

## Unlimited Potential - Phoenix, AZ



### Synopsis

Since 1985, Unlimited Potential (UP) has addressed the needs of underserved

populations in Maricopa County, Arizona. UP's mission is to ignite unity, pride, and dignity through education and advocacy. We provide equitable opportunities grounded in acceptance and respect, promoting strong individuals, families, and communities.

#### **UP believes:**

- All people have the right to have their basic human needs met.
- All people have the right to a quality education.
- Languages and cultures should be celebrated.
- All people should be treated with dignity, respect, and integrity.
- Given the opportunity, people can acquire the skills necessary to overcome economic and social barriers, and become proactive in changing their lives and community.
- People have the capacity and social responsibility to create communities that promote the healthy development of future generations.
- Through perseverance we can achieve social justice.

#### **UP has four priority areas:**

- Adult Education
- Environmental Justice
- Disease Control and Prevention
- Healthy Living



### Challenge

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) is the leading cause of death in Arizona. Racial and ethnic minorities, including Hispanics, have higher rates of CVD mortality. Among males, Hispanic men have the highest mortality rate for congestive heart failure and stroke, whereas African American men have the highest mortality rate for coronary heart disease. Additionally, one in three Hispanics have high blood pressure, and 24% are more likely to have uncontrolled high blood pressure.<sup>1</sup>

Race and ethnicity play a major role in the development of prediabetes, and diabetes increases the risk of cardiovascular disease. The Arizona Department of Health Services reports one in ten people in Arizona has diabetes, with the Hispanic population having a disproportionate share of diabetes, obesity, and other factors.<sup>2</sup> Studies indicate U.S. adults overall have a 40% chance of developing type 2 diabetes, but if you are Hispanic your chance is more than 50%, and you are likely to develop it at a younger age.<sup>3</sup>

Social determinants of health, including safe neighborhoods, income, and education, have a major impact on health equity of communities. Communities in south Phoenix face a higher crime rate<sup>4</sup>, lower income per capita<sup>5</sup>, and lower high school graduation rate<sup>6</sup>. Life expectancy for residents of south Phoenix is 68 years versus 78 for the state of Arizona due to factors such as poor access to preventive healthcare, nutritious foods, and safe areas for physical activity.<sup>7</sup>



## Solution

Unlimited Potential utilizes a Community Health Worker (CHW) model to implement evidence-based strategies and to address health inequities. In this model, CHWs are members of the Phoenix community and have similar social, cultural, and economic characteristics as the service population. CHWs provide culturally appropriate services and fulfill roles like an educator, outreach worker, mentor, advocate, and translator. The CHWs at UP are skilled and passionate about helping families address a myriad of challenges whenever possible. The interaction may begin with a blood pressure check, and evolve into a referral to a medical provider, enrollment in SNAP, helping with Arizona's Medicaid agency, enrolling in an UP workshop, scheduling pick up of free, organic produce, or a combination of opportunities. Clients that are referred to partner FQHCs continue to receive follow-up interactions with CHWs from

Unlimited Potential. Each touchstone allows CHWs to reinforce messaging, connect individuals to community-based services, and empower community members.

In addition, UP utilizes the *Know Your Risk of Diabetes and Heart Disease Program*, which is focused on reducing the prevalence of type 2 diabetes and heart disease among a largely Hispanic clientele, and to ameliorate the effects of the disease among those who suffer from it. UP hosts weekly health fairs and disease management initiatives, such as Million Hearts® workshops. UP's approach incorporates self-evaluation, providing access to nutritious foods, counseling, support groups, promotion of healthy lifestyles, and helping clients identify their medical home. UP helps people understand the connection between how a nutritious diet, salt intake, physical activity, tobacco/alcohol use, environment, stress, and other factors impact their heart health.

## Results

During this grant period, UP conducted 220 hours of health education for community members and 59 hours for CHWs. The education/training for the CHWs was focused on developing core competencies and disease control and prevention. In the past year, UP has trained 60 CHWs. As part of their training and certification processes, CHWs had to share the information with at least 15 people in their community. By the end of the grant term, the 60 CHWs educated 958 community members about disease control and prevention regarding hypertension, diabetes, cancer, Alzheimer's, COVID-19, importance of vaccination, and many other health topics.







Of the 958 clients served by this program, 87% self-reported as Hispanic, 26% reported to have a diagnosis of a chronic condition, 20% reported a diagnosis of diabetes, and 18% reported a diagnosis of hypertension. However, 48% of the clients were newly identified as having a blood pressure of 130/90 or above. These individuals were referred to a medical provider for follow up and additional services.

Participants self-identify and often initially engage with CHWs via one of UP's weekly health fairs. They are curious and eager to learn, particularly in a place where they are comfortable and open to receiving support and information from one of their peers. One of the clients changed his lifestyle to adopt the information received during the educational interaction and by doing so was able to control his blood pressure. Now, under medical supervision, he is controlling his blood pressure only with diet and physical activity.



## Lessons Learned

The high mortality and morbidity caused by the COVID-19 pandemic only shows the need for comprehensive and radical behavioral changes. Educating and informing the community about health risks and disease control provides the opportunities to the individual, family, and community for better health and a better future.

Today, Unlimited Potential is recognized as a training site for CHWs. It continues to empower individuals by bringing evidence-based health education, and connecting individuals to social and health services in the community. CHWs' training is not only about health education and practice, but also about creating a support system for the community. Clients feel connected to the CHW, and vice versa.

It is important to take every moment as an opportunity to educate and share information, even when an individual is not ready to act in their personal life at that time. Education empowers a person to execute an informed health decision. It takes time to understand a concept, and much longer to adopt a change. UP is giving the opportunity to individuals to learn and act once they are ready. It is here to support them.

- 1 Arizona Department of Health Services. Division of Public Health – Bureau of Chronic Disease Prevention and Control. The Burden of Cardiovascular Disease in Arizona. <https://www.azdhs.gov/documents/prevention/tobacco-chronic-disease/az-heart-disease-stroke/az-burden-of-cardiovascular-disease.pdf>.
- 2 Arizona Department of Health Services. Diabetes in Arizona: The 2018 Burden Report. <https://www.azdhs.gov/documents/prevention/tobacco-chronic-disease/diabetes/reports-data/diabetes-burden-report-2018.pdf>.
- 3 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Diabetes: Hispanic or Latino People and Type 2 Diabetes. <https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/library/features/hispanic-diabetes.html>.
- 4 City of Phoenix. Crime Statistics and Maps. <https://www.phoenix.gov/police/resources-information/crime-stats-maps>
- 5 City Data. Phoenix, Arizona income map, earnings map, and wages data. <https://www.city-data.com/income/income-Phoenix-Arizona.html>.
- 6 Statistical Atlas. Educational Attainment in South Mountain, Phoenix, Arizona. <https://statisticalatlas.com/neighborhood/Arizona/Phoenix/South-Mountain/Educational-Attainment>.
- 7 Vitalyst Health Foundation. Short Distances to Large Health Gaps. <http://vitalysthealth.org/short-distances-to-large-health-gaps/>.

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