



African Americans in Trenton, N.J., Lose Weight with Support from Eight-Week Workshops

Developing a program to demonstrate and support healthy eating and increase physical activity among low-income urban families

SUMMARY

Trenton's H.O.P.E., a New Jersey-based community development corporation, conducted a series of eight-week workshops on healthy eating and physical activity in 2005 and 2006. The workshops served moderate- and low-income, mostly African-American, Trenton residents.

Key Results

- All of the participants trying to lose weight did so. Weight loss ranged from 4 to 40 pounds.
- Program participants reported greater activity levels and other health benefits.

Funding

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation provided \$32,153 in an *unsolicited* grant for the project.

THE PROBLEM

According to the [Centers for Disease Control](#), almost a third of Americans were obese in 1999-2000. Obesity contributes to a variety of diseases, including diabetes, cancer and hypertension. Obesity afflicts African Americans more than whites. Nearly 40 percent of African Americans were obese, compared to 29 percent of whites.

The statistics were similar in New Jersey where, according to a [report](#) by the state Department of Health, African Americans were more likely to be obese than whites (25% to 17%). Income also played a role. Twenty-six percent of New Jerseyans earning less

than \$30,000 per year were obese, compared to 13 percent of those with incomes of \$75,000 or more.

CONTEXT

RWJF is committed to tackling childhood obesity. The goal is to reverse the rise in childhood obesity rates by 2015 by promoting healthy eating and physical activity in schools and communities throughout the nation. RWJF also has a particular commitment to its home state, New Jersey.

In Trenton, RWJF funds *Children's Futures: Improving Health and Development Outcomes for Children in Trenton, N.J.*, which employs a comprehensive set of interventions to improve the health of children in Trenton, New Jersey.

THE PROJECT

Trenton's H.O.P.E. is a community development corporation affiliated with the Union Baptist Church of Trenton, N.J. It has more than 10 years of experience helping the homeless, providing support groups for men and women, and helping youth build self-esteem and avoid alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs.

In 2005, Trenton's H.O.P.E. began offering eight-week workshops for area residents on healthy eating and physical activity. The workshops offered:

- Nutrition counseling, with recipe suggestions and samples of healthful foods.
- Instructions on keeping a daily food and activity diary.
- Yoga training and exercise sessions.
- A free pedometer for use in a "10,000 steps per day" program.
- Visits to a local gym and a health food center.

A total of 27 people, including 24 women and three men, participated in the workshops. Half of the participants had high blood pressure and a quarter suffered from diabetes. Two-thirds of the participants attended more than one eight-week session.

RESULTS

The project director reported the following results:

- **All of the participants who were trying to lose weight did so.** Weight loss ranged from 4 to 40 pounds. Average weight loss for males was 21.3 pounds and for females, 10.5 pounds. (Two of the participants were elderly women who had problems trying to maintain their weight. Both gained five pounds during the program.)

- **Program participants reported greater activity levels and other health benefits.** Participants credited the workshops with helping them increase their daily activity levels and energy expenditure, and reported general improvement in their overall health.

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Grant ID# 52328
