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Imagine having a child in kindergarten die in school from asthma. This is what happened in our community over 7 years ago. A needless death from a treatable disease in a community that cares. Long Beach has a long history of different constituencies working together to solve problems. We had tackled the appalling low rates of childhood immunization raising them from 35% up to date to the high 80's during the 90's. In the new millennium – Long Beach decided to take on childhood asthma. In 1999, the **Long Beach Alliance for Children with Asthma** (LBACA) was formed with participation from The Children's Clinic, Miller Children's Hospital, Long Beach Department of Health and Human Services, Long Beach Unified School District, legal aid, managed care organizations, state assembly and senate, Long Beach Department of Parks and Recreation, YMCA, etc. Most importantly is the grassroots participation of parents of children with asthma known as the "LBACA Moms". Through other programs in the community, mostly Partnership for the Public's Health, these moms have been trained as health leaders in their community. As community leaders said "At LBACA we know we are respected and that our voice counts".

With funding from Robert Wood Johnson *Allies Against Asthma* (AAA) program, the California Endowment, *Community Action to Fight Asthma* (CAFA) initiative and other local funding LBACA focused at work to improve clinical outcomes including reduction of preventable hospitalization, emergency room visits and school absenteeism in 4 areas:

- Education and support of healthcare providers.
- Improved care and care coordination and environment in schools and after school programs.
- Community outreach and education focusing on a simple message – **We C.A.N. Control Asthma Now.**
- Advancing policies focusing on access to medication and equipment and control of environmental triggers such as diesel emissions and air pollution.

To date LBACA has trained over 42 physicians in the PACE (Physician Asthma Care Education) program. In addition they have been provided with Asthma Action Plans and their medical assistants have been trained to teach children how to use their inhalers. A media campaign was developed in collaboration with others in Los Angeles County that can be personalized to local organizations to emphasize the message that asthma can be controlled and children can lead active lives with asthma. LBACA in partnership with a local newspaper, the Long Beach Press Telegram developed an award winning Newspapers in Education program on asthma that reached 380 classrooms. Over 1500 school, head start, after school and early childhood educators have been trained in "Asthma 101" curricular.

LBACA implemented a Community Health Worker (CHW)/promotoras program that hired staff from the local community (two were LBACA moms) and have made home visits (over 500) to over 150 families – going into the homes assessing indoor asthma triggers and use of medication and educating families in trigger reduction and proper use of medications.

LBACA in partnership with the University of Southern California Keck School of Medicine has taken a leadership role in focusing on the impact of environmental triggers on childhood asthma. LBACA hosted a legislative tour in 2001 and has been invited to testify to state legislature on numerous occasions. Most recently LBACA took a leadership role in bringing health issues to focus in the

proposed 710 freeway expansion. Health impacts were not discussed in the initial presentations regarding expansion. LBACA in partnership with others brought health issues to the table. Parents/LBACA Moms have become actively involved and actually “moved the freeway” to save their homes.

So why has LBACA made a difference? Why a coalition approach? Asthma is a complex disease with multiple triggers, and etiologies . . . its control and treatment require a multi-faceted, holistic approach which cannot be accomplished by the “silo” approach. The coalition approach brings a richness and coordination of approaches and services which truly can make a difference in the lives of families being it moving a freeway or making sure a doctor prescribes the proper medicine or having a mother know which medicine to use when.

The coalition approach can be challenging. It requires patience and respect for all the constituencies. It requires knowing that the perspective of parents, doctors, school nurses all have equal weight and equal value. Sometimes it takes longer to accomplish the goal but the results are much richer, more successful and longer lasting

Look at the history in your community. See what collaborative efforts have been successful and why, and build on these relationships and successes.



“As a Community Health Worker for LBACA I was referred a 12 year old boy by the asthma school nurse. The nurse had not been successful in controlling the child’s asthma. I discovered in the last year the child had symptoms of asthma every single day and almost every night. Additionally he had four emergency room visits and numerous missed school days. He was taking albuterol four times a day and not using a spacer. He was also taking Advair and Singulair on a daily basis. There were lots of asthma triggers in the home...roaches, scented oils, cleaning solutions, a cat and dust from a wood shop business behind their house. The family was highly stressed. When the child’s doctor was contacted he was shocked the child was so symptomatic. The doctor reclassified the child from mild persistent to severe persistent. The doctor said he had not seen the child in six months but realized that was because he was treating his symptoms with albuterol.”

I provided support and encouragement for the mother. The entire family participated in asthma education and changing the home environment. The cat sleeps outside and they are trying to find another home for the cat. They use the non-toxic cleaners provided by LBACA, no longer burn scented oils, have controlled the roach problem and are using the dust free pillow and mattress encasing provided by LBACA. The child uses the spacer after I taught him the proper method of use. He uses albuterol prior to exercise or as needed, which is rare now.

At the exit visit the child’s symptoms have decreased to almost nothing. The asthma school nurse is impressed at the depth of my involvement with the family and is amazed at the results. The child’s mother has become an asthma advocate and wants to work with LBACA to teach other parents about asthma.

**We CAN Control Asthma Now!**