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Project Title: Clearing the Air; Hartford and East Hartford, Connecticut

Background:

It is often hardest to see areas of conflict within our own communities. Residents of Connecticut's five largest cities (Hartford, New Haven, Stamford, Bridgeport, and Waterbury) accounted for 37.2% of all asthma hospitalizations, 37.9% of all asthma emergency department visits, and 30.1% of all asthma deaths (Connecticut Department of Public Health, 2009). We attend one of the wealthiest colleges in the middle of one of the poorest communities in our nation. According to survey data, residents of East Hartford live in some of the worst conditions of poverty in the United States. Economic barriers prevent East Hartford residents from paying for expensive asthma management resources.

Our campus has participated in the American Lung Association's Open Airways for Schools since 2006 to provide asthma education to children in Hartford and all five of us are involved. We collaborate with local elementary and middle schools in Hartford to teach children with asthma how to manage their symptoms, prevent asthma attacks, and properly use their medications. Interacting with these children has given us some insight into the conditions they live in and has made us realize how important is it to reach out within our community. While peace traditionally is thought of in the context of physical violence, for our project addresses peace in terms of overcoming structural violence.

Hartford has a Puerto Rican majority and more than 11% of residents live below the poverty level. Similar evidence-based programs in Connecticut such as Putting on Airs recognize that many families with children who suffer from asthma lack the resources and/or the knowledge to reduce asthma triggers in their homes. We propose a project to go into the homes of these families and help to eliminate asthma triggers while providing education about ways to continue promoting health and safety in their homes and throughout their communities. We hope our project inspires more students on our campus to become invested in the lives of people in our community and that our project unites families to invest in the health of children.

Project Proposal:

Putting on Airs and the Region II Asthma Coalition have invited us to partner with them and build off pre-existing programs to reduce asthma triggers in the homes of families with asthma. We have discussed collaborating with the Connecticut Children's Hospital Asthma Center, the Hartford School District, family physicians, and LLAMP Green and Healthy Homes to connect with families of children with asthma that would like to create an asthma-friendly environment in their homes. We will collect referrals from all of our collaborators and contact the families in the order that the referrals are received. The referral document will include a contact number for the family and we will call and schedule a time for us to come to their home.

Putting on Airs is the Region II Asthma Coalition's evidence-based program that consults families by checking for asthma triggers, and reviewing their current asthma plan and medications. By partnering with the Region II Asthma Coalition, we will be better able to develop an effective method for tracking our progress with the project and have access to the materials that the Connecticut Health Department is already using. This will make it possible to contribute to larger efforts for asthma control in Connecticut with our services.

We will stay on campus at Trinity College for six weeks and "trigger-proof"; reduce common asthma triggers, in an average of one to two houses a day with an intended total of between 30

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and 60 families assisted. Before we begin consultations, we will address our lack of certifications by using online training programs provided by the Connecticut Department of Public Health. While we still will not be officially certified to give professional advice, we will have a background of training to be better equipped to serve the families we will consult. Each house will be provided with a HEPA air filter, dust-mite covers for pillow cases and mattresses, and a variety of traps for small pests. We will also be working with kids in their homes to make homemade trigger reducers such as dehumidifiers and smoke filters as fun ways to get the kids involved in the management of their asthma. Additional services we will offer include steam cleaning carpeting, flooring, and other surfaces in the household to reduce allergens without adding a new allergen of chemical cleaners.

While we are working with the families, we will spread knowledge about asthma management that the family can implement together to ease the burden for relatives living with asthma. Since Spanish is the primary language of many East Hartford residents, we are fortunate that one of our group members speaks Spanish fluently and can act as a translator for any families that aren't comfortable with English. We will inform the families of additional services (through the Asthma Clinic, the American Lung Association, the Region II Asthma Coalition and our own Open Airways for Schools program) that can benefit their children in the future as they continue pursuing better management of their asthma. Many of the trigger reducers we are proposing to offer are expensive and time consuming processes that these families otherwise might not be able to afford. The families will not only benefit from the trigger-proofing services and the information we give them, but they will also benefit from the prospect of being cared for in their community and of building lasting relationships with Trinity College.

We plan to follow up consultations with the families to continue providing health education in the future and to supplement our initial visits. We will track our progress by submitting all the paperwork to Hilary Norcia and then it will be added to a database created by the CT DPH. They can then create statistical reports using our data. There is an evaluation form provided by the CT DPH that we will use to receive the clients' input on their experience. Therefore, we have both qualitative and quantitative data that we can use to track our progress. Also, there is a follow-up portion with the Putting on Airs program that includes call backs via phone two weeks after the visit, three months after, and then six months after. We will use this model to do our own follow up work. The follow up work will also be tracked in the database as well.

Bringing it Back to Trinity:

For the past eight years, Open Airways for Schools has been an active organization on campus. Our goal is to increase the scope of the program by branching out to the families of the children we serve. Maintaining contact with these families and our partner organizations will allow us to follow up with the project and continue serving the Hartford community well after the summer of 2012. Many members of Open Airways for Schools come back from their teaching experience wishing they could do more for the children they work with. We hope this project will provide students with such an opportunity. Clearing the Air may prove to be the beginning of a new era at Trinity College focusing on the improvement of conditions in the community around us and the elimination of the structural violence that plagues our city. We have a responsibility to use our education to create change in the world around us. Our plan to continue following up with the project in the future will open up doors for more students at Trinity to work with community members and foster self-empowerment as individuals take control over their own health and well-being.