



Creating Hope Through Science

“Living Well through Community”

Is a prevention program that uses lifestyle specific approaches to impact risks associated with chronic diseases. Essential program elements involve culturally adapted recommendations for diet, nutrition and physical activity.

The program was developed by a grant from the National Center for Minority Health and Health Disparities. They reached out to various churches (was used to start in communities) and a two group trial was developed and delivered at 5 various churches in Northwest Denver. During the eight-week intervention program, participants met two times per week for group sessions involving diet, nutrition and cancer screening education, as well as low impact physical activity. As a condition of enrollment in the program, each participant received a physician-supervised assessment at baseline prior to program implementation and at 3 months post-enrollment (end of program). The assessments included Body Mass Index (BMI) - assessed by taking height and weight; Blood Pressure – obtained using an arm or thigh blood pressure cuff; Percentage Body Fat – using skin fold calipers, and a Fitness Step Test – assessed through heart rate measurement following a 3 minute bench step test. Additionally, a Health Questionnaire was administered to inquire about the participant’s health history, current diagnosis, medication regiment, information regarding their overall lifestyle (including physical activity, diet and nutrition habits), cancer screening knowledge, and level of readiness.

The program launched in the fall of 2009, with 106 participants represented across 5 church sites. The program designed involved a comparison of a minimal, single-session control group intervention against a 2-month, 2 times per week program that was delivered by a nutritionist and exercise trainers. Nearly all participants (97%) were African American. Participant retention rates were extraordinarily high (93%) at the two-month follow up, with participants rating both the exercise trainers and the nutritionists between 95-100% either excellent or good. 96% of participants reported being very satisfied and 99% indicated they would recommend the program to others in the community. Despite the small sample size, significant time-by-experimental condition interaction effects were found for weight loss, percent body fat and blood pressure (systolic), indicating that the intervention group showed significantly greater improvement from baseline than the control group. In addition to the clinical endpoints change effect, there were numerous qualitative improvements indicated by the participants. These include: changes in pre-diabetic health status, a reduction in blood pressure medication, reduced blood pressure levels, increased strength and cardiovascular capacity.

The “Living Well through Community” program is a wonderful demonstration for overall health improvement using lifestyle specific education models on diet, nutrition and physical activity. While the initial program was designed to impact disparities, particularly cancer related, the results have shown impact on other chronic diseases prevalent within underserved communities. Next steps for this program would include: developing funding resources to ensure the continued delivery of this program toward a variety of community-based settings; to expand the program from 2 to 3 months, develop additional program components that focus on family lifestyles, and to culturally adapt the program curriculum for Latino populations.

Gaye Woods, who serves as the program manager is responsible for the program development and modifications as needed, training project staff, conducting assessments/evaluation, program implementation, quality control and follow up. Gaye also is the owner of Colorado Fitness and Wellness which is a leading edge, lifestyle health and wellness company dedicated to reducing the incidence of obesity and associated risks for chronic disease.