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Promising Practices



Women, Children & Adolescents

Preventing Bullying in Schools Through Partnerships

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Bullying prevention is an issue of national concern. In early 2011 President Obama convened the first-ever White House Conference on Bullying Prevention to discuss how the issue affects communities across the country and to advance strategies to reduce instances of bullying. Although bullying was once regarded as a rite of passage, school administrators, parents and public health professionals are now looking at it through a more critical lens. Research has shown that bullying has adverse effects on the quality of life of both the bully and the victim and that one in three school-aged children is affected.¹

For nearly a decade the Highmark Foundation, a private foundation and an affiliate of Highmark Inc., has been funding school-based bullying prevention efforts. The Foundation launched a major children's health promotion project in 2006, Highmark Healthy High 5, with one of its main initiatives focusing on school-based bullying prevention. The bullying prevention initiative employs basic tenets of a public health approach in its programs and devotes resources to collecting and analyzing data on these programs to refine strategies as needed throughout the initiative's five-year duration.

The central focus of the Highmark Foundation's bullying prevention initiative

was the implementation of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP) in schools within Highmark's 49-county, Pennsylvania service region. The initiative represents the largest implementation of the OBPP in the United States. The public health approach used to successfully implement this model bullying prevention program on such a large scale can be summarized in six main steps:

1. Build a coalition.
2. Follow an evidence-based program.
3. Monitor and evaluate that program.
4. Adapt, modify and enhance it as needed.
5. Sustain the program with fidelity.
6. Report the impact.

THE COALITION

The public health-oriented coalition that was created and funded as part of the bullying prevention initiative is led by the Highmark Foundation and includes:

- Susan Limber, PhD, professor at Clemson University's Institute on Family and Neighborhood Life,
- Olweus program founder, Dan Olweus of the University of Bergen, Norway,
- bullying experts at the Center

of Health Promotion and Disease Prevention at the Windber Research Institute (WRI), and the Center for Safe Schools, affiliated with the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

In order to reduce bullying and to increase schools' capacities to prevent bullying, the coalition focused on implementing two programs in many Pennsylvania schools: Highmark Healthy High 5 HALT!® A Bullying Prevention Program, which is managed by the Windber Research Institute; PA CARES (Creating an Atmosphere of Respect and Environment for Success), which is managed by the Center for Safe Schools. The Highmark Foundation Bullying Prevention Institute, also created and managed by the Highmark Foundation with content development and program management by WRI, supports schools adopting or interested in adopting the OBPP. All programs were designed to bring the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program to schools in Highmark's service region and to support effective program adoption.

Highmark Foundation's ability to work closely with the experts who comprised the coalition was critical to the coalition's success. The group was highly instrumental in identifying the essential factors to address in order to achieve the initiative's goals of strengthening the

bullying prevention capacity of schools across a wide geographic area and consistently decreasing instances of bullying in these schools. The coalition also set priorities for the initiative, including the emphasis on evaluating the initiative's programs from the start of their implementation.

Another factor crucial to the success of the initiative was Highmark Foundation's decision to engage leading experts in the field of bullying prevention and integrate efforts already being made in Pennsylvania. Prior to joining the coalition, the Center for Safe Schools had already made progress in building a network of certified OBPP trainers to assist schools, however limited resources led to fragmentation. In addition, Clemson University offered experts in bullying prevention, and WRI supplied highly experienced trainers who had been studying the factors of successful OBPP implementation. The funding coalition members received from the Highmark Foundation enabled these organizations to leverage their expertise in a more targeted manner. Moreover, the existing capacities of the coalition members gave the Highmark Foundation initiative an advantageous footing for efficient implementation and accurate evaluation.

THE OLWEUS PROGRAM

Though the Foundation investigated several bullying prevention models for the initiative to employ, none rose to the level of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program. OBPP is the only bullying prevention-focused program to be designated a "BluePrints" for Violence Prevention program, a designation made by the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence at the University of Colorado. With Highmark Foundation funding, the coalition worked to help Pennsylvania schools implement the two main efforts centered on the evidence-based Olweus Bullying Prevention Program and began collecting data for evaluation in the 2007 - 2008 school year.

Schools in Highmark Foundation's service area either were invited to participate in the initiative or they applied directly for support. Since 2006, 427 schools have

implemented the OBPP through their participation in the initiative. From the outset, the timeline for implementation was highly bound by the school calendar, which helped to keep the work on track despite the tight deadlines. In some instances activities had to be scaled back to match available resources and capabilities. Over time, the coalition built bullying prevention capacity within schools by providing scholarships that grew the network of certified OBPP trainers. As the funding organization, the Highmark Foundation expected results from the coalition partners at Clemson, WRI and the Center for Safe Schools. These partners were required to meet the obligations related to their roles managing the bullying prevention programs as well as to serve as effective members of the coalition. The Highmark Foundation notes that it was precisely the partners' programmatic expertise that allowed them to be such effective members of the coalition.

THE RESULTS

The Foundation succeeded in one of its primary goals of building bullying prevention capacity within its service region. The coalition members' extensive reporting and evaluation of this initiative will enable new OBPP implementation efforts to better adapt the Norwegian model to US schools. The large-scale implementation of Highmark Foundation's OBPP initiative allowed the coalition to collect a large amount of data that will be helpful to others who want to emulate its success. To further support those schools and others wanting to better understand the impact of the OBPP model, networking workshops and school administrator retreats are continuing through Foundation funding.

The extensive evaluation supported by the Foundation provides empirical evidence that bullying prevention investments yield results. The coalition has implemented numerous surveys to evaluate the initiative, with results demonstrating significant reductions in bullying and other positive outcomes. Students report being bullied and bullying others less, and teachers report that they know how to respond better to bullying in their schools. The Highmark Foundation re-

leased the results of these surveys in a recent publication *Bullying Prevention: The Impact on Pennsylvania School Children*.

The results of the first savings analysis also demonstrated the impact of bullying prevention programs in Pennsylvania. *The Cost Benefit of Bullying Prevention: A First-Time Look at Savings* indicates there are cost savings for schools when they initiate long-term, evidence-based programs to prevent bullying. For the first time, the Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention at the Windber Research Institute looked at the anticipated financial impact of the expansion of the OBPP during a three-year period in the 49 Pennsylvania counties that the Highmark Foundation serves.

REPORT THE RESULTS

As a result of the Foundation's leadership, the \$9 million in grant funding over a five-year period and the public-private sector coalition, the Foundation's bullying prevention initiative exposed more than 210,000 students to the OBPP and anticipates \$17.1 million in potential school savings when the number of students who leave schools because of bullying is reduced.

Downloadable versions of *Bullying Prevention: The Impact on Pennsylvania School Children* and *The Cost Benefit of Bullying Prevention: A First-Time Look at Savings*, both featuring the latest data from the Pennsylvania OBPP implementation funded by Highmark Foundation, can be found by visiting www.highmarkfoundation.org.

ABOUT HIGHMARK FOUNDATION AND NIHCM FOUNDATION

The Highmark Foundation is a charitable, private foundation and an affiliate of Highmark Inc. supporting initiatives and programs aimed at improving community health. The Foundation strives to support evidence-based programs that have impact and work collaboratively to leverage funding to achieve replicable models. For more information, visit www.highmarkfoundation.org.

The National Institute for Health Care Management (NIHCM) Foundation works to engage health insurers in educational activities to improve their programs and policies on maternal, child and adolescent health issues. Our Promising Practices program was created to recognize these emerging and promising programs.

¹Flaspohler PD, Elfstrom JL, Vanderzee, KL, Sink HE, Birchmeier Z. "Stand by me: The effects of peer and teacher support in mitigating the impact of bullying on quality of life." *Psychology in the Schools*, 2009; 46(7): 636-649.