

CARE's Neighborhood and School Survey — An Innovative Survey Approach

We've been told this is award season (Golden Globes, Grammys, Oscars, etc), so we're wondering if there is an award category for the "Most Efficient and Innovative Data Collection Strategy." If so, the leaders of CARE at Yale University should be dusting off their tuxedos and sequined gowns; they are the smart money to win.

CARE, a collaboration of the New Haven and Yale communities, provides an opportunity to enhance the health of the citizens of New Haven by fostering rigorous community-based research and by translating scientific breakthroughs into practical benefits. CARE is a part of Yale's Center for Clinical Investigation and the Yale School of Public Health.

In seven weeks during the fall of 2009, the CARE team surveyed 1,205 households in six low income neighborhoods in New Haven, with a response rate over 85%, and 1,175 student surveys of 5th and 6th graders in 12 randomly selected schools, which accounted for 88% of all students in those grades. Four weeks after the survey ended, preliminary analysis of these data were being distributed to CARE stakeholders, school and neighborhood leaders. These surveys complement the health asset mapping completed last the summer by Youth@Work.

Two data collection surveys and the asset mapping were part of CARE's work in the Community Interventions for Health (CIH). The goal of CIH is to reduce the three risk factors (smoking, poor nutrition, and lack of physical activity) for the four diseases (diabetes, heart disease, lung disease, and most cancers) that account for 50% of preventable deaths worldwide. New Haven is the first U.S. city to participate in CIH.

In the neighborhood survey, teams of trained community interviewers, collected information on chronic disease such as whether the respondents had been told that they have high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes or asthma; diet, smoking and exercise habits; mental stress; and access to health care. In the school survey, students were asked about their own assessment of their health, eating habits, physical activity; BMI, waist circumference, and blood pressure were also measured.

There were several factors that accounted for the team's ability to collect this large amount of data in such a short period of time, said Alycia Santilli, assistant director for CARE. They hired a cadre of interviewers and trained them

for this one specific task. "We realized that we could hire five people and do this over eight months or hire 20 people and have it done in two months," said Santilli. In addition, the people who were hired as surveyors were from diverse populations who reflected the sampled neighborhoods and schools; in fact, many of them lived in those neighborhoods. Every household received a letter explaining the survey, and fliers about the project were circulated in the neighborhoods, with additional outreach occurring the week before the surveyors would begin in a new neighborhood. "We were



Two CARE surveyors knock on the door of a health survey respondent in New Haven.

also lucky with the local press," said Santilli. "We had good press coverage in all major news outlets. All of the alders and community management teams were aware of our work and our presence in the neighborhoods, and this helped, too. We approached it like a campaign" rather than a traditional research study, said Santilli, whose education and work background are in community organizing.

"We were not a hundred percent certain that this would work," said Jeannette Ickovics, PhD, director of CARE, "but we were thrilled with how it turned out. With support our funders and a commitment to our community to 'minimize the burden and maximize the benefits' of research — this experience has shifted the paradigm of how we do research — now and in the future. And importantly, we now have the baseline data we need to move forward with interventions designed to improve health in New Haven through CIH."