

Grant Outcomes Report

Know Better-Feel Better: Queens Library's Health Literacy Program

The Problem:

Immigrants and American-born individuals with low literacy skills are among those nationwide who experience the harmful consequences of low health literacy. Whether the barrier they experience is as complex as cultural attitudes or as simple as the inability to read a medicine label, the result is often poor health.

According to the Queens Library Foundation, the borough of Queens, New York is home to more than one million foreign-born residents who speak 161 distinct languages. Nearly 300,000 residents speak English "not well" or "not at all." These new immigrants are among the most vulnerable in the health care system.

In January 2008, the New York State Health Foundation (NYSHealth) awarded a \$200,000 grant to support the Queens Library Foundation in institutionalizing a health literacy program that had been started with funding from the Langeloth Foundation. *Know Better-Feel Better* targets low-level English language learners – those who begin with little or no English skills. Queens Library knows of no other such curriculum nationwide for this population.

Grant Activities & Outcomes:

Under this two-year grant, the Queens Library's Health Literacy Program offered 18 Beginning Health Literacy classes that enrolled 390 low-level English language learners. At the outset of the program, they hoped to roll out more classes and reach more students; however these goals proved too ambitious. Queens Library refined the curriculum developed during the program's pilot period and developed their own assessment tool, designing it to more closely reflect the curriculum and learners' goals.¹ The student

¹ Throughout the grant period, the Queens Library Adult Learner Beginning Level Health Literacy Curriculum was distributed at conferences and via online links. Lesson plans, accompanying student worksheets and audio files are online and freely available to the public here: http://www.queenslibrary.org/index.aspx?page_nm=ALP_English_Health.

KEY INFORMATION:

GRANTEE

Queens Library Foundation, Inc.

GRANT TITLE

Know Better-Feel Better: Queens Library's Health Literacy Program

DATES

January 1, 2008 – May 17, 2010

GRANT AMOUNT

\$200,000

FUNDING

2007 Special Opportunity RFP

workbooks for the Health Literacy curriculum were revised based on feedback collected from teachers in the first year of the grant. The revised student workbooks were implemented in all classes in 2009.

An assessment tool was developed in lieu of the TOFHLA (The Test of Functional Health Literacy in Adults), which did not adequately measure all aspects of the curriculum during the pilot period. The assessment tool was implemented during the second year of the program, during which 10 Beginning Health Literacy classes were conducted, serving 226 English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) learners. According to evaluator Lori Hoepner, the expected outcome of improving ESOL students' knowledge of health information and health behaviors was achieved and was demonstrated by their mean post-test scores. However, these results should be interpreted with caution because of the small sample sizes along with some program attrition.



Ms. Hoepner also ran some focus groups at various program locations. Participants' overall reaction was appreciation for the Health Literacy classes and recognition that Health Literacy has already made a positive impact in their lives. The only critical comments made by participants were that they wanted to learn more than what the curriculum currently offered and they wanted more opportunities to attend the class.

In addition to the core work of the program (i.e., further development of course curriculum and assessment, recruiting and training teachers, marketing the program and recruiting students, and managing the classes), Queens Library created two new full-time staff positions related to general health literacy activities: a Health Literacy Coordinator and a Health Community Liaison. The Library hosted two free daylong Health Literacy Conferences: one for ESOL/Adult Literacy teachers and staff that engaged the library, and one for adult literacy and health care communities in the greater metropolitan area. Both conferences drew approximately 115 participants—far more than was originally expected—from the greater ESOL/Adult Literacy community. Participants were from New York City's five boroughs as well as Connecticut and New Jersey.

The Future:

By the time that the NYSHealth grant closed, Queens Library had some funding remaining from other grants to support the initiative and was actively seeking additional funding.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

ABOUT THE GRANTEE

The Queens Library Foundation, Inc. serves residents of Queens, New York through its community libraries and Adult Learning Centers (ALCs). Queens is the most ethnically diverse county in the nation—it is home to more than one million foreign-born residents, coming from 191 countries/territories and speaking 161 languages. Queens Library is a destination for thousands of immigrants seeking information and services to improve their lives.

Queens Library is number one in circulation among public libraries throughout the U.S. It leads the three independent New York City library systems (including Brooklyn and New York) in circulation, and it is one of the highest circulating libraries in the world.

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