

Improving Outcomes:

Engaging Faith-Based Organizations to Reach At-Risk Moms and Families

Overview

Faith-based initiatives are those in which faith-based organizations (FBOs) play an active role in an initiative to impact their members and the surrounding community. FBOs are establishments such as churches, mosques, temples and synagogues, and social service establishments such as Lutheran Social Services.

Why Engaging Faith-Based Organizations Works

Many at-risk families do not immediately trust and respond to information provided by outside agencies. Information provided through a community-based FBO has greater credibility to those in the community, especially when endorsed by the leader and led by community members.

It is a unique opportunity to engage community leaders who are well-known and respected. Once the FBO leader decides to support the initiative, it becomes easier to get the attention of others.

It is especially useful in engaging communities that have strong ties to their FBOs, such as African American and Hispanic communities. The stronger an individual's personal ties to a FBO, the more likely they'll be to act on initiatives presented to them through their FBO.

Examples

The Leading Ladies Initiative is a project of the Minority Health Coalition of Marion County and Indianapolis Healthy Start, which works with leading ladies (many of whom are pastors' wives) to spread important key messages about infant health and mortality throughout their community. Involving churches' leading ladies in community programs is an effective way to reach new audiences and build strong partnerships.

Safe Sleep Sundays is a community-based outreach initiative that provides education on the importance of safe sleep to at-risk communities through their local churches. On a Safe Sleep Sunday, the church or FBO might have a faith leader speak about the importance of how and where infants sleep, display a model crib, and/or have materials and resources available for members.

Mothers Outreach Mentoring Service (MOMS) is a ministry program in which volunteers mentor at-risk pregnant women. Mentors educate the women about issues related to pregnancy and the post-partum period, connect women to resources, and offer support and encouragement throughout the pregnancy.

Essential Components of Faith-Based Initiatives

These tips will help strengthen your relationship with faith-based organizations and form a successful partnership.

- FBOs should play an active role in planning and implementing the program. They have insight into their community and know what kinds of approaches and messages will be most effective.
- Having the FBO leader (pastor, rabbi, imam etc.) endorse the program will give it credibility.
- Find and build a relationship with a main contact person who will represent the FBO and ensure that accurate information about the program gets out to members.
- Acknowledging or incorporating the faith and beliefs of the FBO will make the program relevant and valuable to its members.
- Share your program outcome data with your contacts from the FBO, and solicit their input as you interpret and report it.

For more information, contact

Indiana Perinatal Network
1991 E. 56th Street
Indianapolis, IN 46220-3411
Tel: (866) 338-0825
Fax: (317) 924-0831
Email: ipn@indianaperinatal.org
www.indianaperinatal.org