



## Six Communities in Pittsburgh's East End Benefit From Coalitions to Prevent Childhood Obesity

Incorporating childhood obesity prevention into a community-wide initiative to address diabetes among low-income adults

### SUMMARY

From 2005 to 2008, the [Kingsley Association](#) developed and implemented strategies for preventing childhood obesity in 16 communities in Pittsburgh's East End. The strategies included convening youth service providers to create coalitions and plans to combat childhood obesity; expanding safe opportunities for children to be physically active; and reducing their consumption of unhealthy beverages, foods and snacks.

Kingsley staff pursued the project with staff of the [Healthy Black Family Project](#) at the University of Pittsburgh, which focuses on preventing hypertension and diabetes in adults in low-income communities.

### Key Results

- Youth service providers attending eight workshops co-hosted by Kingsley and the Healthy Black Family Project developed coalitions and strategic plans to tackle childhood obesity in four Youth Wellness Zones.
- Kingsley engaged more than 2,500 children in supervised physical activities offered two to six times each week, and provided training and support for 250 volunteer coaches, certifying 100 through a contract with the Positive Coaching Alliance.
- Staff from both Kingsley and the Healthy Black Families Program educated parents and children about healthy eating and provided nutritious food during sponsored physical activities.

### Funding

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) provided \$239,218 to the Kingsley Association for this project.

## THE PROBLEM

Children of obese parents have more than double the risk of developing adult obesity compared with children of parents who are not obese (*New England Journal of Medicine*, 337(13), 869–873. September 25, 1997).

The University of Pittsburgh's [Healthy Black Family Project](#) focuses on preventing hypertension and diabetes—two conditions often related to obesity—in adults. (RWJF, through its [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Local Funding Partners](#) program, is among the project's funders [ID# 053603].) Run by the Center for Minority Health at the university's Graduate School of Public Health, the project enlists researchers, parents, faith-based ministries, civic organizations, businesses and government agencies in its work.

Parents involved in the Healthy Black Family Project indicated strong interest in structured activities that would help prevent and combat obesity in their children. As a host site for the project, which aimed to develop a youth component for its programs, Kingsley Associates could spearhead those efforts.

## CONTEXT

RWJF seeks to reverse the upward trend in childhood obesity by 2015. RWJF has developed three integrated strategies to reverse the childhood obesity epidemic: evidence, action and advocacy.

- **Evidence.** Investments in building the evidence base will help ensure that the most promising efforts are replicated throughout the nation.
- **Action.** RWJF's action strategy for communities and schools focuses on engaging partners at the local level, building coalitions and promoting the most promising approaches.
- **Advocacy.** As RWJF staff learns from the evidence and action strategies, it shares results by educating leaders and investing in advocacy, building a broad national constituency for childhood obesity prevention.

This project was part of the action strategy.

## THE PROJECT

From 2005 to 2008, the [Kingsley Association](#) developed and implemented strategies for preventing childhood obesity in 16 communities in Pittsburgh's East End. The strategies included convening youth service providers to create coalitions and plans to combat childhood obesity; expanding safe opportunities for children to be physically active; and reducing their consumption of unhealthy beverages, foods and snacks.

Kingsley offers comprehensive educational, recreational and social programming to improve the lives of youth and families. Its 56,000-square-foot facility includes meeting areas, classrooms, a regulation-size gymnasium and a 25-meter indoor swimming pool.

To begin the project, Kingsley staff divided the 16 East End communities into four Youth Wellness Zones. Staff members then conducted an assessment of the childhood obesity—related needs and resources of each zone, including the organizations that could help address the problem.

Project staff then invited more than 250 of those organizations to participate in eight workshops designed to develop zone-specific coalitions and strategies for preventing obesity. Organizations represented at the workshops—co-hosted with the Healthy Black Family Project, and held in April and May 2008—including:

Pittsburgh Public School District  
Pittsburgh Urban League  
Pittsburgh Housing Authority  
YWCA

Hill House Association  
Magee Hospital  
Community Care Behavioral Health  
NaKa Fitness

Kingsley also expanded its own fitness programs and added a focus on nutrition as part of the project.

## RESULTS

Kingsley Association staff reported the following results to RWJF:

- **Participants in the eight workshops created coalitions and strategic plans to prevent obesity in each Youth Wellness Zone.** Participants identified the contributions each organization could make, signed a memorandum of understanding specifying how they would work together, and began to implement the plans. For example:
  - Community LEARNS, which provides various kinds of educational support, offered structured team basketball but did not have a facility. Kingsley offered the group a discounted membership in its gym.
  - NaKa Fitness, a dance performance and fitness group, took a performance team around the community to encourage other organizations to start similar teams, and to provide practice space.

The workshops were critical in raising awareness of the obesity epidemic and bringing agencies together to combat it, according to Keino Fitzpatrick, project director. "Many people in our community and in the agencies we worked with were not aware of the epidemic, so we were really starting at the beginning." Involving the schools was especially important, he said, as they have "moved away from health and nutrition to focus on sexually transmitted diseases."

- **Kingsley provided training and support for 250 volunteer coaches, and certified 100 of those coaches through a contract with the [Positive Coaching Alliance](#).** The training aimed to counter negative attitudes among youth coaches that prompt many children to leave sports activities before age 12.

"The idea was to give our volunteer coaches a sense of appropriate sports culture for children and the important components besides winning," according to Fitzpatrick.

- **Kingsley engaged more than 2,500 children in supervised physical activities, each held two to six times per week.** The activities included basketball, swimming, cheerleading, football, soccer, baseball, a climbing wall, golf and dance. For example, Kingsley sponsored supervised basketball instruction for youth, known as Old School Skills Camp, at three locations during the spring and summer of 2006.

In response to incidents that had created an unsafe atmosphere at football games, Kingsley also worked with the Allegheny County Midget Football League to establish a basic security policy requiring the presence of two police officers at each game.

- **Project staff educated parents and children about healthy eating and provided nutritious food during sponsored physical activities.** For example,
  - In May 2008, Kingsley staff members showed a film produced by Body and Soul: A Celebration for Healthy Eating and Living to 26 parents and grandparents raising children and hosted a follow-up discussion on healthy eating.
  - Project staff provided healthy snacks for children who participated in the sports programs.
  - Staff of the Healthy Black Families Program distributed tips and guides for healthy eating at a volunteer awards ceremony held by Kingsley.

## **AFTERWARD**

As of May 2009, Kingsley was continuing to offer an array of youth sports programs, and had hired a staff member to focus on health and wellness programs for adults and seniors. Kingsley staff members were also teaming with the [Duquesne University School of Nursing](#) to establish a youth wellness clinic in each Youth Wellness Zone based on the results of the workshops.

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### **Prepared by: Nina Berlin**

Reviewed by: Sandra Hackman and Molly McKaughan

Program Officer: Dwayne C. Proctor

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