

Clearing the Air
Hartford, CT, USA
Trinity College

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Section 1:

Project Goals:

In an effort to educate families about methods to manage their children's asthma to avoid future asthma attacks and hospitalization, Clearing the Air involved going into the homes of children suffering from severe asthma complications to help them eliminate and/or reduce possible asthma triggers in their homes. The project also involved an educational component; each family was provided asthma and environmental education detailing ways to continue promoting health and safety in their homes as well as in their communities beyond the project.

Funding:

The bulk of the funds from this project were from the Kathryn Wasserman Davis Projects for Peace grant. We did receive additional funds from the office of Trinity President F. James Jones, Jr. which supported, in part, housing accommodations for Clearing the Air Project members.

Project Details:

The project involved going into homes of families with severe asthma problems to help eliminate or reduce asthma triggers, while also providing education about ways to continue promoting health and safety in their homes and communities. We sought help from outside organizations; much of the project was made possible by the contribution of educational materials and educational training from several public health agencies in the Hartford area. The Central CT Area Health Education Center (AHEC) provided environmental education to families. Additionally, the Putting on Airs Program and the Region II Asthma Coalition played a crucial role by partnering with our organization and allowing us to complement their pre-existing programs to reduce asthma triggers in the homes of families with asthma. By Partnering with Central AHEC and the Region II Asthma coalition we were able to develop an effective method for tracking our progress and gained access to materials used by the Connecticut Health Department. We also collaborated with public schools in the Hartford school district as a form of recruitment. Family physicians and other outside organizations like LLAMP Green and Healthy Homes also helped with recruitment for our project.

The Project was advertised by word of mouth, publishing information in local newspapers, and also posting flyers in local supermarkets, physicians' offices, and churches. Once individuals displayed interest in participating, they filled out a referral form and were screened by the Region II Asthma coalition to determine if they qualified. Clearing the Air members would then arrange a time to come in and meet the families. Preliminary information about each family was also collected in a phone call prior to the home visit. Once a home visit was scheduled, individuals from our partnering organization, Central AHEC, were contacted to carry out the environmental education portion of our home visit. Supplies were bought in advance to accommodate the homes that we visited.

Each home visit began with an environmental assessment and education, and then asthma education. In some instances, children were educated about their asthma triggers while the parents were educated about keeping their homes healthy and safe for their asthmatic child. After the educational portion of the visit, Clearing the Air members would then steam clean areas of the home and distribute a dehumidifier, pest control devices, mattress and pillow covers, and other materials.

After the visit we also provided each family with a list of recommendations for keeping their home healthy, clean, and safe for their asthmatic child. If physicians had to be contacted for any specific reason they would also be contacted after the home visit. Each visit was followed up by a phone call to check on the status of the asthmatic child and to see if the project was successful.

There were only a few unanticipated difficulties regarding the project. These difficulties began with a hard time recruiting enough participants. When the project began it took several weeks to hear back from families who were interested. Newspaper advertisements, however, helped us get feedback

from interested candidates. A second difficulty in this project was the challenge of scheduling concurrently the environmental specialist and the project members for home visits. The environmental specialists were primarily available on Tuesdays and Thursdays, which limited our home visits to only 2 days a week. A final difficulty of this project was keeping track of families post visit. Many families changed their phone numbers or changed addresses, so follow-up was difficult. There were no budget constraints or language or cultural barriers. We had a diverse group of people working on the project and we were sure to have more than one Spanish-speaking project member to facilitate with non-English speaking families.

While it took a while to establish connections within the community, the Clearing the Air Project helped 6 different families over the course of our project. We received a total of 10 responses of interested candidates; however, the other 4 did not answer calls to set up home visits.

All of the families who we helped had complex cases that involved asthma and many other complications as well. One case to highlight is that of Leon, a 4-year-old asthmatic and son of Talithia: *In this case Leon was very sick, and his asthma was a complication of a brain injury that causes him to asphyxiate on his own secretions. At the time of the visit the child was not in the home because he was hospitalized and suffering from pneumonia complications. The mother in this case was a single mother and also had a younger child. She managed the homecare of her son and set-up his bedroom as a makeshift care facility. Talithia was a perfect candidate for our services because she desperately wanted to minimize the impact of Leon's asthma on his overall health. Talithia was proactive in receiving asthma education to care for her son and did very well on the environmental assessment, according to the environmental specialist. Overall, Talithia took the appropriate precautions to take care of her son. The Clearing the Air Project made a major impact in her correctly caring for Leon.*

The long-term impact of this project is that it will minimize the burden of asthma on the families who participated as well as on the hospitals in Connecticut. We hope that this project will also help to minimize the amount of missed school days of our participants due to their asthma. This project placed power in the hands of families regarding the health of their children. These families can now perhaps *teach others* the precautions to take to manage a family member's asthma. In the future, we would like to continue our project and include more members to help with its mission. Since there is a high rate of asthma in the Hartford area, the project will also be very sustainable.

Section 2:

Defining Peace:

We define peace as the ability to have a sense of security at home. However, we are not referring to physical security, but security in the availability of medical resources and their accessibility. Our "Project for Peace" was aiming to create peace by removing barriers caused by structural violence. In our proposal we noted the very high rate of asthma in the Hartford area. We assume that the high rates of asthma in Hartford can be strongly connected to the amount of poverty and thus the poor living conditions of many residents. We were aiming to knock down those barriers through the use of education and providing interventions.

Our Clearing the Air project contributed to short-term peace by providing families with a sense of control over their child's health. In a long-term sense our project is contributing to peace by giving the families who participated the power and knowledge that they too can make impacts on their larger communities by spreading this information to other families of children who have severe asthma.

Quote:

"This project showed me the importance of public health campaigns and demonstrated the power of effective collaboration with many different community health programs." -Erika

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