Get Smart Series: Childhood Obesity (April 8)

by Sandy Cook

Consultant, Christine Robinson, provided both historical and current perspectives on both the scope of the childhood obesity problem and the strategies being used to address it. Christine is currently working with The Blue Foundation, which has identified this issue as a major initiative for their funding for the next several years. Since the mid-seventies, the prevalence of overweight and obesity has increased sharply for both adults and children. Some who work in this arena call it an “epidemic.” The highest regional prevalence of obesity is consistently in the South.

Causes

The social and cultural causes have been widely reported and include: more meals eaten outside the home (many of them “fast food”), increased portion sizes, increased soft drink consumption, decrease in physical activity, increase in television watching and use of computers/video games, changes in school policies, and the school food environment. A few particularly interesting statistics:

• The health of immigrants decline after living in the US for one year.
• From 1977 to 2001 milk consumption by children (ages 6-11) decreased 39%, while consumption of fruit drinks rose 69% and sodas rose 137%.
• Children eat about 770 calories at restaurants versus meals at home—420 calories.
• Six of 10 children ages 9-13 do not participate in any kind of organized sports/physical activity program outside of school.

Impacts

Physicians are seeing children who are developing health problems (such as heart disease) that once only afflicted adults including chronic illnesses. Annual obesity-associated hospital costs for children went from $35 million in 1979 to $127 million in 1999. In addition, there is evidence that obesity influences depression, poor academic achievement, and difficulty in peer relationships.

Solutions

Societal causes of obesity require societal solutions. Systemic solutions range from increasing access to good neighborhood grocery stores and green spaces with parks for recreation to addressing the myriad of issues related to poverty and making significant changes in school policies (increasing physical activity and changing food offerings). There are also many strategies to address changes in individual behavior. Overweight and obese adolescents are much more likely than others to become obese as adults. Some pediatricians suggest that the focus should be on young children—birth to age 5 by working with parents and child-care providers. There are multiple efforts underway locally and nationally to address the issues and to determine best practices; however, the issues are not easy ones and progress is slow. (Thank you to WGA member, Susan Towler, for supporting Christine’s time with us.)

A note: It is interesting to reflect on the research regarding Infant Mortality and Obesity—there are many overlapping causes and solutions so making progress on any of these may produce better outcomes on the other.

Record Number of Women Choose to Join WGA

by Mary Kress Littlepage

As of August 2008, 227 women have joined Women’s Giving Alliance the largest number recorded in the organization’s seven-year history.

“Our membership committee has done a tremendous job of reaching out to potential members,” said WGA President Joan Van Vleck, “but I think our real growth has come because of growing awareness in the community of the work we are doing.”

In recent years, WGA has focused its grantmaking in the fields of PreK-12 public education, economic empowerment, physical and mental health, and violence and crime intervention and prevention.

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Notes from Joan

WGA’s Evolving Grantmaking

Initially, WGA approached nonprofit agencies with broad requests for innovative programs for women and girls. These direct service grants produced immediate improvement for individuals but did not address root causes or flawed response systems.

The three-year strategic plan launched in 2007 required WGA to make research-based grants in four fields: (1) Pre-K – 12 Public Education; (2) Economic Empowerment; (3) Physical and Mental Health; (4) Violence and Crime Intervention and Prevention. This focused approach encouraged us to support creative solutions to critical problems facing women and girls, with a new strategic goal: to produce lasting and measurable impact on how the needs of specific target populations are met.

In 2007, the Grants Committee moved deeper into specific areas where our community ranks behind national norms. The aim is to address issues comprehensively, identifying root causes and facilitating problem solving for sustained results. The Grants Committee researches how the community serves those affected, analyzing what is or is not working. Our grants encourage community partners to test new approaches. Often, pilot programs lead to several-year investments. Measurable success may not be immediate; but, over time, such grants can produce fundamental change, leading to opportunities to support more effective direct service programs.

From a traditional orientation toward direct service, WGA grantmaking has evolved to a more robust approach that uses an expanded repertoire of strategies. We still support programs that have immediate benefit for individuals. But our toolkit includes, as well, grants aimed at comprehensive reform to benefit entire target populations.

Thank you to renewing members!

In Memoriam

Dr. Doris Newell Carson, one of the five founders of the Women’s Giving Alliance in 2001, died Friday, August 8. Her impact on this organization and our community will continue to be seen and felt for many years to come.

Steering Committee Members

Joan Van Vleck, President
Barbara Harrell, VP
Susan Rowley, Secretary
Anna Brosche, Treasurer & Finance
Sandy Cook, Nominating

Jana Ertrachter, Communications
Mary Pietan, Communications
Pam Gerrish, Education
Susan Towler, Education
Katherine Graci, Finance
Scott McGehee, Grants
Susan West, Grants
Linda Hosenlopp, Membership
Mary Ellen Smith, Membership

Joan W. Newton, Board Liaison, The Community Foundation

Members At Large:
Martha Baker
Robin Berenberg
Jan Healy
Lindsay Helms
Sally Lee
Carla Marlier
Sharon Simmons
Lisa Weatherby

The Community Foundation Staff:
Cheryl Riddick, Grantmaking
Jeneen Sanders, WGA Coordinator
Nina Waters, Steering Committee Representative
Get Smart Series: Report on JCCI’s Infant Mortality Study
by Sandy Cook

WGA was one of six organizations that provided financial support for this study. The results were announced at a May 29th meeting. The study was initiated to better understand why the Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) in Jacksonville is higher than the Florida state average, which is higher than the U.S. national average, which is higher than nearly all the industrialized countries in the world. The IMR for black mothers in Jacksonville is nearly double the rate for white and Hispanic mothers. The recommendations for action are organized in two major categories: Public Policy and Community Systems. Here is a description of the major findings and recommendations.

Public Policy
There is a need to address underlying societal and root causes—racism, poverty, poor housing, crime, education, access to medical care, drug abuse and joblessness. A particularly interesting finding indicates that stress from socioeconomic inequalities and especially racism experienced by black women is a significant contributor to infant mortality. Such stress may decrease immune system functioning and lead to preterm labor. Other studies on this issue indicate that black women at all education and income levels have higher IMRs than white women.

Community Systems
• Enhance health systems. The health of the mother before pregnancy contributes to the largest proportion of poor birth outcomes which indicates that more needs to be done to reach women at all stages—well before they become pregnant. Further, it was suggested that there needs to be a holistic life-course approach to women’s and girls’ health.
• Improve service delivery. There are needs to provide greater support for those accessing Medicaid. In addition, a need for neighborhood grocery stores with quality, fresh foods to address nutrition requirements.
• Individual Behavior. Public health actions need to focus on efforts to address sleep-related deaths, abuse and neglect. Women and men need to understand the importance of pregnancy planning; and education to behave in a sexually responsible manner. Public school curriculum needs to deliver, evidence-based, age-appropriate sex and health education.

What’s Next?
JCCI will organize an Implementation Team of community volunteers which will work over 18-24 months to ensure that positive change occurs in addressing the study’s 15 recommendations. To learn more about JCCI and the Infant Mortality Study, visit www.jcci.org.

Of the 227 women who had joined as of Aug. 1, 2008, 34 – 15% – are first-time members. WGA, which was formed in 2002, also has the benefit of experience. President Joan Van Vleck, President-Elect Barbara Harrell, Nina Waters, and Jeneen Sanders recently attended a meeting on women’s giving circles in Florida held by the Community Foundations of Florida. They noted that WGA’s experience, compared with its peers, was evident in the areas of grants, researching community needs and best practices. Other giving circles were much younger and smaller—with only one nearing the 100-member mark.

“One of the most rewarding aspects of WGA is its continuous growth, both in terms of our numbers and our organizational maturity,” said Van Vleck. “We are constantly learning, and as we learn, and apply what we have learned, we become a better organization, more capable of serving our community and, therefore, more attractive to women who have an interest in giving back.”

WGA members pool their philanthropic giving to make a lasting impact on the lives of women and girls in Northeast Florida. Each member contributes $1,500 annually, with $1,000 going to the WGA grants pool to fund initiative and programs, $500 going to the Women’s Endowment Fund at The Community Foundation, and $150 for administrative expenses.

Congratulations to JA Girl$,
Junior Achievement of North Florida has been named a recipient of the 2008 MetLife Foundation Entrepreneurial Award. Since 2001, the award has recognized JA operations that demonstrate entrepreneurial spirit and innovation in achieving sustainable results for JA’s primary stakeholders—students, schools, volunteers, and donors. Junior Achievement of North Florida’s award-winning initiative JAGIRL$ is a local initiative which matches JA’s 23 financial literacy programs with the clientele and needs of local organizations serving girls and young women. “With 80% of single-parent households in Jacksonville led by women and more than half of all practical every day economic decisions made nationally by women, providing this segment of our population with financial education not only made sense, it was needed,” said Steve St. Amand, President of Junior Achievement of North Florida. “The very best result of this award is that JAGIRL$ is now well known nationally and internationally. It is a tremendous feeling knowing that what has started in Jacksonville will be used throughout the world to reach girls and young women.” said St. Amand. WGA made a discretionary grant to JA Girl$ to help pay for evaluating the program.
Our Mission
To inspire the women of Northeast Florida to be strategic philanthropists and to improve the lives of women and girls through collective giving.

www.womensgivingalliance.org

Events Calendar for September 2008 - January 2009

SEPTEMBER
10 WGA Operating Committee Meeting from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at WJCT. Brown Bag lunch
23 Get Smart Series - “If It’s Broke, Fix It!” - Plan for radical change in the foster care system from 10:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. at WJCT.

OCTOBER
8 Education Boutique - Cathedral Arts Project: “Girls Only After-School Dance Program” at 3:30 p.m. WGA Steering Committee Meeting from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at WJCT. Lunch provided
20 WGA Operating Committee - Strategic Planning Retreat from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at WJCT.
29 WGA Members Forum from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at University of North Florida University Center. Members Only Business Meeting.

NOVEMBER
5 Education Boutique - Women’s Center of Jacksonville: “Mentoring Matters” from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Brown Bag lunch
12 WGA Operating Committee Meeting from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at WJCT. Brown Bag lunch

DECEMBER
10 WGA Operating Committee Meeting from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at WJCT. Brown Bag lunch

JANUARY
21 WGA Annual Meeting from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at University of North Florida University Center.