

Be Better Together: Importance of Institution and Network Building

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Networking is the "action or process of interacting with others to exchange information and develop professional or social contacts" (Momentum Management Consulting, 2022). Network building, related to public health nursing, involves the process of bringing people, with common interests, together to accomplish specific tasks or goals related to addressing a public health need. To ensure the network building process is implemented to meet the tasks or goals, it is imperative that the information shared with appropriate and relevant colleagues piques their interests and desires to support the public health need. This manuscript describes a community-based public health nursing intervention and the process of building a network to support the goals of the project (Indiana University School of Nursing Bloomington, n.d.).

In 2015, the Indiana University Bloomington (IUB) School of Nursing (SON) received a donor gift with the task of creating an interprofessional community health education project to meet the health needs in south central Indiana.

The project leaders reached out to already established community and academic partners to gauge interest in collaborating on the implementation of a needs assessment and the development of an intervention based on the results. The outcome was the development of an advisory committee that included individuals from social service agencies, schools, health care, county

health departments, along with faculty, students and professional staff from nursing, public health, brain and psychological sciences, education, and social work. The primary result from the needs assessment were concerns around substance abuse and a need for more mental health resources. Since 2015, the advisory committee has served to support the implementation and evaluation of substance use prevention and mental health programs in rural school-based settings. To date, the program has been implemented by 201 college students from multiple degree programs in six county school systems reaching over 6,637 elementary-level students.

The advisory committee continues to meet monthly to support the efforts of the SON's implementation and evaluation of the program in schools. The committee specifically provides feedback about the implementation of evidence-based programs, successes and challenges implementing the program in schools, ensuring the information and skills the students learn are developmentally relevant, and address current trends. Over time, new members have joined the advisory committee based on the results of the evaluations and in-depth discussions to ensure the sustainability of the program.

The longevity of the advisory committee and the continual recruitment of members from related disciplines to join the committee have supported the sustainability of the program.

One example is the addition of an expert in rural health and community capacity building from the IUB Center for Rural Engagement. This allowed the exploration of securing additional funding to provide the financial support of IUB graduate student interns and purchasing program materials to provide the program at no cost to the school corporations. Another example was the addition of a doctoral student from the School of Education to support the needs related to classroom management, a significant challenge for the facilitators. The CRE's Unconference led to the expansion of the team through a conversation between the advisory committee's chair and the IU Corps Director to develop a plan to recruit additional college students from other disciplines to be trained as facilitators and become part of the interdisciplinary team implementing the program in fall 2024.

The longevity of the advisory committee and the continual recruitment of members from related disciplines to join the committee have supported the sustainability of the program. These efforts have provided educational opportunities for youth in rural elementary schools to learn about the negative outcomes of substance use and learn skills to support their mental health. The initial funding from a donor to the IUB SON has led to the implementation of a program that addresses the health and wellness needs of rural youth.

References

Indiana University School of Nursing Bloomington. (n.d.). *Outreach*. Improving the health of our communities: Dr. Anita Aldrich community health promotion project.

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