

Pursuing an Advocacy Agenda with the Use of Community-Based Participatory Research Principles: Lessons from the Harlem Urban Research Center

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The Harlem Urban Research Center

- Founded in 1999. Funded by the CDC until 9/2003
- Guided by community-based participatory research principles and methodology
- *Purpose: To figure out what works to improve the health of East and Central Harlem residents with a focus on examining the social determinants of substance use*
- Directed by a Community Action Board made up of community (residents, service providers, advocates) and institutional (researchers, hospitals, government) partners.
- Reinvented our partnership – Harlem Community & Academic Partnership (HCAP)

Community-based Policy Work

- Establish the Policy Work Group
- Translating research into policy, policy into practice
- Combine community need with partnership expertise to define a project.
- Key ingredient: PWG chaired by community-oriented academic policy researcher who coached the work group on the policy analysis & advocacy.
- Shifting from a Criminal Justice to a Public Health Paradigm

Prioritizing Community Issues

- Choose something of importance to the community
- Choose something of importance to the members of the partnership
- Choose an issue that your partnership can impact with the resources you have

The Community-based Policy Analysis and Advocacy Cycle



Identifying & Evaluating Community Issues

- Must look at strengths and challenges in the community
- Fill in the holes with original research
- Prioritize community issues
- Use your policy lens
- Evaluate prior policy work; learn from history

Investigating Substance Use at the Policy Level

- Interviews with CAB members and policy experts;
- Survey of local service providers;
- Review of published literature and previous reports;
- Meeting with local advocacy groups;
- Focus Groups with ex-offenders.

The Community-based Policy Analysis and Advocacy Cycle



Mustering Resources

- \$\$\$ & the ability to raise \$\$\$
- People = People Power
- A space to meet, communication technologies
- Networks & connections

Early Steps to Refine Problem

- Achieve agreement about nature of problem;
- Produce detailed policy briefs;
- Discuss sources of problems identified;
- Recognize interconnectedness of problems;
- Select issues that reflect community concerns.

Methods of Community Assessment

- Review existing data
- In-depth interviews
- Town hall
- Photovoice project
- Community opinion polling
- Community survey (health, demographics)
- Study the history of the community

Policy Barriers to Reentry

Together, the Policy Work Group members identified some of the main barriers to successful reentry:

- Banned from subsidized housing
- Barred from many professions
- Medicaid disenrollment + waiting periods
- Lack of identification, which is *required* by agencies in order to obtain benefits and other help
- Lack of discharge planning & aftercare
- Difficulty accessing medical records
- Services focus on special needs populations

Formulate Specific Policy Objectives

- Expedite Access to Medicaid;
- Institutionalize procedures to secure identification for inmates prior to release;
- Change release time;
- Provide routine discharge planning to all inmates prior to release.

Persuasive to Policymakers

- A discussion of the practical daily implications of the policy
- A organized group of constituents
- Information about practice (v. stated policy) at the community level
- An historical perspective including prior policies or practices and their effects.
- Quantitative analysis of policy outcomes at the community level.
- Qualitative research documenting community residents' experience
- Cost-benefit analysis of current v. proposed policies.
- Theoretical framework for policy proposals.
- Review of model programs or policies enacted in other jurisdictions

The Community-based Policy Analysis and Advocacy Cycle



Building Momentum for Change

- Breaking the Barriers Symposium 2000
- Fall 2002 Community Forum on Reentry
- Network building (listserv, website)
- Advocated City Council Oversight Hearing on Discharge Planning and Reentry
- Multiple agendas, diverse stakeholders, shared goals.
- Engaging in partnership for the long-term.

The Community-based Policy Analysis and Advocacy Cycle



Action Strategies

- Community Organizing
- Coalition Building
- Public Education
- Marches and Public Demonstrations
- Media campaigns
- Documentary
- Study circles
- Lawsuits
- Legislative Advocacy
- Negotiations with policymakers or implementers
- Developing Pilot Programs
- Running Candidates
- Organizing Community/Town Hall Forums

The Community-based Policy Analysis and Advocacy Cycle



Evaluation Questions

- How have our goals changed?
- How has policy or practice changed?
- How has media coverage and public perception of the issue changed?
- To what degree were changes a result of our effort?
- How have our relationships with policymakers and other stakeholders changed?
- **Where do we go from here?**

Conclusions

- Reentry is a public health issue!
- The conversation shifts: government and advocates agree on both the problems and on some solutions.
- We need elected and administration officials to partner with to improve community health and public safety in order to reduce the enormous social and financial costs of the status quo in community reintegration.
- **Focus Shift of Policy Work Group**