

National Leadership Academy for the Public's Health Leadership Team Project Summary: Greater Mercer Public Health Partnership, Mercer County, New Jersey

December 2013 - January 2014 Fellowship

Diane Grillo, Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital Hamilton; James Brownlee, City of Trenton and Trenton Health Team; George DiFerdinando, Princeton Board of Health and Rutgers University; and Toni Lewis, United Way of Greater Mercer County participated in the multi-sectorial leadership training fellowship program through the National Leadership Academy for the Public's Health (NLAPH), funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). As a team, each member represented a subset of the Greater Mercer Public Health Partnership (GMPHP), a coalition of fourteen organizations working together to make a measureable improvement in the health of Mercer County residents. NLAPH team members from Health Care, Government, Non-Profit and Academia, focused their applied health leadership project on advancing some of the strategies outlined in Mercer County's 2012 Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP).

In the early days of our leadership project, teammates shared individual viewpoints. After several months, we solidified our vision through several iterations of the 'big picture' strategic diagram. Over the course of year, our NLAPH team communicated weekly and met in-person monthly. Quickly, we realized that our original big picture diagram was evidently too big in scope. Eventually, our team narrowed its focus and decided that our project would be to engage the community in affecting environmental strategies and interventions to prevent chronic disease. Decidedly we began by focusing on improving the physical environment for underserved communities in order to reinforce healthy choices and behaviors and make it easier for people to take charge of their health. We determined that we could showcase an effective process for (a) assessing environmental barriers to healthy choices and behaviors, and (b) identifying interventions that would demonstrably improve choices and behaviors. Once the process was established and tested it would be then scaled up to achieve a more sizeable impact. We agreed to design a standardized assessment for the two communities in the county with the highest population, namely Hamilton and Trenton. The goal would be to conduct surveys by residents of the community within neighborhoods to identify the barriers to walkability along with the necessary interventions to address those impediments. We designed a workable scale that could be completed by one person yet easy enough to scale up based upon the number of community volunteers. We identified a community based participatory mapping tool using a smart phone. The application was designed to easily capture and analyze geographic information system (GIS) data in order to prioritize local government planning. Today, our leadership project plan is ready for promotion. Moving forward, our team intends to find an institute interested and capable of launching the proposed plan.