

Grant Outcomes Report

Building Local Coalitions To Prevent Childhood Lead Poisoning

I. Executive Summary

This \$139,770 grant to the University of Rochester Environmental Health Sciences Center (EHSC) increased capacity for lead poisoning prevention and fostered local coalition building in three upstate New York counties. Under “Building Local Coalitions to Prevent Childhood Lead Poisoning,” each county completed a lead risk needs assessment and a direct action project, and produced a final report documenting its coalition building activities, as well as general directions for future lead poisoning prevention efforts. This project capitalizes on a successful coalition model in Rochester that has been used as a statewide model for primary lead prevention. While the long-term sustainability of these local coalitions is unclear, one of the three county coalitions was able to obtain additional funding to continue its lead poisoning prevention efforts while the other two county partners have increased their involvement in lead poisoning prevention efforts.

II. The Problem

Childhood lead poisoning rates have decreased in the past several decades, but the rates in upstate New York remain among the highest in the country, particularly among low-income children living in older housing. According to the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in 2001 New York had the second highest number of children with confirmed elevated blood levels in the country, and the highest number of high-risk (pre-1950) housing units.¹ The Comprehensive Housing Affordability Survey² found that 5,535 households in Elmira (Chemung County), 12,225 households in Utica (Oneida County), and 5,920 in Auburn (Cayuga County) have the highest risk for lead poisoning (i.e., in homes built before 1950, family incomes below 30% of the Household Area Median Income, and children under six years of age). Each of these cities has a significant amount of older housing in poor condition, resulting in high lead poisoning rates. However, these cities lack experience in building community-based lead poisoning prevention efforts, particularly in forming multi-stakeholder coalitions to advance lead poisoning prevention policies.

¹See: Meyer, P.A., et. Al. 2003. Surveillance for Elevated Blood Lead Levels Among Children—United States—1997–2001.

MMWR Surveillance Summaries. 52(SS10):1–21. <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss5210a1.htm>. Accessed Feb. 12, 2008/

²See: <http://www.huduser.org/portal/datasets/cp2000.html>

KEY INFORMATION:

GRANTEE

University of Rochester, Environmental Health Sciences Center

GRANT TITLE

Building Local Coalitions to Prevent Childhood Lead Poisoning

DATES

January 2008–January 2009

GRANT AMOUNT

\$139,770

To address the high risk of childhood lead poisoning in upstate counties, EHSC attempted to replicate a successful local lead prevention coalition model established in Rochester (Monroe County) in Cayuga, Chemung, and Oneida Counties. In 2000, diverse stakeholders in Rochester formed the community-based Coalition to Prevent Lead Poisoning (CPLP).³ Through years of developing a robust coalition, CPLP successfully promoted community awareness, direct action, and local policy change. In 2005, as a result of the Coalition's efforts, Rochester passed the first local lead law in New York State (outside of New York City), which required inspections for lead paint hazards as part of Rochester's existing housing inspection process for rental housing.

III. Grant Activities

The goals of the project were to increase the lead poisoning prevention capacity of Elmira, Utica, and Auburn in their respective counties, and to foster an environment for local coalition building. Grant funds were primarily used to support the CPLP and the Community Outreach and Education Core (COEC) of the Environmental Health Sciences Center at the University of Rochester⁴ to engage a local partner organization in each city, and support their individual lead poisoning prevention outreach activities and coalition building efforts. Working with the University of Rochester, each local partner completed a lead risk needs assessment. Each group also worked to achieve the following outcomes:

- 1) Enhanced commitment and local support to increase lead poisoning prevention efforts. Key stakeholders would become educated on the extent and hazards of lead poisoning in their communities, and in turn educate their colleagues, clients, and the general public about lead poisoning, and build local support for prevention efforts.
- 2) Establishment of a sustainable and strategic process for ending lead poisoning in the three cities. The needs assessment, direct action project, and strategic plan for each community would position the local partner and/or stakeholders to obtain a sustained commitment and funding to eliminate lead poisoning.
- 3) Development of a model for coalition-building in the top lead-poisoning cities in New York. This project would demonstrate the feasibility, barriers, and effective approaches to supporting lead coalition-building.

The University of Rochester and CPLP provided technical assistance to all local partners for activities such as data collection and analysis for the needs assessment and educational material development. They also shared their coalition building experiences

³See: <http://www.leadsof2010.org/>

⁴See: <http://www2.envmed.rochester.edu/envmed/ehsc/outreach/coec/>



on topics such as convening stakeholders, promoting awareness, and driving policy change. A summary report of the lessons learned would be disseminated to the public including community and government groups.

IV. Key Findings

During the course of the grant, lead poisoning prevention efforts shifted to the county level instead of focusing on each individual city. This allowed for accommodating ongoing lead prevention efforts that were traditionally led by the county, and for a local partner who wanted to focus on rural areas. In addition, because each local partner had a different role in the local coalition in its respective county, it was more appropriate to produce a final report (instead of a strategic plan) to provide broader guidance for future lead poisoning prevention efforts.

CHEMUNG COUNTY: The University of Rochester and CPLP partnered with the Catholic Charities of Chemung Schuyler⁵ to implement a variety of activities. Catholic Charities had limited experience with lead poisoning prevention, but had extensive experience with facilitating local coalitions on children's issues and housing, and working directly with low-income parents on health and housing issues.

Building on these experiences and assistance from CPLP, Catholic Charities formed a new coalition with 25 local organizations focusing on current lead prevention efforts, education, and statewide policy advocacy. For their direct action project, coalition members distributed lead education brochures through their own outreach channels, conducted door-to-door education outreach, and presented at various community events such as the Elmira farmers' market. Catholic Charities included articles about lead in their members' newsletters, bulletins, and local newspapers. The coalition also arranged a meeting where more than 200 landlords were invited to learn more about lead inspection and hazard inspection funding; however, only seven attended. Nevertheless, between 900 and 1,000 people collectively received lead information as a result of this project.

Catholic Charities' awareness-raising, combined with the County's focused efforts, likely contributed to a significant increase in lead testing rates, which more than doubled during the grant period. During the first nine months of 2007, a total of 649 blood tests were done in the county; during the same period in 2008, 1,679 tests were completed.⁶ In recognition of its capacity to contribute to lead poisoning efforts, Catholic Charities received \$10,000 from the Kennedy Valve settlement and \$2,000 from the Diocese of Rochester to continue its lead outreach, education, and coalition-building work in 2009.⁷

⁵See: [Link to http://www.cs-cc.org/](http://www.cs-cc.org/)

⁶From grantee's personal communication with the Chemung County Health Department.

⁷Chemung County was awarded \$1.5 million (known as the Kennedy Valve Lead Fund Grant) in 2007 as part of a settlement between the New York State Attorney General's office and the Kennedy Valve Corporation. The fund is jointly administered over a three-year period by the City of Elmira and the Chemung County Health Department, and used to fund efforts in reducing childhood lead poisoning.

FUNDING & RATIONALE

This project was awarded under NYSHealth's 2007 Special Opportunities initiative. This project was funded because it closely aligned with NYSHealth's mission to improve public and community health. Funding this project allowed NYSHealth to demonstrate the potential of local coalition-building as a strategy to combat childhood lead poisoning in upstate New York.

ONEIDA COUNTY: The local partner organization for Oneida County is the Mohawk Valley Community Action Agency⁸ (MVCAA). MVCAA had extensive experience with training contractors in lead-safe work practices, but limited experience with lead poisoning education and outreach. MVCAA did not form a new coalition because the Oneida County Health Department already had established a comprehensive county-level lead poisoning prevention coalition, the Safe Housing Coalition (SHC). Rather, MVCAA capitalized on its experience running several Head Start⁹ programs in rural parts of the county and focused its efforts on children in the rural environment.

As its direct action project, MVCAA wrote and produced a play on lead poisoning, which was performed by Head Start children in two different towns. The play reached 110 adults, in addition to dozens of Head Start children, teachers, and staff, and is expected to be performed in partnership with other Head Start centers in the future. In addition, MVCAA took the New York State Department of Housing staff on a tour of a rural housing area and educated the staff on poor structural conditions and potential lead hazards. Through its participation in SHC's regular meetings, MVCAA coordinated with SHC's lead prevention activities, and brought in University of Rochester and CPLP staff to speak about their lead coalition building experiences in Rochester. MVCAA purchased a second HEPA filtered vacuum cleaner, which helps trap lead dust particles, to lend to families. MVCAA also staffed an outreach table at the Rome Homes Show, where it disseminated information about lead poisoning prevention to 324 people.

Although MVCAA was unable to obtain additional funding to support future lead poisoning outreach, it has an increased involvement in the Oneida County Health Department's primary lead prevention pilot program. The Oneida County Health Department has established a partnership with MVCAA to provide education and outreach under this special grant program from the New York State Department of Health.

CAYUGA COUNTY: Cornell Cooperative Extension¹⁰ (CCE) served as the local organization partner for Cayuga County. Prior to this project, CCE had limited experience with lead poisoning prevention, but had extensive experience with community outreach and education on other environmental topics. For this grant, CCE partnered with the Cayuga County Health Department to develop lead education materials, and collected other materials for a Lead Resource Center at CCE offices. CCE hosted two meetings with the County Health Department's Lead and Immunization Advisory Committee and other community stakeholders. These meetings reviewed Rochester's experience in lead poisoning prevention and examined future actions necessary for Committee members and community stakeholders to form an independent coalition. CCE also organized, advertised, and supported a Free Lead-Safe Work Practices Course, which trained and certified nine people in lead-safe work practices. Additional outreach activities, such as providing lead poisoning education at public events

⁸ See: <http://www.mvcaa.com/>

⁹ Head Start is a national program that promotes school readiness by enhancing the social and cognitive development of children through the provision of educational, health, nutritional, social, and other services to enrolled children and families. <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ohs/about/index.html#mission>

¹⁰ <http://cce.cornell.edu/Pages/Default.aspx>

(the Chamber of Commerce 2008 Home Expo, blood lead screening clinics at the Women, Infants, and Children¹¹ health clinics, and the Cayuga County Fair) directly reached nearly 700 individuals.

The primary direct action project was a targeted door-to-door outreach event in an Auburn neighborhood that identified lead poisoning high-risk areas in the city of Auburn by reviewing lead risk maps and county records. CCE trained a class of 17 high school students from BOCES (Boards of Cooperative Educational Services) to conduct exterior visual assessments of homes and short interviews with residents, and provide education about childhood lead poisoning. Nearly 70 doormats and litterbags were distributed to houses and housing units, 13 residential surveys were conducted, 59 houses were evaluated, and 19 soil samples were taken. CCE followed up by mailing property owners copies of their external visual assessments, soil sample results, and information about lead hazard reduction and local resources.

It is unclear if CCE will have staff capacity to convene a long-term lead coalition or replicate its direct action activities, but stakeholders are expected to continue meeting to share information and work with the County's Advisory Board as a subcommittee or workgroup.

Throughout the project, the University of Rochester and CPLP provided technical assistance to the local partners, such as developing lead education materials, assisting with press releases, and attending local coalition meetings to share their Rochester experiences. Most important, each county now has a final report that includes a needs assessment with recent health and housing data, a summary of lead prevention and outreach activities, and general next steps for each county in its lead poisoning prevention efforts.



¹¹ The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) serves low-income women, infants, and children up to age five who are at nutritional risk by providing nutritious foods to supplement diets, information on health eating, and referrals to health care. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/aboutwic/>

V. Lessons Learned

The main goal of this grant was to create local lead coalitions and sustain them, and this goal was partially achieved by the close of the grant. Local partner organizations in Chemung and Cayuga counties were able to form local lead coalitions. MVCAA of Oneida County did not form a local lead coalition, but for a good reason. This project hoped to build on existing community resources and recognize the diverse strengths of each county's local partner; Oneida County already had a fairly robust lead poisoning prevention coalition, and rather than forming a similar coalition to divert resources and attention, MVCAA decided to work with Oneida County's coalition while bringing in its own expertise on children living in rural environments and CPLP's assistance. It also used its connections with the Head Start program as an opportunity to spread information to parents about childhood lead poisoning.

This grant also enabled each local partner organization to increase its capacity and involvement in lead poisoning prevention efforts. By the end of the grant, each local partner increased its knowledge and local awareness on lead poisoning, and became more involved in its county lead coalitions. In addition, the needs assessment provided each local partner with clear, concise data to use in its future grant seeking efforts.

While this strategy of coalition building has great potential in primary prevention of health problems, the strength of a flexible, locally responsive approach was not sustainable in all instances. Of the three counties that tried to replicate this coalition model and sustain it, the Catholic Charities efforts in Chemung County appeared to be the strongest. Some evidence suggests that its awareness-raising efforts may have affected lead testing rates, which more than doubled during the grant period. Other factors likely contributed to this increase, but Catholic Charities' work was certainly one of them. In addition, Catholic Charities' efforts occurred at the right time, with Chemung County reaching a \$1.5 million settlement between the New York State Attorney General's Office and the Kennedy Valve Corporation in 2007. The settlement funds are dedicated to supporting efforts to reduce childhood lead poisoning. This funding is only for one year, thus it is unclear whether the coalition will receive continual funding.

VI. The Future

Catholic Charities in Chemung County was the only county that secured funding to continue its lead prevention coalition for 2009. It is uncertain if the other local partners in Oneida and Cayuga counties will continue their direct action work, but both continue to participate in their county coalitions and provide lead education on demand through existing staff.

At the end of the grant, each county produced a final report, which was shared with all community stakeholders and is available on the University of Rochester's Department of Environmental Medicine Web site.¹² The experiences and lessons learned from this project will serve to further advance the lead poisoning prevention work in Chemung, Oneida, and Cayuga Counties.

¹² The Final Reports for Chemung, Oneida, and Cayuga County are available at (<http://www2.envmed.rochester.edu/envmed/ehsc/outreach/coec/news.html>).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

ABOUT THE GRANTEE

The Environmental Health Sciences Center (EHSC) at the University of Rochester generates research findings and then converts these findings into information, resources, and tools that can be used by public health officials, medical professionals, and the community to prevent disease and improve public health. Within the EHSC, the Community Outreach and Education Core (COEC) has been dedicated to addressing Rochester's environmental health education needs since 1998. A key focus of the COEC has been the prevention of childhood lead poisoning. The COEC provides analysis, scientific expertise, and evaluation to the Coalition to Prevent Lead Poisoning (CPLP), the general public, and elected officials. COEC staff coordinates direct action projects, informs efforts to pass state lead legislation, and supports CPLP's outreach efforts.

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