La Vida Sana, La Vida Feliz ★
(Healthy Life, Happy Life)

Location: Illinois
Category: Promising Practice

BACKGROUND
In the Chicago neighborhood of Humboldt Park, approximately 35 percent adults are overweight, which far exceeds the national average of 24 percent and the Chicago average of 25 percent. This rate can be linked to the fact that only 33 percent of adult females in Humboldt Park are moderately active and 30 percent of all Humboldt Park residents do not understand nutrition guidelines. Additionally, 35 percent of obese residents eat fried or fast food four times or more per week. About 30 percent of overweight adults and 10 percent of obese adults in Humboldt Park perceive themselves as underweight or normal weight.

The Erie Family Health Center, a Federally Qualified Community Health Center in Chicago serving 30,000 low-income patients annually, collaborated with the Greater Humboldt Park Community of Wellness to develop La Vida Sana, La Vida Feliz, a program designed to promote a healthy weight in Latinas facing weight loss barriers such as access to healthy foods, time, economic resources, family commitments and motivation. In addition to the group program format, presentations and workshops are provided at community agencies and an extensive calendar of free community wellness activities is offered and distributed monthly.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES
The overall objective of the La Vida Sana, La Vida Feliz program is to promote a healthy weight in low income Latinas in Humboldt Park who are disproportionately affected by overweight and obesity, and face a number of barriers to weight loss.

The program’s goals are to reduce participants’ BMI, cholesterol, waist and blood pressure, and increase nutrition and fitness knowledge and overall wellness. Additionally, staff members aim to provide access to healthy foods and activities and offer motivational support.

TARGET POPULATION SERVED
The 63,000 residents of the Humboldt Park neighborhood of Chicago are predominantly Mexican, Puerto Rican or African American. 1 in 3 families live below the federal poverty line. The La Vida Sana, La Vida Feliz program was developed specifically for this neighborhood and was implemented through Erie’s Humboldt Park clinic.

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES
The program was developed based around the social-ecological model. This approach takes into account both biological and environmental influences in the individual interacting with her environment. The social ecological model identifies 5 targets of interventions: individual factors, interpersonal factors, organizational factors, community factors, and system or policy factors. Individual behavior changes provide for learning new skills, including self-management related to nutrition, physical activity, and healthful weight.

Opportunities to practice and reinforce these skills were provided through nutrition counseling and fitness programs. Supportive environments were created through education and linkages to community resources, making healthful lifestyle options more accessible, affordable, and safe.

The promotora model, in which a lay health educator from the community provides the group education, was chosen based on past research suggesting a significant relationship between collective efficacy – the willingness of community members to look out for one another and intervene when trouble arises – and BMI, risk of overweight, and overweight status. The 3 methods of information dissemination included promotoras with tailored print materials, tailored print materials alone, or off-the-shelf print materials. The promotora group consumed significantly less calories and fat, resulting in a more successful intervention.

TITLE V/MCH BLOCK GRANT MEASURES
N/A

ADDRESSED
In total, over 300 workshops and classes on physical activity, chronic disease, stress management and nutrition were held in the Humboldt Park community, reaching 2,800 individuals. Evaluation results consistently reflected that La Vida Sana participants felt favorably about having instructors being from their community, like themselves.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES/EVALUATION DATA
Pre- and post-test data related to BMI, waist, blood pressure and cholesterol scores were collected along with Patient Health Questionnaire scores. Changes in physical activity and nutrition knowledge and behavior, participant’s self-efficacy and program satisfaction were also measured using pre-tests and post-tests in both English and Spanish. Specifically, self-reported data were collected related to weekly physical activity participation; fruit, vegetable, tortilla and rice consumption; soft drink, water, milk and alcohol consumption; and regular label reading and purchasing/cooking with low-fat/low-sodium ingredients.

Approximately over 1,800 patients have been referred by their providers, 1,109 women have attended an orientation session and 406 women have graduated from the program (three ongoing groups have yet to graduate).

Outcomes from the project include:

- 99 percent of graduates reported that their clothes fit better and 97 percent stated that they have more energy and feel better about themselves
- 95 percent of graduates reported eating more fruits and vegetables on a daily basis
- 71 percent of graduates met cholesterol guidelines, an improvement of 25 percent
- Nutrition knowledge scores increased by 36 percent when compare pre- and post-program
- 60 percent of graduates met risk guidelines for blood pressure, an improvement of 31 percent
- 85 percent of graduates lost at least one inch from their waists and 81 percent of women lost weight
- Mean hemoglobin a1c scores improved from 6.48 pre-program to 6.14 post-program

PROGRAM COST
Funding was received through HRSA’s Maternal and Child Health Bureau in 2006 for three years (8/1/06-7/31/09). Project cost (personnel and program supplies and materials) for one year with 150 participants: $100,000.

ASSETS & CHALLENGES
Assets
- The ability to keep connected with the participants via regular phone follow-up calls
- Community partnerships and buy-in from the healthcare providers
- Utilizing a promotora model

Challenges
- There is a cultural acceptance of a high BMI in this community
- Participants have limited access to healthy foods
- Participant retention – family obligations, change in work status/schedule, travels back to home country for extended period of time
- Goal achievement related to BMI

Overcoming Challenges
Time was spent discussing with the participants what a healthy weight is, what constitutes a healthy diet and why it is important to make healthy lifestyle choices. Promotoras discussed risk factors for heart disease, diabetes and other chronic diseases and emphasized the importance of having a healthy body mass index. Women participated in a grocery store scavenger hunt at a nearby grocer to use the tools they learned in the group to plan a healthy menu and find easy-to-prepare healthy snacks.

To address recruitment and retention, phone calls were made on the weeks that the groups weren’t in session to all participants to check on goals and remind the women of the next group meeting. Groups were offered at different times throughout the day and women were encouraged to bring family members or friends to participate with them in order to combat barriers to participation such as lack of childcare.

LESSONS LEARNED
- Strong communication with referring providers encourages referrals
- Phone contact between group meetings is essential for participant motivation/program satisfaction
- When participants become engaged in program, they want to share that passion with others (referrals, promotora trainings)
- Developing an evaluation and data collection plan as part of the planning process is key

FUTURE STEPS
Funding has been secured from five foundations, allowing the program to continue at Erie Family Health Center. HRSA funding concluded in July 2009 and since that time, seven additional cohorts have been held. Recruitment for future groups is ongoing. New partnerships will continue to be developed with community agencies to discuss future replication plans.

Participants that complete La Vida Sana, La Vida Feliz are invited to one-time seminars and workshops on wellness topics such as “Healthy Holidays”, “Family History and Heart Disease” and “Investigating Sugar, Fats and Salt in Foods”. For those program graduates with diabetes, they are invited to participate in a 4-session follow-up program called “La Vida Sana con Diabetes”, providing an additional funding opportunity for foundations.
The additional funding also allowed the program to be offered in English and Spanish, and provide for La Vida Sana for Couples (2011) and La Vida Sana Prenatal (2012).

COLLABORATIONS
There were many local partners that helped with this project by providing exercise space for participants, educational materials, wellness classes, cooking recipes and continuing education credits for the promotoras. The support of this diverse group of community partners made this program possible.

PEER REVIEW & REPLICATION
This program has not been officially peer reviewed, but it has been presented at several conferences.

The curriculum and materials are organized in such a way that this practice could be replicated in other settings with other organizations. In 2011, a different community health center applied for funding and is now implementing the La Vida Sana program. La Vida Sana for Graduates workshops began in early 2011 as well.

RESOURCES PROVIDED
For more information and available resources, contact:

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★This program was highlighted at AMCHP’s 2011 Annual Conference with a Promising Practice award.