

## **Consolidated Report on Parent Focus Groups for Healthy People 2010**

In preparation for the Healthy People 1020 Action! Summit scheduled from June 20-21, the committee agreed to gathering input from the community's perspective, particularly those in the Enterprise Communities who had not have been represented on the committee itself. To do this, a number of Head Start parent groups, plus one Grandparent and Kin group, some under Catholic Charities and some from Mile High, were engaged. Following is a report of their input.

The first group, Northeast Montessori, was asked primarily specific questions around health and nutrition. In the groups that followed, the final "input" question became:

*What kinds of changes in our community would make it easier  
for all of us to have healthy lives?*

The actual groups involved were Northeast Montessori (April 16), Garfield Head Start (including the Kentucky center from next door – April 30), Grandparents and Kin (who meet at Macedonia Baptist Church – May 1), and Catholic Charities Child Development Center (May 13). There was a significant amount of similar input from among these four groups. A Summit with representatives from all four groups met on May 29<sup>th</sup> to review their data in preparation for the larger Action! Summit. Some new data was added at that point.

Issues the groups listed in answer to the question "What makes it hard to keep you and your family healthy?" are highlighted beneath each "change needed" section below.

### **CREATING SURROUNDINGS THAT SUPPORT A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE**

Having a focus on health education in the community was seen as an important new step. This included better advertisements for being healthy and other ways to educate the community around health, healthier school menus (no soda pop), education on how to make changes, and more incentives to stay healthy.

In one group, where they are hoping to have a city recreational facility opening soon, there was concern over the cost of participation (recommendation for a sliding scale) and the lack of locations in some parts of the city. A provision of childcare during workouts would make this healthy choice an option for many more parents. They were also advocating for more free or low-cost activities for children and families.

At the Focus Group Summit meeting May 29<sup>th</sup>, a resource directory and wellness programs at work sites received strong support from representatives of all four focus groups.

#### **Relates Issues: Loss of community**

Uninformed about available resources

#### **Relates Issues: Poor Health Habits**

Inactivity, fast foods (improper eating), drugs

### **PRACTICING HEALTHIER LIFESTYLES**

It was clear that practicing healthy or healthier lifestyles was a goal of all the groups. This included good nutrition (eating the right foods, using fresh vs. processed ingredients and preventing contamination) paying attention to health (regular check-ups for both children and adults, vaccinations, good hygiene, and protection from injury), and finally an acknowledgement that “changing ourselves” is key (knowing what I want to be or have, healthy relationships, and self discipline).

The Summit added mentoring (walking, parenting, wellness, a buddy system) and having 2 parents in the household whenever feasible. They noted that current welfare rules tend to punish dads and help is needed in this arena.

#### **Relates Issues: Poor Health Habits**

Inactivity, fast foods (improper eating), drugs

#### **Relates Issues: Inability to Focus**

Depression/Stress (loss of sleep, worry, overwhelm)

### **BETTER ACCESS TO BASIC HEALTH CARE**

Another arena of direct health concern was appropriate access to basic care. This included better dental health; again, better school lunches, assistance for seniors and having a better rapport with local health centers or clinics, with more doctors available at better rates. Some mentioned free or affordable care, particularly dental, possibly through dental insurance, and better, more affordable health insurance overall. At the Summit, even more emphasis was placed on having affordable health care.

### **PARENT INVOLVMENT IN CHILDREN’S EDUCATION**

The importance of being involved with your children and in their education as keys to family health was brought out numerous times and one group’s suggestions were detailed and worth sharing. They recommended paying attention to your kids and telling them when they are doing something good, watching what they are watching on TV, involving fathers and extended family as well as others outside the family, keeping guns away from children, utilizing Big Brothers/Big Sisters, holding a parenting fair in the park, a newsletter for parents and kids, and starting a program called “Catch Me Doing Something Right.” Additional classes to support the family were also recommended, everything from family communication and classes on marriage to actual job training.

A lengthy discussion during the Summit placed strong emphases on the issue of having fathers involved in their children’s lives, even if it had become untenable to keep the family together (due to an abusive situation, for example). The group recommended making dads accountable for more than just child support, helping them (vs. punishing them) through parenting training and other incentives to be involved. This kind of help could be made available in the evenings, at schools and through churches.

**Related Issues: Times Pressures**

Caring for kids with little time, not enough time for all responsibilities

**REDUCING STRESS**

Stress came up in the first group as a primary barrier to keeping healthy and the later groups echoed this. However, all groups had ideas on how to manage stress and stay healthy, clearly realizing it is something one must take charge of personally. Ideas included managing your time (keeping a schedule, having a routine for family care), both working and taking time off from work, keeping physically active, listening to music, working to keep relationships healthy through communication, love, and understanding and simply knowing your family is health. One group expanded on this to an area they called “Think and Do Good Things.” By this, they meant to focus on good, think about God, set goals, make positive changes, set a good example for your kids and your neighbors, and use good discipline. They also pointed out that stress is a global issue, not just one for Denver or the U.S.

Both parents and grandparents at the Summit mentioned the need for respite help with their children. Many said the highlight of the evening was having childcare and being able to talk to adults! They will be looking into the possibility of child-care cooperatives. They also requested that any help available through churches be neutral, without “preaching,” because many who come for help come from differing faiths.

**Related Issues: Times Pressures**

Exhaustion, family responsibilities vying with work responsibilities, no time for self or to stay organized

**SUPPORTS FOR BASIC FINANCIAL SUCCESS**

It probably would have been unusual for “money” not to show up somewhere, but it was less apparent than other items, with only a few key comments from two of the groups. The Grandparents and Kin group pointed out the high financial stress on grandparents when they have children on rotating schedules of food stamps and must take up the slack in between. In addition, the extremely low amount of financial aid to kin vs. foster parents is discouraging. Overall, they also noted that the community does not offer much support to the many grandparents raising their grandchildren. The other group suggested giving parents a day off, proving help for people to start a business, as unemployment runs high among these parents, and recommended people both get help when they find themselves out of a job and use their freer time to volunteer in the community, maintaining a certain level of good mental health while struggling with unemployment. While they called it “The Dream,” they did note that parenting is full-time and deserving of being a paid job.

There was a third group whose data could easily fall under the category of “help for working people.” However, this group clearly categorized their four items (better job opportunities, better salaries, having money to just spend, and lower car insurance rates) as the result of citizens being more involved in their government.

At the Summit, the idea of being able to buy vitamins with food stamps was brought forth during a discussion around issues of health and fatigue.

**Related Issues: Economic Stressors**

Stress of work/low pay, stress of lost job, bills, plus time stress – getting to work on time after handling home responsibilities

**COMMUNITY RESPONSIBILITY FOR NEIGHBORHOODS**

Again, the groups took responsibility for working on their own issues with suggestions for block parties, neighborhood yard clean ups, intergenerational projects and joining Neighborhood Associations. They saw potential in building stronger support groups, more community involvement, holding neighborhood potlucks and finding ways to occasionally have someone cook for the family to allow more time for socializing with both family and friends. They also realized that solving the loss of activities that students love in school, such as music/arts, sports and extra activities would require their personal involvement. They again saw this as they expressed the need for better schools where their children could actually learn. Other issues they saw as “community responsibility,” requiring neighbors to get more involved, included reducing the large number of liquor stores in the neighborhood, lowering the crime rate, having clean parks, getting out the vote (more than just 40%), safety (such as neighborhood watch), and helping to bring more family-oriented places to the neighborhood.

**Related Issues: Loss of Community**

Not knowing our neighbors (due to mobility, cultural differences, lack of courtesy), uninformed about available resources

**MORE EFFECTIVE CITY GOVERNMENT**

The groups did see a helpful role for city government in dealing with traffic control in residential areas and better bus transportation or mass transit, providing needed trash containers and otherwise reducing overall pollution, improving seniors’ housing, assisting with lower housing costs (as many spend far more than the recommended maximum one-third of their income for housing), and – a particular sore point in Northeast Denver – the acquisition of a grocery store (perhaps in the long-promised redevelopment of the old Dahlia shopping center). Two groups also noted the need for water conservation.

In discussing the role of city government at the Summit, better bus transportation was the primary focus.

**Related Issues: External Factors**

Pollution, political agendas, high cost of decent housing (including landlords who don’t fix things)