TURNING INFORMATION

DATA AND

INFORMATION

COLLABORAT

TIME, TRUST

AND TURF

INTO ACTION

"Some self-confronting questions: 'Where do I want to be

at any given time?' 'How am I going to get there?' 'What

do I have to do to get myself from where I am to where I

want to be?' . . . 'What's the first step I can take to get

moving?' "

– George A. Ford

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"I think the ability to listen to other people and be flexible [is important in community organizing]. Too many times, I have seen... individuals, and they have good ideas, but they are not flexible enough to consider everyone's opinion or everyone's recommendation."

-   *(1) Louisiana Office of Public Health, 1998. From an interview with community organizers, unpublished.*

TURNING INFORMATION INTO ACTION

Data, indicators and information

This is a book that has a wealth of data and indicators. However, data, indicators and information are different in some ways. Data are actual numbers, rankings, sequences and values that describe something specific. These data are the raw material for developing indicators which provide information on the status of a thing or process over time. The combination of bits and pieces of data, select indicators and historical and future trends provide the information that individuals and communities need for good decision making. Community-level information establishes a foundation for community organizing, prioritizing, decision making and action.

Specific issues begin to emerge as communities collect and study data, develop indicators and gather relevant information. There is a natural tendency for people to be drawn to things they feel are most important. However, this approach often doesn't account for the complexity of many issues. By taking a broader approach toward addressing the issues important to communities, people can come together to recognize and work on community concerns.

For instance, you may teach your child the dangers of tobacco, drugs and alcohol use. Yet, other forces such as peer pressure, the law and public safety, school policies and the media all influence your child's decisions. Another concern may be improving your health to prevent heart disease or diabetes. In this case, local diet and exercise norms, availability and affordability of nutritional food at home and work, as well as the safety of the neighborhood all contribute to your ability to develop healthy habits. Changes in the larger environment are often necessary to support and sustain healthy lifestyles.

> **"...the changes you make individually will be easier and better maintained if your community supports them."**

Other types of information

To get a full picture of how your community is doing and the challenges it faces, you need to assess or learn from the wide variety of information that is available. Community assessment can be as simple as walking around your neighborhood and counting abandoned houses, or it can involve doing a survey of community members to find out the skills they have that are useful to the community (such as fixing cars or watching children). Below is a list of some sources that can provide important information on your community:

- ◆ **Secondary data** – Secondary data include mortality, morbidity surveillance and studies like the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS). Secondary data already exist in forms such as: census and other local, state and federal data resources; needs assessments from health, education, business or other organizations and from various research projects and reports (Scovill, 1998).

◆ **Community perceptions** - Community perception data record what the community members think about their quality of life or provide insight on issues that community residents think they need to change (Scovill, 1998).

◆ **Assets, skills and resources** - Assets and capacity data provide information on the wealth of skills and resources that are present in each community. There are tested and organized steps to use as a guide to discover all the hidden talents in a community (see McKnight and Kretzman, 1993).

◆ **Community landscape/political will** - Community landscapes and political data provide information on the political, social and cultural aspects of a community. This information is important in developing community action plans and understanding the larger context in which they will be implemented. Issues such as empowerment and self-esteem are essential to the success of community initiatives (Scovill 1998).

Taking action and getting organized

The process of community planning has been practiced by many people and groups across the country. This chapter has suggestions about what communities can do to help improve health by working together. There are a variety of strategies for bringing community members together, to identify shared concerns and to take action to create the desired change.

Working together

Collaboration is one of the words used to describe people working together. One person or organization alone cannot solve the complex problems facing communities. Public, private and nonprofit sectors and concerned citizens must come together to identify the challenges faced by the community. Together, they can then develop plans and share resources to address these challenges and improve the community's quality of life. Although this may appear simple, it involves complex relationships and a shared commitment toward a common goal (Himmelman, 1994).

Working together can happen at many different levels. The level that individuals and organizations partner together depends on the amount of **time, trust and turf** people

DID YOU KNOW?
Studies of health promotion programs reveal six shortcomings in community organizing:
1. Fragmentation of effort;
2. Overemphasis on initial motivation;
3. Appeal to individual heroics;
4. Overemphasis on activities as opposed to results;
5. Overemphasis on knowledge and information; and
6. A "we will do it for you" approach, rather than "together we can do it for ourselves."
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999.

Taking Care, Taking Control: Cancer Outreach through Preventive Education (COPE)

One of the most powerful ways to develop a strong network is "training of trainers." The Cancer Association of Greater New Orleans (a United Way agency) is working with members of the Hispanic population to train ten to 15 Hispanic women as trainers in the Greater New Orleans area. They, in turn, will train other Hispanic women about breast cancer.

To spotlight the effort, representatives began talking to their church and family members, and local Hispanic radio and television programs. Soon after, the Hispanic Council at City Hall became involved. Through word-of-mouth,

and mailings to Hispanic businesses and churches, the Cancer Association is now recruiting Hispanic lay health advisors to spread a message of prevention.

Each lay health advisor is trained by the Cancer Association on counseling techniques about self-breast exams, mammograms and the importance of early detection. With their new knowledge and skills, they will increase awareness.

For further information: Cancer Association: COPE, Tammy Louk, 504-733-5539

Hispanic LA: *Teaching about Cancer: community collaboration*

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are willing to commit (Himmelman, 1994). Time refers to how much of your schedule you are willing to dedicate to working together on the project. Trust means mutual confidence in each other's intentions and ability to do the work at hand. Turf refers to all aspects of space and territory, from allowing people to meet in your living room to sharing knowledge, resources, recognition and rewards. The greater the strains on time, trust and turf, the greater the need to clearly define the roles and relationships of the people or groups who are working together (Himmelman, 1994).

The following are four ways developed by Himmelman to look at how individuals and organizations can work together. The best level to work on will depend on numerous factors such as the work to be done, the particular individuals and organizations involved and the complexity of the issue. It is important that communities be clear on the issues and the desired outcomes before deciding how to work together.

- **Networking** involves sharing information, resources and experiences with others who are doing similar work. It is the most informal and easy way to work with others. Talking to one another can be the visible proof that trust is being built. Networking can be as casual as participating in a car pool or as elaborate as a neighborhood watch program.

- **Coordinating** requires greater time and turf than networking, but it is a very important strategy for change. Coordinating means that everyone agrees to make room in his or her schedule and adjust priorities to reach the planned goal. Well-coordinated activities reduce duplication and build on each partner's strengths.

- **Cooperating** involves exchanging information, altering activities and sharing resources to meet a common goal. Cooperating can require a substantial amount of time, high levels of trust, and significant access to each other's turf. Although this may be difficult, the benefits can be substantial.

Taking Care, Taking Control: Helping urban youth by good support

Youth reaching out to youth: *Positive Impact; Perfect LOVE Ministries; and W.A.R.*

Who can talk to kids better than other kids?

This important observation was the driving force behind three organizations – Positive Impact, Inc., Perfect Love Ministries and Warriors After Righteousness (WAR) – joining together to curb youth violence in Gentilly and New Orleans East. Positive Impact had been working in the Gentilly area and had established clubs. WAR had been working with mime, street theatre, dance, skits and plays by and for teens. And Perfect Love Ministries collaborated by bringing their extensive contacts in the community. Together, they had the reputation, contacts, experience and a wide array of skills and esteem building programs to help teens make good decisions.

The New Orleans Public Schools have been active with ten clubs in place and another six in the planning. Senior High Clubs are the "Alpha Omega Agape," and junior and middles schools have LOVE Clubs (for Lifting Our Valuable Esteem).

Collaboration between these groups has brought the best of their programs and contacts together where they have been able to reach deeply into the lives of teens. Over 4,000 young people have heard the message of the collaboration. One of the major targets of their activities has been to try to counteract intense peer pressure, which can lead youth to self-destructive behaviors.

One of the ideas for the future is to search for funding to start a TV show for the local teens. All the work of the collaboration has come from volunteers who are motivated to help young people navigate the difficult years of adolescence with positive results.

- *For further information, Lynette Owens at 504-943-2601 or Michael Shaw at 504-245-8620.*

◆ **Collaborating** is built on the desire of individuals and organizations to increase the capacity of others. This definition of collaborating recognizes that individuals and organizations have a relationship. Part of that relationship is wanting to help each other become better by sharing risks, responsibilities and rewards. To do this, substantial resource commitments are made, very high levels of trust are built and extensive areas of common turf are shared.

Processes for working together

Working together is a difficult process that requires tremendous patience and persistence. Yet, when people come together in a nonthreatening environment with quality community information, they can successfully create goals, objectives and strategies. The Parish Health Profiles 1999 provide information for this purpose.

Successful strategies for bringing together the public, private and nonprofit sectors and local citizens vary from community to community. There really is no single best approach to creating healthier communities. Courage, flexibility creativity and, most of all, patience are essential. Advocacy is an example of a process through which communities can bring together a broad spectrum of concerned and motivated citizens. This process can be adapted to the specific needs of the community, but it provides a good example of what can take place in order to create effective and lasting community initiatives.

> **"Trust means mutual confidence in each other's intentions and ability to do the work at hand. "**

Advocacy

In this day and age, we all need to be able to advocate for ourselves and for the things in which we believe. In the simplest terms, advocacy is a set of skills to shift opinion or start action. Essentially, advocacy is getting something changed or done ([1] Wallack, 1993). To advocate effectively in your community, you need access to good information and must know how to use the information to gain support for your initiative. This information can be used to support and drive home your points when addressing the public. Advocacy can take place on several levels.

Advocacy on the individual/family level

Every day, we need to advocate for our own well-being. In order to get better health care in a clinic, you may have to do your homework to understand your health condition. You will have to be able to tell the doctor/nurse your symptoms. You should discuss with your physician the tests and treatment you believe are right for you. Part of advocating for good care is a commitment to work with your physician and clearly communicate your needs. This is equally important in many other facets of your life.

Voting, contacting local and state politicians, notifying a consumer protection agency, asking your doctor/nurse questions, writing a letter to the editor of your local

"What do I think is the most important factor for improving quality of life? I think once people have an education, and I am not saying that they have to have a masters or Ph.D., but a good, well-rounded education, they are more inclined to make better decisions about themselves and their families. The quality of life would be improved when better decisions are made."
– *(3) Louisiana Office of Public Health, 1998. From an interview with community organizers, unpublished.*

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newspaper, or voicing your opinion through other formal channels are all ways that you advocate for your personal interests ([1] Wallack, 1993). Our system of government works best when we all take steps to keep representatives and programs in touch with our needs. No one else will do it for you. It is your own responsibility to advocate for yourself.

Advocacy on the community level
In addition to individual advocacy, people can work together to advocate for their community or neighborhood. In order to get your streets repaired, you and your neighbors could contact public works. If the local park is in need of repair, you could collect a petition of names and go to parish or city officials. Both of these are examples of community level advocacy. Advocacy even means showing up at a planning meeting with a group of people. Just being there often sends a message ([1] Wallack, 1993).

Powerful advocacy is as small as writing a letter to the Better Business Bureau or checking a book out of the library to get informed about your newly diagnosed illness. It is as big as being a spokesperson for a large group or holding a press conference. Mostly, what this publication is trying to show is that communities can no longer expect their needs to be addressed without first getting informed and then advocating for a change. You get heard better when you are organized and when you have information that supports your community's points of view. No one will hear you if you don't get out there and make some noise.

> *"What do I think is the most important factor for improving quality of life? The family is most important, because we seem to have a breakdown in the family. Families should be involved in whatever communities do... be involved with what is happening where you live, and be part of it."*
> – (4) Louisiana Office of Public Health, 1998. From an interview with community organizers, unpublished.

> *"Mass media ownership is growing increasingly concentrated... [it] is estimated that fewer than 29 corporations control more than 50% of all media output."*
> - (2) Wallack L et al., 1993.

> **"Powerful advocacy is as small as writing a letter to the Better Business Bureau or checking a book out of the library . . . it is as big as being a spokesperson."**

Measuring community improvement
Once a community has gathered various forms of information, and has committed to work together it must also continue to follow up and monitor the desired improvements in the community. This takes time and vigilance. This Parish Health Profile 1999 has many indicators that can be followed over time. In many cases, communities will decide to collect or develop others. The strengths and limitations of using indicators to measure community progress are described in the next section.

THE COMMUNITY CAN . . .

There are many ways to use the data in these Profiles. One manner is to work more closely with local governments.

❶ Using the Parish Health Profiles 1999
- Decide what issues are most important in the community, through meetings or discussions with neighbors by using the information in the Profile.
- Meet with local officials and elected officials to explain concerns.

❷ Community assessments
- Request copies of community assessments that have been conducted in the past. Summarize the results and discuss the findings with local officials.
- Brainstorm how to perform an assessment of your own community.

❸ Other kinds of information
- Make a list of important measures of quality of life for the local community. Some may be as simple as the number of parks in the city limits or public swimming pools open during the summer.

❹ Advocacy
- Bring local officials into your discussions. Work with them to understand your community's concerns.

"What do I think is the most important factor for improving quality of life? I think that probably the most important thing of all is the personal responsibility side of it -- that area where young people are able to learn that they have responsibility for their own lives, and they have the opportunity to make something of that."

– (5) From an interview with community organizers, unpublished, Louisiana Office of Public Health, 1998.

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