

Successful Service Improvement Project for Noble Health Center

In 2007 the Noble Health Center was awarded a small merit grant from the Maine CDC. The Advisory Board for the health center decided to use the award toward a project aimed at expanding the services offered in the Noble Health Center to include mental and reproductive health services. Kini Tinkham and Cindy Flye from the SBHC at Maranacook met with the Noble health center advisory board to talk about the process they used for their service improvement project for reproductive health service. It was great for us to be able to hear how smoothly things went for them. They shared with us a notebook outlining the steps they took to gather information and opinions from parents, students, and community members regarding issues related to sexuality and adolescents. Focus groups in each of their communities provided a forum for parents to discuss concerns, fears, and support services. It was a very productive meeting for us and gave us direction as we were planning to move forward. It was especially great for all of us to share the work as partners in the small community of school based health care.

Here is an outline of our step by step approach to expand the services offered in the Noble Health Center:

1. We formed a sub group to our existing advisory board to plan a procedure to follow to reach out to the community, students, and parents. Students and parents were part of this committee.

(Then the King Middle School flurry of national attention brought our plans to a halt. We decided to wait until things settled down before proceeding with our service improvements.)

2. A year later we changed our sponsoring agency to Avis Goodwin Community Health Center and we continued our expansion planning. The sub group met and decided to follow Maranacook's lead and survey students, parents, and community members using the focus group format. The goal of the project was to improve health services offered in the Noble Health Center and if indicated after the analysis was completed, propose to the MSAD #60 Board of Directors an expansion of services to include reproductive health care.
3. In the spring of 2009, Noble Health Center with the funding from the grant from the Maine CDC hired an independent research and evaluation firm, Oldham Innovative Research, to help develop a focus group protocol, conduct a series of focus groups, and report on the findings from the focus groups. The questions were fashioned from the report Kini and Cindy shared.
4. Interviewed were parents and community members, teachers, and students.
5. Despite many efforts to involve parents and community members, attendance was low during the community based focus group.
6. In June 2009 the findings from this project were presented to the school board and it was determined that we needed more parent and community input.
7. The sub group met again and decided the best way to reach community members who did not have children in the schools would be to contact the local selectmen, representatives, and senator. In July we invited all these people to a "legislative breakfast" at the high school. We talked about all the services offered at the Noble Health Center and had a discussion about risk factors and youth including reproductive health issues for youth today.
8. The next step was to conduct a parent survey from the district web page using Survey Monkey and discuss the findings of this survey in an open forum. Parents were made aware of the survey through the connect-ed system with a telephone call to each household.
9. The open forum was scheduled in September after the high school open house and approximately 30 people were in attendance. People were for the most part upset about the Minors Rights to Confidential Health Care. Parents were feeling that introducing reproductive health services under this law was undermining their authority as parents. Most were not aware of this state law. Another concern was

around emergency contraception with the perception this was the “abortion pill”. They felt that more parents needed more information so we conducted another survey on the district web page once again using Survey Monkey.

10. Two weeks later at an open school board meeting with approximately 130 people in attendance the results of this survey were presented to the school board and the community. High School student’s grades 9-12 participated in the survey as well as parents, teachers, and other community members. The response to this survey was significantly higher than the first one. Again, the greatest concern was about the minor’s rights to confidential health services. The results favored the expansion of reproductive health services.
11. At the next School Board meeting approximately 130 people were again in attendance. Everyone was given a number and assigned into a group for a round-table discussion. There were 5 questions around adolescent risk taking behaviors and how reproductive health services in the Noble Health Center would impact the MSAD #60 community. One person from each group was chosen to report out the findings of the group. One school board member was in attendance at each table. Several students also participated. The school board members decided to table a vote until the next meeting so they could review the round-table discussions.
12. Finally with a 5 to 4 vote the school board voted to expand health services in the Noble Health Center to include Mental and Reproductive Health services. An addendum was added at the last second to not allow the distribution of emergency contraception.

Success and Lessons Learned:

Throughout this whole process every effort was made to educate the public about the Minor’s Rights to Confidential Health Care and other concerns parents had. Thank you in a very big way goes to Kini Tinkham and Cindy Flye who were in attendance for at least two very late meetings. They were both enormously helpful articulating factual information and helping the board to understand that school based health care is a new frontier; and we may not all look the same but the work we do to keep our students in Maine healthy and in school is the same. It was an AHA for some of the board and community members to discover that school based health care is really a very important piece of health reform. The spirit of partnership between Noble and Maranacook only demonstrated to me the importance of keeping together our Maine Assembly on School Based Health Care for the good of us all.

I think the process was slow, sometimes painful, gratifying as well and definitely done the right way to include as many people as wanted to be heard and involved. We especially tried to educate the public about the incorrect perception of abortions as part of the reproductive health services in our school based health centers. I am not sure where the disconnect was with the last minute addendum about emergency contraception but it certainly has impacted our ability to provide comprehensive, confidential reproductive health services and I must mention receive title X funding. This is a problem. For many reasons the superintendent will not bring this before the board at this time. We will communicate this problem back to the school board in the spring when we submit our “State of the Health Center” report and be sure that each member completely understands how emergency contraception differs from RU-486. All in all we are ahead of where we were and we intend to maintain that the Noble Health Center is dedicated to the health and well-being of everyone. We carry on!

P.S. Overall the media was not so biased in their reporting this time. A very good sign in the whole scheme of things!