



Adult School-University Partnership: Centered on Student Learning

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Partnerships Can Save the Day

In a changing economy, when there is less money and more accountability, partnerships can save the day. Monterey Adult School has teamed up in a collaborative effort with the Center of Immigrant and Refugee Community Literacy Education (CIRCLE) at San Francisco State University; the Center for Vulnerable Populations at the University of California San Francisco (UCSF); and Literacyworks, an educational non-profit. The project focuses on how residents and healthcare professionals can work together to address lead poisoning in the community.

Supported by a grant from The Public Health Trust, Monterey Adult School will implement study circle sessions and classroom action research as part of its English as second language (ESL) program. The partnership provides stipends for teachers as well as learners and offers staff development opportunities for teachers.

Benefits to the Partnership

At the heart of this collaboration is student learning. Monterey Adult School teachers will use the study circle to present and review the curriculum together. Teachers will engage in conversations about learner-centered curriculum. Students will learn about issues affecting their community and health, and acquire English language skills. Classroom action research will allow teachers and students to become co-participants in bringing about change in the community. This fall the students at Monterey Adult School will investigate the reasons lead is affecting their community. Students will discuss readings related to immigrant health. They will be directly involved in the development of the action research focused on lead poisoning prevention and related health topics. Students will acquire health literacy, expand their vocabulary, and take ownership for their own learning while developing research skills. In turn, the collaborative will have data generated by the students regarding the issue of lead poisoning that can be incorporated into community-based prevention messages.

Starting the Partnership

The partnership came about after a phone call from a concerned professor at San Francisco State University to the director of the Monterey Adult School. The professor wanted to explore the idea of a partnership with the adult school to address the issue of lead poisoning. A series of investigations conducted by Dr. Margaret Handley, a public health

epidemiologist at UCSF; Celeste Hall, a Monterey County nurse; and Dr. Eric Sanford, a community clinician in Seaside, documented the following problems:

- Monterey County lead poisoning cases stand out among all counties in California.
- The city of Seaside (the location of Monterey Adult School's largest ESL program) alone has more cases than many counties in California.
- Seaside and Salinas have the largest number of cases in all of Monterey County.

Initial discussions between the adult school and the university quickly led to an agreement to create a partnership to address this question: What can we do about the lead problem in Monterey County? Utilizing each organization's resources, the members created a strategic plan to combat lead poisoning in Seaside.

Recommendations for Adult School-University Partnerships

- Build a relationship with a local research university. Professors conduct research on various topics throughout the year. Find a research professor who is seeking teachers and students to participate in a study. Their research grant usually budgets a stipend for participants.
- Be prepared to present data. An assessment of community needs can compel separate community entities to come together. Partners also need to show data to their funders and colleagues to justify their participation in a project.
- Offer your program as a resource. Articulate how your adult school or program benefits the community. Describe your program's activities and services, and the number of students served.

Starting a partnership can be a long, hard process, but rewards to the learners and teachers can greatly outweigh the difficulties.

REFERENCES

Handley, M., Hall, C., Sanford, E., Diaz, E., Gonzalez-Mendez, E., Drace, K., et al. (2007). Globalization, binational communities, and imported food risks: Results of an outbreak investigation of lead poisoning in Monterey County, California. *American Journal of Public Health, 97*(5), 900-906.