

Success Stories

In January 2009, Parish Health Promoters from St. Anne Catholic Church in Gresham organized their first blood drive with the American Red Cross. The drive was organized at the initiative of one of the promotores and was promoted specifically to the Latino community. The goal of the drive was 42 donors. The health promoters worked hard to educate the community about the drive and the need that exists for blood donations. Even though most of the community had never given blood, including most of the promotores, the drive exceeded the goal, by collecting 54 units of blood from 57 first-time donors.

In February 2009, the health promoters at Ascension Catholic Church started a weight loss support group. This group was initiated and designed by one of the promotores at the parish who had a personal goal of losing weight and knew that many of her fellow parishioners did too. She began by talking to people after mass one day at one of the promotores' monthly "health information tables." Interested participants were invited to learn their Body Mass Index and then talk about what their BMI meant. Nearly 30 people signed up for the support group and about 15 regular participants have started participating in the weekly meetings. The group meets each Saturday morning at the church for 90 minutes. Promotores lead the group by facilitating short classes on health topics related to nutrition and weight, group learning activities called "dinámicas" and discussion from group members. Each group includes prayer and 20-30 minutes of low-intensity physical activity, as well as tracking the weight of each participant.

In 2008, a young man named Alberto was referred to the health promoters program by staff members of St. Peter Catholic Church, one of the participating parishes in the program. Alberto complained of heart problems that had led him to the emergency rooms of several local hospitals. He did not have health insurance and was very low-income. In fact, the condition was impacting his ability to work and support his family. He regularly had an accelerated heart rate which led him to feel dizzy and faint. Although he had received care from a health department clinic, Alberto was unable to get the specialist care he needed because of lack of insurance or income. He had been referred to a cardiologist after one of his Emergency visits and learned that he needed a procedure called ablation. Through our advocacy with the cardiologist, Alberto was able to receive the ablation at Providence Portland Medical Center and pay very minimal charges.

When Luz Gomez was pregnant in 2006 she had no idea where to go to get prenatal care. As a Spanish-speaking immigrant without health insurance she was scared she would not have access to the services she needed. Luckily, Luz met Susana, a parish health promoter, at a monthly health information table at her church. Susana referred

Luz to the “Comadres” program at Providence Family Medicine Southeast Clinic. Luz was able to get high quality prenatal care and ongoing medical care for her daughter, Julia, when she was born. Susana also referred the family to dental and vision care resources within the community. Both Luz and her husband Roberto tend to have elevated blood pressure so participating in the monthly blood pressure checks at their parish and in the annual health screening events organized by the health promoters have been wonderful. Luz hopes to enter the healthcare field someday as a nurse so that she can give back to her community.

In June 2009, Parish Health Promoters organized a blood drive targeting Latinos at St. Peter Catholic Church. It was the first time the church had participated in a blood drive geared toward the Hispanic community. Despite the overwhelming economic challenges facing many members of the congregation and many culturally-based myths about blood donations, nearly 61 people showed up to donate and 46 pints of blood were collected. 50 of the donors who came to the event were first-time donors! The health promoters deserve a lot of credit for not just recruiting donors, but educating the Hispanic members of the parish about the need for donated blood and dispelling some of the myths within the community that often discourage people from donating.

In July 2009, a health promoter from St. Anne Catholic Church responded to a request from a fellow parishioner about her need to find dental services for her 18 year old daughter. The daughter was in a lot of pain and had a swollen cheek from a toothache. The family had no health insurance and simply had no idea where to take their daughter to get the dental care she needed. The health promoter gave the mother a copy of our dental resource list and the girl was taken to one of the dental clinics on the list. The family was very pleased with the services the girl received and the affordable payment plans of the clinic. The mother of the girl called the health promoter to personally thank her for the help in locating the resources she needed.

In September 2009 I received a call from Lili, one of our parish health promoters from St. Anne’s Catholic Church in Gresham. Lili was pleased to tell me that one of the referrals she had given for mental health services was successful. A young woman was having a very hard time. Her family felt that she was probably depressed but they could not convince her to get help. The young woman’s mother-in-law contacted Lili for help. Lili was able to speak to the young woman and the family members and give them some names and numbers of Spanish-speaking counselors and mental health therapists. The family was very pleased and relieved to know that these resources were available and were able to make an appointment for the young woman to see a counselor. The mother-in-law called Lili a few months later to say that her daughter-in-law was doing much better since she had started working with a counselor and everyone was so grateful for her help.

In February 2009 I received this note from a colleague, Lynn Steele from the OSU Extension Service Hispanic Food & Nutrition Program, about one of our promotores who recently graduated from our parish health promoter training course:

“Just wanted to provide some timely feedback from the field before I forget. I was talking to [my co-worker] Lucy about the recent class with the Health Promoters and she informed me of the following:

- [Sofia] is doing a great job coordinating the group. She has really taken leadership with this long series of classes.
- Lucy knew her some 5+ years prior to this class, when she was very depressed and had actually attempted suicide (which is evident in scarring on her wrists). I believe she was in a class of Lucy’s back then and Lucy being a nurse recognized the signs of depression, etc. Evidently she experienced past abuse not by her present husband.
- At any rate, Lucy has seen a marked difference in [Sofia]. She is happy and involved. She told Lucy that the Health Promoter Program has helped change her life. She loves being involved in the community.

Good job Catherine! Have a great weekend!

Lynn”

In April 2010, one of our newest parish health promoters, Edith, participated in the Race for the Roses half marathon in Portland after training with the “Team in Training” program of the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society. Edith was inspired to participate by one of our other promotores, Matilde, who had completed the Portland Marathon in October 2009. Matilde invited fellow promotores to join her in training for a walking race to raise money for Leukemia and Lymphoma research as well as to increase their level of physical activity. Edith signed up for the half marathon program and successfully completed the race on April 11th. She hopes to encourage more members of the Latino community to participate in similar events to improve their fitness levels, lose weight and raise funds to help others. Our program plans to participate in the 2010 “Race for the Cure” to raise funds and awareness of breast cancer this fall.

On May 1, 2010, our group of parish health promoters participated in a dental workshop at Pacific University School of Dental Health. This workshop was set up by my counterpart on the Westside, Adele Hughes, and her group of health promoters, along with several dental hygiene students from Pacific University. Twelve of our Eastside health promoters were trained by 6 of the Westside health promoters in 3 interactive classes throughout the day. The workshop topics included the following topics: dental hygiene, periodontal disease and diabetes, dental health of infants and children. This workshop was a wonderful example of a “train the trainer” model. The Westside health

promoters had received a similar workshop last year and a small group of them had decided to study the materials and become trainers for this year's workshop. They worked in pairs to study the educational materials and incorporate popular education methods to develop short workshops for this year's group. The participants' comments included:

- "The 3 classes were excellent."
- "The promotores who taught us were so professional, so prepared."
- "The information was very understandable and clear."
- "The small groups were really helpful for giving us the information."
- "It was easy to understand and I learned a lot."

One of the Pacific University students who helped facilitate the dental health project was Wilber Ramirez, who also happens to be a parish health promoter from St. Andrew parish in NE Portland. Wilber was a dentist in his home country of Peru but his license does not allow him to practice dentistry here in the U.S. After living in the U.S. for several years and working in other fields, Wilber participated in our parish health promoter training course in 2007 and 2008. After completing the training he decided to enroll in a dental hygienist program. Wilber is on track to graduate in August 2010 and looks forward to working in a public health or community clinic setting and serving the Latino community with their dental health needs. Wilber credits the parish health promoter program for motivating him to find a way to return to his chosen profession and continue his studies here.

On Mother's Day, 2010 there was a luncheon at St. John the Baptist Church put on by and for the Latino congregation. The men prepared and served the food and the menu was healthy! Some of the organizers had attended the nutrition classes that the promotores had organized at the church a few months earlier. One of the promotores was very pleased because she thought the healthy food choices were directly a result of the classes.