Community Health Advisors in Phase 1 of the Faith, Activity, and Nutrition (FAN) Dissemination and Implementation Study

Community health advisors (CHAs) are trained lay leaders who help put community-based health promotion programs and research into place. CHAs may play a role in several parts of research studies and evaluations, including recruitment, program delivery, and evaluation. CHAs may be particularly helpful in reaching underserved communities and minority populations.

Study Background:

Phase 1 of the Faith, Activity, and Nutrition (FAN) Dissemination & Implementation study focused on creating healthier church environments for members in 59 churches in Fairfield County, South Carolina. This brief describes how CHAs were selected and trained to be a part of FAN, their response to the FAN training, and their role in the program.

Selecting CHAs

CHAs were recruited with help from community members. Research staff shared the position description with local churches and organizations throughout the county. The responsibilities listed included participating in CHA trainings, delivering FAN training to church committees, completing technical assistance phone calls to help churches put FAN components into place, tracking technical assistance in an online database, and taking part in booster trainings led by research staff. CHAs who met the position requirements were able to earn up to a $1000 stipend. Ultimately, two CHAs plus the Community Outreach Coordinator (who had assisted the study team with recruitment) were selected and trained. Two of these individuals ultimately served as CHAs delivering trainings and technical assistance.

Training CHAs

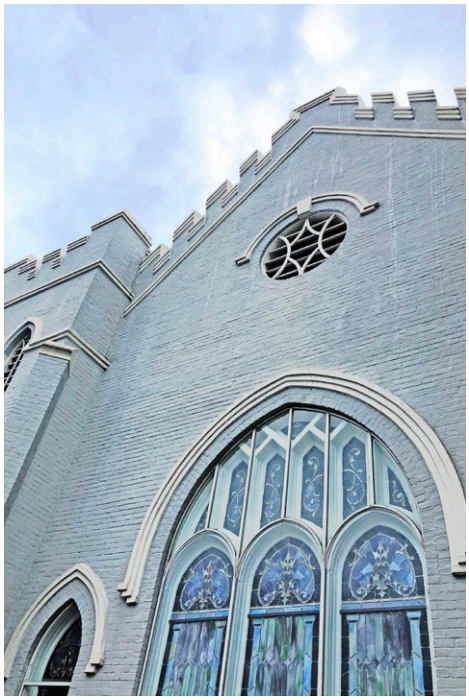
CHA training began with an introductory, self-paced training focused on content they would cover in the training for church committees. They were then trained in one full-day, in-person training led by the study's project coordinator and principal investigator that focused on physical activity and healthy eating content, delivery of the training in a church setting, and duties of a CHA. CHAs rated the training very

positively and described the pace of information provided as "just right." A practice session was held for CHAs to deliver portions of the training with in-person feedback. Finally, a self-paced training was completed that focused on delivery and tracking of the technical assistance calls.

Research staff subsequently provided three supportive booster trainings to the CHAs. These booster calls addressed barriers reported by church committees regarding implementing FAN, use of CHA scripts and protocols, and any specific CHA requests including how to support churches with implementing FAN for a second year.

CHAs' Role in Training Church Committees

A total of 202 church committee members were trained by two CHAs over nine training dates. Committee members evaluated the CHAs and overall had positive impressions (average item ratings ranged from 3.45 to 3.66 out of 4). They noted that the CHAs were helpful, organized, and enthusiastic about FAN. A member of the research team also attended the majority of trainings led by CHAs and completed observation forms to note delivery of content and to rate training delivery. The CHAs covered the vast majority of content and activity areas planned and were rated positively in areas such as staying on schedule and participant engagement and excitement.



CHAs' Role in Delivering Technical Assistance to Churches

CHAs were responsible for making eight technical assistance calls to church program coordinators and four calls to pastors over the year after training. CHAs delivered 590 technical assistance calls to church program coordinators and pastors, representing 92% of all planned calls. Calls averaged about 9 minutes in length and ranged from 2-32 minutes.

Summary

The evaluation of CHA trainings during Phase 1 of the FAN study showed that lay health leaders can successfully deliver engaging, organized, and easy-to-understand trainings and provide assistance to churches in delivering a physical activity and healthy eating program.

To learn more about the study:

An abstract of the research report is available here: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/29427128 The full paper is available here: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6252272/

***If you have questions about the study,** please contact Dr. Sara Wilcox, wilcoxs@mailbox.sc.edu*

***To learn more about the FAN program,** please visit http://prevention.sph.sc.edu/projects/fantraining.htm.*

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