and the weekly/biweekly meeting format.

Key Informant Interviews

The responses to the key informant interviews indicated that successful components included having two Peer Health Educator cohorts, one in each Gold Town and Pacific Canyon, rather than having one cohort that traveled to both communities; training both cohorts in a one-day, Triple T Curriculum specific training (vs. a multiple day training), and having weekly/biweekly practice sessions with a local adult coordinator who also arranged presentation logistics and transported the PHEs to the after school program site. The most significant challenges were scheduling conflicts with other after school program activities and other school-related activities for the PHEs, and turnover among staff and PHEs during the school year.
Conclusions and Recommendations

The objective of getting at least two youth-serving groups (e.g., 4-H, Kids Club, Boys & Girls Club, etc.) to provide ongoing tobacco use prevention education using an evidence-based curriculum that provides instruction on the negative physiologic and social consequences of tobacco use, social influences on tobacco use, peer norms regarding tobacco use, and refusal skills to youth members was met. Based on process data results, this was due to providing weekly/biweekly meetings to prepare the PHEs to deliver the curriculum, arranging presentation logistics, and transporting the PHEs to the after school program site.

Limitations of the evaluation include lack of outcome measures. In addition, the response rate to the key informant interviews was lower than anticipated.

Lessons learned from this intervention and recommendations for future work include:

- An afterschool program’s interest in providing tobacco use prevention education is dependent upon having a thriving PHE cohort to deliver the tobacco use prevention lessons. This requires an adult coordinator to provide practice sessions, help develop presentation skills, provide a variety of activities to keep the youth engaged and interested, and to deal with the logistics of the presentations.

- In order to be successful at this type of intervention, administrative, logistical and financial support are needed for the adult coordinators, as well as ongoing training and technical assistance, coaching and regular communication mechanisms.

This project shows that providing ongoing tobacco use prevention education in after school programs requires an adult coordinator with administrative, technical and financial support, plus a weekly/biweekly curriculum plan. The curriculum plan should account for PHE turnover, ongoing training needs and a variety of presentation experiences.