

Spotlight on the Safety Net

A Community Collaboration

Lucille W. Gorham Intergenerational Community Center (IGCC)

The Lucille W. Gorham Intergenerational Community Center (IGCC) in Greenville, North Carolina, was founded in 2007. Its goal is to identify and address the biopsychosocial health and wellness needs of the residents of west Greenville and Pitt County through innovative programs designed for people in all stages of life. The center's philosophy is that everyone has assets, and by promoting those assets it hopes to help strengthen another generation of families. The center's community development and sustainability plan strengthens individuals and families so that they can maintain their health and well-being.

The Intergenerational Community Center is a collaborative effort on the part of the west Greenville community, the City of Greenville, East Carolina University (ECU), Pitt Community College, and several community nonprofit agencies. The campus of the center, which consists of 6 buildings formerly occupied by St. Gabriel's Catholic Church, is owned by the City of Greenville and is leased to ECU, which is the site manager. The university is responsible for bringing in programs and services and nonprofits. Pitt Community College offers General Educational Development (GED) courses at the center during the days and evenings, and the college's new construction lab on the IGCC campus builds homes in the west Greenville community. IGCC partners use memoranda of understanding to operate the center and to drive its collaborative efforts.

In 2005, Lessi Bass, an associate professor of social work at ECU, took an interest in a community located between ECU's east and west campuses, which was struggling with a number of social, economic, and health needs. Bass worked closely with the City of Greenville, which was trying to revitalize the area. She was concerned about what disparities meant for residents and their families. She went door-to-door with Deborah Moody, who is now director of programs at IGCC, asking citizens about their needs. These 2 women made IGCC a reality. Bass died in January 2009. Her legacy is the center

and the work it does in the community. Moody, who worked alongside her, is now the day-to-day person who keeps alive the connections that Bass made. One of us, K.A.L., an assistant professor of social work at ECU, recently joined the staff of the center as executive director.

In order to understand the needs of the community, in June 2011 the ECU Center for Health Disparities Research community and faculty partnership award funded the West Greenville Community Health Needs Assessment. It was the first time secondary data and survey data were used to examine health for residents of the west Greenville community. The results showed significant health disparities. Compared with Pitt County as a whole, the west Greenville area has extremely high mortality rates for HIV infection, lung cancer, nephritis, and diabetes. Through a random sample of homes in 2 census tracts near the center, the researchers gathered information on access to health care, health disparities, health behaviors, and health beliefs. They reported this information back to the community in a town hall meeting, and the IGCC used it to help determine the type of programming needed by the residents.

A variety of programs focused on strengthening the family have been established. A community garden built with funding from a Kellogg grant in 2007-2008 has provided health education, physical activity, nutrition, and an opportunity for young and old to work together. The garden is integrated into the children's applied math and science programs and also serves as a source of fresh produce for the community.

Electronically published October 12, 2012.

Address correspondence to Ms. Kimberly Alexander-Bratcher, North Carolina Institute of Medicine, 630 Davis Dr, Suite 100, Morrisville, North Carolina (kabratcher@nciom.org).

NC Med J. 2012;73(5):410-411. ©2012 by the North Carolina Institute of Medicine and The Duke Endowment. All rights reserved.

0029-2559/2012/73528

Youth Excelling For Success (YES) is an after-school program (formerly funded by a 21st Century Community Learning Center grant from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction) for youth in third through fifth grades. The program applies the North Carolina Standard Course of Study in nontraditional ways, teaching health, reading and math skills through cultural enrichment activities, chess, physical education, and community gardening. The program is free to families. The program receives community and Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust funding, and half of its staff members are people who live in the community. The chess teacher is a community member who has won state and national competitions. He works with students on math and critical-thinking skills. An in-class grocery store helps students learn to budget and to think about nutrition. A major component of the program is parent engagement. The staff holds large parent meetings with free health screenings to connect parents to resources; these meetings serve as a gateway connecting the center with the community and involving it in the lives of families.

Project FRESH (Food and Relationships for Equitable and Sustainable Health) is a pilot program in which children in the after-school program and their parents walk around the community and deliver locally produced food bundles and cards with healthy recipes on them to homebound seniors. These parent and student volunteers receive produce bundles as well.

The Summer Significance Academy is a 6-week program for students entering middle school. This program seeks to enhance study habits and math and science skills, and then tracks youngsters in their sixth-grade year, providing tutoring as necessary. Older community members serve as volunteers for this program.

IGCC Fit is a new health and wellness program funded by the Kate B. Reynolds Foundation. It focuses on serving youth, adults, and seniors by providing physical activities, nutrition assistance, education, and community support and engagement. The goals of the program are to improve access to affordable healthy food options, to increase opportunities for safe physical activities in the community, and to reduce health disparities, including disparities in the prevalence and treatment of obesity, hypertension, and diabetes.

The IGCC offers free health screenings in col-

laboration with Tom Irons and his staff from the James D. Bernstein Community Health Center. The IGCC is also involved in Doyle "Skip" Cummings's EMPOWER Study of African-American women with type 2 diabetes in Edgecombe, Pitt, and Bertie counties. IGCC is an enrollment and assessment site for the EMPOWER grant and provides free monthly diabetes screenings. EMPOWER is a randomized controlled trial funded by the Bristol Meyers Squibb Foundation to test the effects of implementing a small changes model with community health workers to maintain type 2 diabetes.

The Youth Apprenticeship Program (YAP) is a project for juvenile offenders and for youth ages 16 to 25 years who are at risk for law enforcement interaction. The program prepares these teens and young adults to complete the GED course or to return to high school by teaching them professional business practices (time management, dress, and attitude), vocational skills (welding, electronics, automotive repair, and the like) through apprenticeship placements with mentors at local participating businesses, and life skills (through classes on parenting, conflict/anger management, and financial literacy). Most of the program participants have completed the GED and some have gone on to college.

Seniors Sowing Seeds (SSS) is a program that connects senior women with young girls. The older women provide the younger women with child care advice, cooking and sewing lessons, and home management skills. In turn, the young women teach the older women about new technology, including cell phones, computers, e-mail, and digital cameras. Many of the older women also participate in a weekly quilting group.

The success of the programs and events offered by the IGCC is the result of its strong partnerships with the community and the participation of a variety of organizations. The staff and partners are committed to keeping the center and its programs going regardless of changes in funding sources. The IGCC will continue to use its community resources to strengthen the families of west Greenville. NCMJ

Kimberly Alexander-Bratcher, MPH project director, North Carolina Institute of Medicine, Morrisville, North Carolina.

Kerry Anne Littlewood, PhD, MSW assistant professor, School of Social Work, College of Human Ecology, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina.

Acknowledgment

Potential conflicts of interest. K.A.-B. and K.A.L. have no relevant conflicts of interest.