

Fall 12-12-2014

# Healthy and Livable Pittsburg Initiative: Master of Public Health Culminating Experience

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## Recommended Citation

Bernal, Jasmine L., "Healthy and Livable Pittsburg Initiative: Master of Public Health Culminating Experience" (2014). *Master's Projects*. Paper 52.

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Healthy and Livable Pittsburg Initiative: Master of Public Health Culminating Experience

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November 22, 2014

### **Abstract**

Contra Costa Health Services Department of Community Wellness and Prevention sole purpose is to improve the environmental, social and economic conditions that contribute to poor health, and support a quality of life that promotes the health and well being of all residents within the county, with major attention to those underserved. The Healthy and Livable Pittsburg Initiative tries to address those issues within the city of Pittsburg. The project aims to engage certain members of the community within Pittsburg to be involved in the future community action plan, which will improve the lives of every resident in Pittsburg. The first step of the project is to gather the attention of 10 members of the African American community and 10 members of the Latino community. The total of 20 members will play a vital role for the community action plan, which will be held in 2015. The following paper is a summary on a 300- hour fieldwork experience at Contra Costa Health Service's Healthy and Livable Initiative specifically with the engagement of the community for the future community action plan.

## Healthy and Livable Pittsburg Initiative

## Master of Public Health Culminating Experience

Chronic disease such as cancer, heart disease, stroke and diabetes are the leading causes of preventable morbidity and premature mortality within Contra Costa County (Health Indicators, 2013). Chronic disease is also the major driver of health inequities within the community of Contra Costa. According to the CDC, health inequities are a subset of health inequalities that are modifiable, which are associated to social disadvantages and considered ethically unfair (CDC, 2011). Chronic illnesses are linked to education, ethnicity, income; they are most prevalent in areas of communities of color, poverty and low educational attainment (Contra Costa Health Services, 2013). With the assessment of Contra Costa County, it is important for the community to understand the implications and try to work with the community to resolve the issue. Community Capacity Building is essentially providing the community with the important information on how their city is being affected by certain issues. This process incorporates measures such as teaching the community on the social determinants of health and empowers them on making a change for their community. When these members become involved with a program from the beginning to the end, they are able to provide their insight on what is it that their community needs.

This paper will provide an introduction on the Healthy and Livable Pittsburg Initiative. The program empowers certain members of the community with the underlying issues, in hopes of trying to create a specific program that addresses the exact needs of those within the city of Pittsburg, California. This paper will also include a summary of 300 hours of fieldwork experience completed at Contra Costa Health Services in the department of

Community Wellness and Prevention as the conclusion for the University of San Francisco's Master of Public Health program.

### **Background**

Within Contra Costa County, many communities are suffering from preventable chronic illnesses such as cancer, heart disease, stroke, and diabetes, which cause morbidity and premature mortality within the county. These illnesses are also the major drivers of health inequities within the community. According to the CDC, health inequities are linked to social disadvantages and considered ethically unfair (CDC, 2011). Chronic illnesses are connected to income, education and ethnicity; chronic illnesses are more prevalent in areas that are in poverty, low educational attainment, and communities of color.

Pittsburg, California is one of the cities that is located within Contra Costa County. Over the years, Pittsburg, along with other cities such as Antioch and Bay Point, have seen a growth rate faster than the overall county. In 1990, Pittsburg had a population of 47,564, which by 2010, it had grown to 63,510, showing a percent change of 34% (Contra Costa Health Services, 2013). The large influx of growth can be due to the housing crisis within the bay area causing many people to travel in the outskirts of bay area. With this increase of population, there also has been an increase on the amount of people living below federal poverty level between 1990 to 2010. Pittsburg in 1990 had 10.7% of the population living in poverty but the most recent data of 2010 showed that it had increased to 16.3% (Contra Costa Health Services, 2013). Focusing on Pittsburg, this community has a dropout rate of 7.2% and 80.9% of students qualify for free or reduced price lunches for high schools, middle schools and elementary within Pittsburg (Contra Costa Health Services, 2013). This means that there is a population within Pittsburg that is barely making ends meet.

One of the biggest issues that Pittsburg is facing is the amount of children that are considered to be obese. Within Pittsburg, the childhood overweight/obesity rates in Pittsburg Unified School District is 43.7% which is one of the highest compared to Antioch Unified School District, West Contra Costa County Unified School District and Mount Diablo Unified School District (Contra Costa Health Services, 2013). Obesity and being overweight are associated with health risks such as high cholesterol, high blood pressure, high fasting insulin, and even musculoskeletal disorders (California Center for Public Health Advocacy, 2010). Hispanic, African American and American Indian girls and boys have higher rates of obesity than white children (California Center for Public Health Advocacy, 2010).

The employment rates within the communities of Pittsburg, Antioch and Bay Point are all extremely similar with an average 2012 unemployment rate of 25% (Contra Costa Health Services, 2013). In a study conducted by Dr. Sara Arber, people who lacked employment reported having poorer health than the ones that were employed and were concentrated in the lower social classes. This shows that employment is a factor on the well being of a person.

The Community Wellness and Prevention Program conducted interviews and came to the conclusion that poverty, lack of access to affordable healthy foods, poor walkability, the disproportionate availability of fresh produce compared to unhealthy options, and growing violence were contributing to the rates of obesity seen within these communities which lead to chronic illness (Contra Costa Health Services, 2013).

As to the specific data on chronic disease within Pittsburg, Pittsburg has a 5.4% of heart disease death, 5.2% of cancer deaths, 6.6% of stroke deaths, 9.0% of diabetes deaths, and 7.7% of homicide deaths (Contra Costa Health Services, 2013). Not only is it important to

look at the percentages of deaths within Pittsburg but also the amount of fast food available within the community. The Retail Food Environment Index is “calculated by dividing the total number of fast food restaurants, and convenience stores by the total number of supermarkets, produce stores and farmers markets in a region” (Healthy Indicators, 2013). The index for Pittsburg was 7.0, which is the ratio of unhealthy food options to those that provide healthy choices.

The Community Wellness and Prevention Program Department of Contra Costa County Health Services aims to improve the economic, social and environmental conditions that contribute to poor health, and support a quality of life that promotes the health and well being of all residents within the county, especially those underserved. In order to achieve these goals, the department works in partnership with individuals, diverse communities and different organizations that allows the increase of knowledge within an individual and skills, educate and mobilize communities, build collations, and advocate for changes in organizational and public policy (Contra Costa Health Services, 2014). The department tries to address the issues by having a variety of programs such as Tobacco Prevention, Food Security, Be Smarter Drink Water, Lead Poisoning Prevention, Built Environment, Injury Prevention and Physical Activity Promotion, Nutrition, and Healthy and Livable Pittsburg.

### **Implementation**

The intention of the fieldwork experience at Contra Costa Health Services within the department of Community Wellness and Prevention was to aide in the development and implementation of the Healthy and Livable Pittsburg Initiative. The goal of the internship was to develop and co-facilitate the Healthy and Livable Pittsburg Resident Training. This

training would allow the residents to understand a variety of factors that play a part in the wellness of the community. In 2015, the residents that attended the trainings will be involved with in the community action plan which will consist of a consultant who will help in the implementation of the final project, a healthy and livable Pittsburg. The goals of the ultimate project are as follows:

1. Strengthen the capacity of Pittsburg community organizations and residents to promote healthy eating and active lifestyles
2. Decrease consumption of non-nutritious foods and beverages
3. Increase fruits, vegetables and healthy beverages consumption
4. Increase physical activity

Since the project is has not ended, and I played a vital role in the beginning of the project, my learning objectives were as follows:

1. Assist with planning and execution of the Healthy and Livable Pittsburg Film Series
2. Assist in development of Healthy and Livable Pittsburg Resident Leadership Training curriculum
3. Co-facilitate Healthy and Livable Training
4. Assist in developing evaluation instrument for the Healthy and Livable Resident Leadership Training

In order to achieve those goals of the project, the first step of the project was to hold two film series for the African American community at the Senior Living Center in Pittsburg, CA. The film series consisted of showing the African American community the films, Food Inc. and Soul Food Junkies. After showing the film, ten members of the community were identified to attend the leadership training. The requirements were that the community



member attended both film series, lived in Pittsburg, and is willing to commit to attending all five leadership-training sessions.

Every leadership training session had a theme that helped to achieve the four goals of the Healthy and Livable Pittsburg Engagement Project. The sessions include discussions of the social determinants of health, ingredients of the food system, creating an active neighborhood environment, leadership and advocacy skills, and tools for action & graduation ceremony.

Since Pittsburg has a high population of Hispanics, it is crucial that the program included this population. The film series and leadership training sessions for this specific group would be in Spanish. Currently, Contra Costa County, is trying to determine when to hold the film series and the leadership training sessions in Spanish for the Hispanic population.

The Healthy and Livable Pittsburg Engagement Project came about due to certain research that had been done in 2013. The statistics showed that Pittsburg had a high morbidity and mortality of preventable chronic illnesses. Contra Costa County decided to step in and create a program that could somehow decrease chronic illnesses. The project uses health education development and materials in order to inform the community of social determinants of health. The development of the leadership training sessions focus primarily on different aspects that affect health such as food systems and creating an active neighborhood.

After the leadership training sessions (which currently only one has been presented to the African American community), the ten members who have gone through the five trainings will then provide public health approaches to the development and implementation of the Community Action Plan for Pittsburg. In other words, after the

groups go through the training, they will partner up with a consultant to create specific needs for the city of Pittsburg.

### **Findings**

The Community Wellness and Prevention department within Contra Costa Health Services has been efficient with the Healthy and Livable Pittsburg project in trying to address the underlying public health issue. The Healthy and Livable Pittsburg tries to develop a program that is specific to the community in Pittsburg. Working with my preceptor, we tried to pick films that the African American community can relate to, but also films that the Hispanic/Latino population could as well. As for the leadership training, we tried to make the presentation as simple as possible for the community so that they may understand the concepts. Originally our first leadership training session consisted of 55 slides but with the guidance and suggestions members gave us, we cut down the slides so that it can be easier for people to follow along. All the facts and statistics used were specific to the city of Pittsburg and they also contained statistics of surrounding cities such as Antioch and Bay Point. Overall the organization seemed very efficient at trying to address the specific public health issue.

Since I was only able to attend the two film series for the African American group and one leadership training, the way that we knew the events were successful were by the discussion questions we had but also the pre/post test that we conducted after the first leadership training. With the film series, my preceptor and I had a list of discussion questions to see if the audience was actually listening. After seeing Food Inc. and Soul Junkies, everyone in the group wanted to comment on the film. Many of them did not know about the information that these films showed. Almost everyone within the group wanted

to borrow the movies to show to their relatives, neighbors and family friends. For the all of the leadership trainings, I created a series of pre/post tests that contained the same questions to see if they had learned anything from the session. During the first leadership training, the pretest contained questions such as “Where does the US stand with life expectancy?” To my alarm, many people believed that the US was within the top 10 of life expectancy. After watching a clip of Unnatural Causes during the training, everyone was alarmed that the US placed number 29. During the posttest, we asked the same question and everyone remembered the answer. As mentioned, for the future leadership training sessions for both the African American group and the Hispanic/Latino group, there are pre/post tests that will address whether or not the groups have learned anything during the presentation.

We worked with the Mind, Body and Soul group in Pittsburg, CA. Cynthia Garrett who leads events for the elderly at the Pittsburg Senior Center runs this organization. Cynthia was the prime person who helped reach out to the community to attend our film series and pick which members of the community she felt could play a big part with the project. With the help of Cynthia, it makes the intervention sustainable because she is a powerful person within the community and she knows who would take the project seriously and attend all five leadership trainings.

### **Public Health Significance**

Overall, the project is about empowering the community in speaking up on what are the needs in their community. Nobody knows the community better than someone who lives within it. Therefore the project really is about empowering those who live in Pittsburg, and

asking them to provide insight on what is it that their community is lacking and what is it that they would like to see.

The impact of this project on public health is that this project tries to improve the environment, social and economic condition that has contributed to the poor health within Pittsburg. Whether it is by creating walkable areas or having the access to fresh fruits, the project tries improve the quality of life for all of residents within Pittsburg.

Some of the lessons learned throughout the program planning of this project are that many educational materials are not in another language and trying to speak in general terms not in public health terms. It was a struggle trying to find films that the Hispanic/Latino population could relate to. For example, for the African American group we were able to show *Soul Food Junkies*, which was a film that addressed the unhealthiness of soul food but also understood the importance of this food for this population. The film mentioned that times have changed and that there needs to be healthier soul food options but have the similar taste. For the Hispanic/Latino population, my preceptor and I could not find a film that addressed a similar issue to present at the event. What we had to do was pick the film *Unnatural Causes: Being American*, to show what happens in most cases when Latinos come to America. Many films were good but many of them lacked subtitles or were not dubbed. This was a struggle for us but we learned that we have to find something similar that could possibly translate the message.

I also learned that many times when creating the leadership training materials, I tried to use big terms that I had learned in class. I realized that when dealing with communities, one must be conscious of the literacy levels of the communities. I had to cut out many terms and try to address the concept with basic examples.

For future projects that address the same public health issue as Pittsburg, it is important that they take into consideration the community and let the community play a part in the project. It is important for the program to be very specific for the community. In many cases, a project can work in San Diego but not in San Francisco. The needs may be different, the communities may be more diverse, and the only those who live within that city understand more than anyone what is needed.

### **Competencies Addressed**

The learning objectives completed through my 300 hours of fieldwork contributed to the completion of the Master of Public Health at the University of San Francisco, and additional to the core competencies and crosscutting values. The fieldwork experience provided the opportunities to develop film series logistics, assist in developing an evaluation tool for the film series, co-facilitate the film series, assist in developing training material for the leadership training, translate the materials to Spanish, co-facilitate one of the trainings in English, and develop an evaluation instrument for the leadership training. Throughout the fieldwork experience, all activities provided an opportunity to demonstrate my leadership skills and being culturally sensitive.

Since the part of the project that I worked on focused on creating materials for the film series and leadership trainings for the African American community and Hispanic/Latino community, the core knowledge areas and cross-cutting values obtained related to social and behavioral sciences and environmental health. It was extremely important for the project to understand the social and cultural factors related to the communities' health and the disparities. The project is geared to understand these issues and try to address them. For example, when showing the film *Soul Food Junkies* it was addressing the cultural

factors of the importance of soul food within the African American community. It also showed how soul food has a major role in the community's health due to the high fat and carbohydrates. As for the core knowledge of environmental health, the program addressed these areas of trying to find the physical factors that affect health within the community. During our leadership training one, the community mentioned that the area of Pittsburg is not pedestrian friendly. They mentioned that there used to be a bench in front of a senior living center at the bus stop. They mentioned that the bench was essential because since it was in front of a senior living center, many elderly wait for the bus at that specific stop. The bench was removed because a neighbor complained that his dog kept on barking at everyone who sat there to wait for the bus. The city of Pittsburg removed the bench. The members of the leadership training expressed their concerns in regards to bench. They stated they would love to have a bench there again since it is essential for them to take the bus and be transported to wherever they need to go. Biostatistics and Epidemiology were implemented before the project started. Because of the results/statistics from the census of the amount of chronic illness within the city of Pittsburg, the Healthy and Livable Pittsburg project was created.

The crosscutting values that I applied in the course of the Healthy and Livable Pittsburg project were that of diversity and culture and program planning. The concept of diversity and culture was strongly present in this project since I was working with the African American community and the Hispanic/Latino community. This concept is about having the ability to interact with diverse communities to impact them on the public health issue. As mentioned, this program was geared to the African American population and the Latino group since the city of Pittsburg is primarily of those ethnicities. It was important to be

culturally sensitive when trying to speak to the African American communities for the film series and the first leadership training that I was able to be apart of. It was important to understand the importance of certain things such as soul food, for this community.

Program Planning was also extremely present within this project. Even though the project was already planned when I joined. I assisted with the development, implementation and evaluation of the program to improve the community of Pittsburg. By assisting with the film series and especially the leadership training materials, I played a big part in the key components of program planning.

The fieldwork experience was definitely a collaborative process. I had the ability of building essential relationships for the project; expand my knowledge as well as the knowledge of my preceptor and others, and problem solving. The Healthy and Livable Pittsburg program included a broad range of the Master of Public Health competencies at the University of San Francisco, within the core knowledge areas and crosscutting values. The project allowed me to draw concepts and interventions from many courses that I attended at the University of San Francisco such as Communicating for Healthy Behavior and Social Change, and Environmental Health.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, the fieldwork experience was a rewarding one to end my Master of Public Health program at the University of San Francisco. The experience I had proved beneficial for building relationships with the people involved in the project and advanced my knowledge on the social determinants of health. There were many times where I felt extremely overwhelmed with the workload and working fulltime. There were times where the events we held did not go as planned but we overcame those moments. Regardless of the

challenging times, knowing that these film series and the leadership trainings are being used to show the community of Pittsburg the importance of understanding all the factors that contribute to their individual health is very fulfilling. The fieldwork experience at Contra Costa Health Services served as a treasured experience in public health practice.

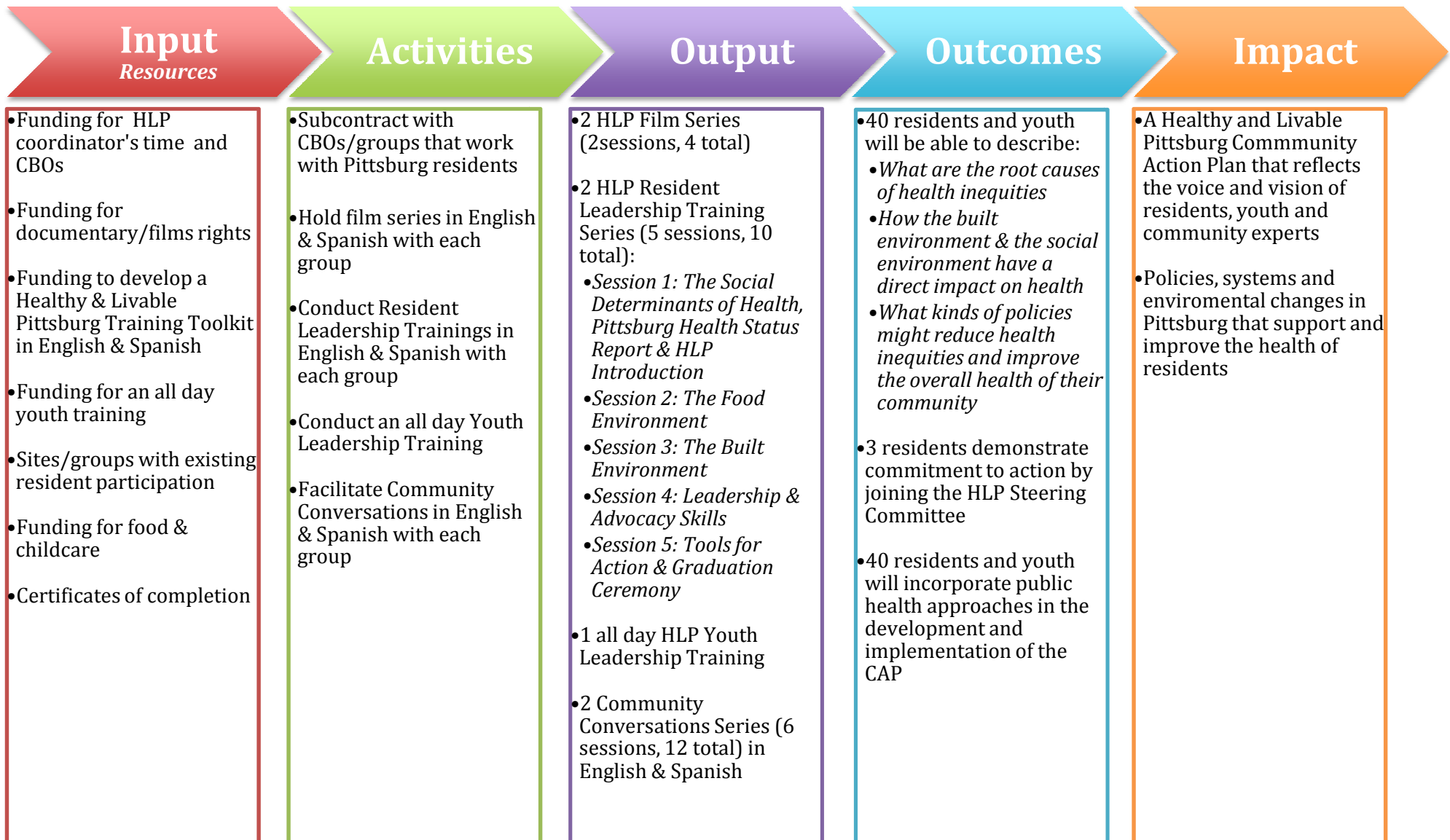


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Appendices

**Healthy & Livable Pittsburg Initiative – Community Engagement Project**





Goal 1: To develop and co-facilitate the Healthy & Livable Pittsburg Resident Leadership Training to have residents help create and implement the HLP Community Action Plan (CAP)				
Objectives (S)	Activities	Start/End Date	Who is Responsible	
1. Assist with planning and execution of the HLP Film Series	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop film series logistics</li> <li>- Assist in developing evaluation tool</li> <li>- Co-facilitate film series</li> </ul>	August 11 to September 30	Tanya Rovira-O. Jasmine Bernal	
2. Assist in development of Healthy & Livable Pittsburg (HLP) Resident Leadership Training curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Assist developing training materials</li> <li>- Translate training materials to Spanish</li> </ul>	October 1 to November 30	Tanya Rovira-O. Jasmine Bernal	
3. Co-facilitate HLP Leadership Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Review training materials</li> <li>- Co-facilitate trainings in English &amp; Spanish</li> </ul>	November 1 to February 15	Tanya Rovira-O. Jasmine Bernal	
4. Assist in developing evaluation instrument for the HLP Resident Leadership Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Research evaluation tools</li> <li>- Develop evaluation instrument</li> <li>- Translate evaluation instrument</li> </ul>	September 15 to November 1	Tanya Rovira-O. Jasmine Bernal	

**Pre-Test for Lexicon**

1) Do you know what a food desert is?

**Circle one:        Yes                        No**

2) Do you think food deserts only happen in certain areas or could they happen in major cities as well?

**Circle one:    Certain areas                        Could happen in major cities**

3) Do you know what food security means?

**Circle one:        Yes                        No**

4) Do you know what food sovereignty means?

**Circle one:        Yes                        No**

5) Do you think that food security and food sovereignty have the same meaning?

**Circle one:        Yes                        No**

6) Do you know what food justice means?

**Circle one:        Yes                        No**

7) Do you believe that everyone has the right to safe and affordable food?

**Circle one :        Yes                        No**

8) Do you know who grows your food?

**Circle one:        Yes                        No**

9) Are you familiar with the term Urban Farming?

**Circle one:        Yes                        No**

10) Do you believe that your food has an impact on climate change and the environment as a whole?

**Circle one:        Yes                        No**

11) Would you consider eating things that are locally grown?

**Circle one:        Yes                        No**

### **Post Test for Lexicon**

1) After watching the film, do you know what a food desert is?

**Circle one:**            **Yes**                            **No**

2) Do food deserts only happen in certain areas or could they happen in major cities as well?

**Circle one:**    **Certain areas**                    **Could happen in major cities**

3) After watching the film, do you know what food security means?

**Circle one:**            **Yes**                            **No**

4) After watching the film, do you know what food sovereignty means?

**Circle one:**            **Yes**                            **No**

5) Do food security and food sovereignty have the same meaning?

**Circle one:**            **Yes**                            **No**

6) After watching the film, do you know what food justice means?

**Circle one:**            **Yes**                            **No**

7) Do you believe that everyone has the right to safe and affordable food?

**Circle one :**            **Yes**                            **No**

8) Do you know who grows your food?

**Circle one:**            **Yes**                            **No**

9) After watching the film, are you familiar with the term Urban Farming?

**Circle one:**            **Yes**                            **No**

10) Do you believe that your food has an impact on climate change and the environment as a whole?

**Circle one:**            **Yes**                            **No**

11) After watching the film, would you consider eating things that are locally grown?

**Circle one:**            **Yes**                            **No**

**12) How has this film affected your perspective?**

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