

## HealthCorps Reader

### ***Part One: Conducting Outreach***

Outreach is the process of connecting with individuals and groups within the community served in such a way that they are empowered to ask questions, state their needs, identify barriers to meeting those needs, and describe how they would like to have their needs met. In other words, *outreach is a client-driven process.*

Some people in the world of community health describe outreach as “meeting people where they are.” And that communicates several important aspects of successful health outreach:

- **Outreach workers go physically into the community** – they don’t wait for people to come to them.
- They present information and ask questions **in the language of the community**. This may mean translation into a foreign language, providing sign language interpretation, or simplifying words to avoid medical jargon.
- They **respect the beliefs and traditions of the community culture**. Some groups will respond well to having a pair of outreach workers knock on their doors and talk with each family or resident individually; this approach is seen as neighborly and an expression of respect. Meanwhile, other groups might be much more comfortable attending a meeting together at their community center where health outreach workers do a presentation and lead a discussion.
- When possible, they **recruit and train community members to do some or all of the outreach**, because people usually respond well to leaders within their community who have similar experiences and concerns. People need to believe in the benefits of any change being suggested to them; a leader who has made such personal lifestyle changes can serve as an inspiration.

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### *Effective Outreach Strategy*

Like any other effort in community health, effective outreach requires both *skills* and *techniques*. Cultural competency, patient relations, and professional communication are among the skill sets outreach workers develop as they prepare for doing health outreach and as they get more and more practice at it. These skills ensure that any outreach worker will:

- Have at least a basic understanding of the community culture.
- Be emotionally and physically accessible to clients and prospective clients, i.e., focus on the community member, listen actively and receive him/her in a place that ensures privacy.
- Be responsive to clients' current needs and interests as expressed in their questions, comments, and body language.
- Believe in the message they are presenting and in the ability of the community to respond.
- Welcome and encourage clients who show interest by building and maintaining mutually respectful relationships.
- Make every effort to ensure that the staff of any partner organizations with which they do outreach also understand the community and support what the community has to offer, and make available to such partners an in-service training about the target community if it seems advisable.

This module of the curriculum offers a strong opportunity to learn *techniques* of effective outreach based on skills practiced in earlier modules. Together these techniques form a *strategy* for exchanging important information within the community served.

### *Conducting Outreach Safely*

When conducting outreach, members may be walking or driving through neighborhoods with which they are unfamiliar. As in the rest of life, safety is a reasonable concern. Here are several guidelines that will increase member safety:

1. “**Do not go alone**” – neighborhood outreach is done in pairs.

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2. Before leaving the health center, members tell their site supervisor the route they are taking for the day.
3. Members also ensure that center staff knows how to reach an emergency contact for them in case something disturbing does happen. The site coordinator can be that contact.
4. Members should set their personal boundaries early in each meeting with a client or prospective client. In other words, they decide beforehand what behaviors are unacceptable *to them* and are ready to decline an inappropriate request or leave an unsafe environment. *For example:* Members do not smoke with the client, do not “bum” a cigarette from anyone in the neighborhood or lend anyone money.
5. Members remove themselves from uncomfortable situations. *For example:* They walk out of an apartment building or home if they see illegal activities occurring or if someone begins harassing them.

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**Part Two: Social Marketing**

*Marketing* brings to mind advertisements and commercials, jazzy graphics, loud music, funny acting, maybe high-pressure selling. It means to most of us that some person or group or corporation is trying to convince us to do something *they want us to do*: Buy their product, pay for their service, vote for their candidate, share their political beliefs, and so on.

However, there is a strategy called *social marketing* which uses some of the same techniques as the business and political kind without pushing information or ideology down anyone's throat. Social marketing is used for getting across various messages – about why we should protect the environment, what to do in a local disaster, how to avoid accidents in the home, when to file our income tax, etc.

Health information is of no practical use unless it is available to those who need it, and social marketing helps put the health center's message out to the public — but the message must be crafted in such a way that community members will be open to it. People want to be informed and have the opportunity to respond; they do *not* want to feel harassed or talked down to.

Surveying the community before starting a marketing promotion helps ensure that the health center addresses true needs of the target audience. Surveying again after full implementation is an evaluation of the usefulness of the message and effectiveness of the methods; results may indicate a need to revise either the overall campaign or parts of it.

**Starting the Marketing**

There are four critical steps to follow when starting a social marketing campaign. After that, developing the health center's specific message involves its own set of steps. At that point, it is wise to include community representatives if they have not yet been invited to join the process. They are able to help confirm whether the center's message speaks to them appropriately.

**First, decide the subject** of the information the health center will be communicating. Perhaps the health center currently works (a) to prevent the spread of

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HIV/AIDS, (b) to launch newly diagnosed diabetes patients onto a path of self-management, and (c) to decrease asthma triggers in homes and schools. The center's senior management may have assigned one of these to the marketing team or allowed the team to select one.

**Second, identify the desired audience.** If the marketing team seeks to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS, they might target all adolescent boys, adolescent girls, adult men, or adult women – or a more limited audience, such as females in their twenties or gay teenagers. If this is the team's first outreach effort, it is wise not to try to address the message to *all* people. In the future, the marketing team may develop a different message for *each* of those six target audiences.

**Third, select one or two media of communication** from the many, many possibilities. Yes, advertising is most familiar to us from TV, radio, movies, billboards, magazines and newspapers, and sometimes those media *are* used for social marketing. However, they are expensive and require professional-level skills. So this curriculum focuses on the media that are easily within the grasp of HealthCorps members: knocking on doors, posting flyers, creating displays, making presentations, participating in health fairs, writing a brochure or pamphlet, hosting a press conference or submitting public service announcements to local radio stations and newspapers. In other words, direct contact with community members blended with public announcements and printed materials that they can read on their own.

**Fourth, develop the message for that audience.** Social marketing is a complex interaction between the information presented and the “consumer” of that information. Thus the message should be designed so it is appropriate *both to the subject and to the audience*. A message will be very different, for example, if the health center is talking about sexual matters with adolescents or talking about dust and other allergens around the house with the parents of very young children. Whatever the subject, a testimonial from within the target audience can illustrate the benefits of a specific lifestyle change, whether it's walking 40 minutes a day and losing 40 pounds or practicing safe sex with the use of condoms.

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### **The Four Ps of Marketing**

Before discussing the steps of developing the social message, there is more to learn about marketing in general by reading up on the “four Ps”:

- **Product** – This is what the health center is offering its clients or prospective clients. It might be a booklet on “Tips for Managing Your Diabetes,” or a one-on-one session with a nutritionist, or a community meeting about the link between obesity and diabetes, or a health fair with many activities including glaucoma screening.
- **Price** – This is the amount of money, time, energy, or personal exposure outside the community that the client perceives he or she will have to “spend” to enroll in the center’s program or even to go to the center and ask for the product. It might be bus transportation, payment for a babysitter, overcoming a language barrier, and/or having to share one’s personal story with strangers (i.e., health center staff).
- **Place** – How does the product reach the client or vice-versa? The health center may be the only “channel of distribution” or there may be partners such as hospitals, pharmacies, nutritionists, specialists, schools, community centers, retail businesses, or employers. Are the location(s) and hours of availability convenient to members of the target audience? Do the places seem welcoming to all people? Are they places where members of the target audience are likely to go for other purposes as well?
- **Promotion** – Unless the first three Ps have been thoroughly considered, promotion of the product (publication, service, event, or whatever) *will not work!*

Promotion includes the specific message(s), the media used to communicate the message(s), the text and graphics selected, and so forth.

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### Developing the Promotion

Involving members of the target community in the development process will be invaluable to the success of the outreach campaign. They can help identify the *right* product, price, place, and promotion, in a wide variety of ways including:

- Has another outreach effort on this same topic been done recently in their community?
- Do they know of people working within other organizations – prospective partners – who are already sensitive to the needs and strengths of the target audience, speak the language of the immigrant community, or otherwise “connect” well with them?
- Are members of the target audience more likely to be open to the message from a source closer to them – their parents, extended family, or family doctor? If so, then the health center’s message could be directed to the “messengers” rather than directly to the diabetes patient or gay teenager.
- Does the community have particular attitudes about this subject area that will cause them to reject the message? *For example:* Social disapproval if kids resist the peer pressure to smoke or when adults stop shopping at their “cultural” bakery in order to limit their carbohydrates and sugars. If so, then the message(s) will have to acknowledge and address these attitudes in order to counteract them.
- Are there commercial entities target-marketing and selling within the community products that could counteract the success of the health center message? *For example:* With a doughnut shop or other fast-food retailer on every corner, audience members may pay no attention to a message on avoiding obesity, diabetes, or bad cholesterol.
- Are there other environmental factors affecting the target audience? Has there been a big news event that could distract people for a while? Or maybe a big change in local politics that could affect how the message sounds to the people in the neighborhoods? Perhaps a fear of nighttime crime, so people

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won't want to leave their houses for a meeting after dark. The marketing team should monitor such happenings and adjust the promotion accordingly.

A health outreach campaign might have a hundred factors to be considered. By starting small, building skills, and trying different approaches, a marketing team learns how to be effective in their own communities and in others with important messages about health care and disease prevention.