

UNITY 2008 HELD JUNE 16-19 IN ALBUQUERQUE

Community health workers from 28 states, the District of Columbia, and seven Native American Nations/Tribes attended The Center for Sustainable Health Outreach's annual Unity Conference June 16-19, 2008 at the Hotel Albuquerque at Old Town in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The conference attracted more than 225 participants, the majority of whom were Community Health Workers (CHWs).

The Unity 2008 Conference theme, "Community Health Workers: The Winds of Change—From Grass Roots to Ground Breaking Public Health Professionals" noted the necessity of a professionally recognized and respected field for community health workers, especially as they strive to meet the demands of a changing health care system, decreased funding, and increasingly diverse populations.

On the first day, Unity 2008 opened with a breathtaking cultural prayer and dance performed by Jackie Bird and her two sons, Gordon and Sheldon, of the Dakota-Hidatsa Tribe of Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Co-Directors, Jackie Scott and Susan Mayfield-Johnson, then welcomed participants to Unity 2008 and emphasized that Community Health Workers must realize that there is power in unity. In her opening welcome greeting, Jackie Scott discussed how we could learn some important lessons from geese (excerpted from Angeles Arrien).

Fact 1 – As each goose flaps its wings, it creates "uplift" for the birds that follow. By flying in a "V" formation, the whole flock adds 71% greater flying range than if each bird flew alone.

Lesson: People who share a common direction and a sense of community can get where

they are going quicker and easier if they are traveling on the thrust of one another.

Fact 2 – When a goose falls out of formation, it suddenly feels the drag and resistance of flying alone. It quickly moves to the back of the formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the bird immediately in front of it.

Lesson: If we have as much sense as a goose, we stay in formation with those headed where we want to go. We are willing to accept their help and give our help to others.

Fact 3 – When the lead goose is tired, it rotates back into the formation, and another goose flies to the point position.

Lesson: It pays to take turns doing the hard tasks and sharing leadership. As with geese, people are interdependent on each others' skills, capabilities, and unique arrangements of gifts, talents, and resources.

Fact 4 – The geese flying in formation honk to encourage those up front to keep their speed.

Lesson: We need to make sure our honking is encouraging. In groups where there is encouragement, the production is much greater. The power of encouragement (to stand by one's own heart or core values and encourage the heart and core of others) is the quality of honking we seek.

Fact 5 – When a goose gets sick, wounded, or shot down, two geese drop out of formation and follow it down to help and protect it. They stay with it until it dies or is able to fly again. Then they launch out with another formation or catch up to the flock.

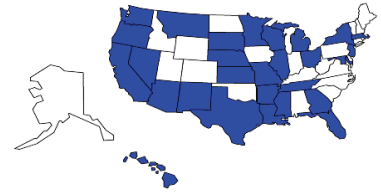
Lesson: If we have as much sense as geese, we will stand by each other in difficult times as well as when we are strong.

The first plenary session highlighted at least ten different local, state, and national Com-

munity Health Worker networks and coalitions. The American Association of Community Health Workers then shared their progress, including the formal and official adoption of the mission, vision, bylaws, and code of ethics. The final plenary session had Community Health Workers and supporters engaging in a lively discussion around CHW credentialing and legislation.

Day Two consisted of several skill-building and breakout workshops. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offered an 8-hour intensive skill-building workshop on Using a Training-of-Trainers Model to Prepare Community Health Workers/Promoters to Use the Road to Health Toolkit on Primary Prevention of Type II Diabetes. Participants received preliminary copies of the toolkit to take back to their communities. Also offered was a 6-hour intensive Krav Maga self-defense workshop. Krav Maga (Hebrew for "contact combat") has been recognized as the most efficient self-defense system for real-life situations, emphasizing practical defenses against real attacks. Based on simple principles and instinctive movements, this reality-based system is designed to teach real self-defense in the shortest possible time. Participants learned to defend against common chokes and grabs from all angles, punches and kicks, and weapons such as guns, knives, and sticks. Also emphasized is how to function under the stress, shock and adrenaline rush of a sudden, violent encounter.

Breakout sessions on advocacy and training were presented, and skill-building sessions on understanding PowerPoint, how people realistically change, and incorporating health messages through song and dance were also offered. Poster presentations were tendered, followed by two introductory dance



sessions, Latin Dance and Samoan Dance.

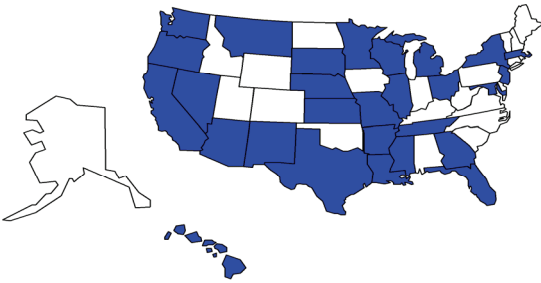
The evening reception was set outside in the courtyard, against the backdrop of the setting sun on the Sandia Mountains. After Milta Franco was honored with the Esther M. Holderby Dedicated CHW Award, dancing and karaoke broke out under the evening stars.

The final day of Unity 2008 consisted of several skill-building sessions. All day intensive sessions on Using a Training-of-Trainers Model to Prepare Community Health Workers/Promoters to Use the Road to Health Toolkit on Primary Prevention of Type II Diabetes and Krav Maga were repeated, and four ½ day skill building sessions, the Power of Learning: Gain the Skills to Really Go Red, Incorporating Basic Sign Language Vocabulary for Your Clients, Basic Tobacco Cessation Intervention Certification, Presentation and Facilitation Skills, and Creating A Code of Ethics for CHWs: Policy and Practice were offered.

Conference evaluations noted excellent speakers and sessions. Conference participants appreciated the change of location to the western side of the United States, and many reflected on the diversity of the conference participants. While many did not feel that there were enough out-of-conference activities, several conference participants snuck in hot air balloon rides and sessions of white water rafting in nearby Taos to end their New Mexican Unity experience. Announcements for Unity 2009 are forthcoming. Look for the Mark Your Calendar Postcards and Call for Abstracts as we celebrate Unity's 10th Year Anniversary.

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Unity 2008 Participants' Home States



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