



Guam Sustantia Project

Faith-Based Advocacy: Galvanizing Communities to End Childhood Obesity

SUMMARY

The Guam SDA (Seventh-day Adventist) Ypao Church of the Guam Micronesia Missions developed and implemented the Sustantia Project, a public education and policy campaign to end childhood obesity in Guam. The project team chose the name *Sustantia*—which means "nutrition" in the native Chamorro language and also suggests the English word *sustains*—to appeal to residents of the two towns where the campaign took place, Dededo and Yigo, in which 63 percent of the 19,000 children are overweight or obese.

Activities

The Sustantia Project team focused on two main objectives: increasing access to affordable, healthy food and innovating ways to increase physical activity. A coalition of some 300 individuals representing approximately 40 organizations—government agencies, businesses, civic organizations, clinics and hospitals—supported the project through in-kind donations and by providing volunteer help at events.

To inform the campaign design, high school student volunteers surveyed some 500 people in grocery stores about what they eat, where they shop, how much they spend on food and where and how much they exercise. See the [Results](#) section for how the survey results informed the project's policy work.

This project was funded under a May 2008 solicitation for proposals from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) entitled [Faith-based Advocacy: Galvanizing Communities to End Childhood Obesity](#). The grants funded under the solicitation support faith-based coalitions that advance community policies and environmental changes that improve access to healthy foods and/or opportunities for physical activity. See the [Galvanizing Communities Web site](#) for more information. Also see the [Introduction](#).

Results

The Sustantia Project team reported the following accomplishments to RWJF:

- To improve access to affordable, healthy food, the Sustantia Project team worked with the largest grocery stores on Guam (Payless Markets, Town Market and California Market) to develop and implement a healthy foods logo identification system.

Under a formal Memoranda of Agreement with the stores, Sustantia volunteers identified items that cost \$3.00 or less and met nutrition criteria set by the coalition's nutritionist and marked them by placing the Sustantia logo stickers on shelves where the food items were located. Through this food labeling system, shoppers were provided with a system to make healthier, more affordable choices.

- The Sustantia Project team publicized the logo identification system, while educating children and their parents about healthy nutrition and exercise, through many outlets and activities, including:
 - A [Sustantia Web site](#), which includes an overview of the program, news updates, advice about healthy eating and kid-friendly recipes.
 - A Sustantia logo and jingle.
 - Short television, radio and newspaper pieces, such as "Healthy Kids Tips" (on television and radio), which provided nutritional advice to parents and children.
 - "Healthy shopping events" at the participating grocery stores, conducted once a month on the day residents receive their food stamps and supported by in-kind donations from coalition members and volunteers from the community. These events created a positive, celebratory atmosphere, featuring full-color fliers with nutrition and exercise advice, free balloons, free healthy foods and Sustantia t-shirts with the purchase of seven recommended food items.
 - The Sustantia Youth Athlete of the Week program, which honored—in brief television and radio spots—local, school-age athletes who were outstanding in sports, ate healthy foods (as certified by their parents) and performed well academically.
 - Press releases and other information about the program provided to local news outlets. The "coverage contributed to the general buzz about the program," said Co-Project Director Michael Robinson, M.D.

According to Robinson, anecdotal evidence suggested that key concepts of the campaign have taken hold among residents in the targeted communities. "Most everybody knows Sustantia and the Sustantia jingle.... People use the word 'Sustantia' anytime they mean something that has to do with healthy eating and active living," he said.

- The Sustantia Project team created the SPARK program (Sports, Physical Activity, and Recreation, Kommunitat) to increase levels of physical activity among children. The program had two components:
 - *Adopt-a-Playground*, designed to help communities spruce up run-down playgrounds and make them more attractive to children. The effort resulted in a makeover of the Lencho Park Dededo Playground, in which the project team worked with volunteers from the BankPacific employees' association to transform a drab, unsafe play area into a clean, safe and colorfully attractive playground.
 - *Playground Watch*, in which volunteers served as playground monitors for school-age children, at designated times in local parks, to increase safety. The volunteers also encouraged parents to exercise by offering to watch their preschool children, as long as the parents used that time to exercise in the park themselves.
- Project team members presented the Sustantia Project experience at conferences in the United States; in the Philippines; and at the 20th European Childhood Obesity Group Congress in Brussels, Belgium.

Lessons Learned

1. **Consider carefully the composition of the core working team.** Co-Project Director Robinson recommends a team that includes at least one person who generates fresh ideas and another who forges those ideas into a practicable plan, people with professional and/or technical expertise (e.g., a nutritionist or a medical practitioner) who can furnish a scientific framework for the project and champions who can spark interest for the project in the community.
2. **Recruit participating grocery stores by emphasizing the benefits they stand to gain.** In this case, the stores saw increased traffic and sales and generated good publicity through their association with a program that demonstrated genuine concern for their customers' health. (Co-Project Director/Robinson)

Funding

RWJF supported this project from 2008 to 2010 through a grant of \$224,903 through its solicitation Faith-based Advocacy: Galvanizing Communities to End Childhood Obesity.

Afterward

Although the logo identification system remains in place in grocery stores and the Web site is still extant (as of May 2011), most other activities concluded with the close of the grant.

The Brussels presentation led to invitations to present in 2011 at other European conferences in Madrid, Italy, Portugal, Hungary and again in Belgium.

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Grant ID # 065336

Program area: Childhood Obesity

BIBLIOGRAPHY

(Current as of date of the report; as provided by the grantee organization; not verified by RWJF; items not available from RWJF.)

Education or Toolkit

Evaluation Tool

Survey on Customer Purchasing Behavior and Buying Preferences. Tamuning, GU: Guam SDA Ypao Church of the Guam Micronesia Missions, April 2009.

Communication or Promotion

Grantee Web site

www.sustantia.org. The Web site of the Sustantia Project includes an overview of the program, news updates and links. Tamuning, GU: Guam SDA Ypao Church of the Guam Micronesia Missions.