

Whatcom County Community Health Worker Initiative

Latino Community Voice: Community Conversations in Sumas, Everson, and Nooksack Whatcom County, WA



August 6, 2018

Special thanks to the Chuckanut Health Foundation, Group Health Foundation, PeaceHealth, United Way of Whatcom County, and the Whatcom Community Foundation for supporting the Whatcom County CHW Initiative.



We welcome your questions, comments and suggestions.
Please contact the Whatcom Alliance for Health Advancement at 360.788.6594 or info@whatcomalliance.org.

Learn more about WAHA's CHW Initiative at: whatcomalliance.org/chw/

Background

The Whatcom Alliance for Health Advancement (WAHA) is spearheading a Community Health Worker (CHW) Initiative for Whatcom County, and conducted a community assessment. In March 2018, the [CHW Assessment Report](#) was distributed via email and WAHA's website, and was reviewed and discussed at a stakeholder meeting.

The assessment findings led to three recommended strategies for Whatcom County:

1. Increase Whatcom's CHW capacity through training and coordination, including the possibility of an ongoing CHW network or collaborative.
2. Continue to explore a Latino CHW initiative in Sumas, Everson, and Nooksack (SEN).
3. Establish regular communication with the North Sound Accountable Community of Health, Area Health Education Center for Western Washington, Foundation for Healthy Generations, and other regional or state organization to identify opportunities for CHW workforce or program development.

While progress has been made on all three strategy areas, this report focuses on exploring a Latino CHW initiative with the Latino community in Sumas, Everson, and Nooksack (SEN). This phase of work consisted of more focused learning from community members directly about existing assets, needs, and "natural helpers."

Methodology



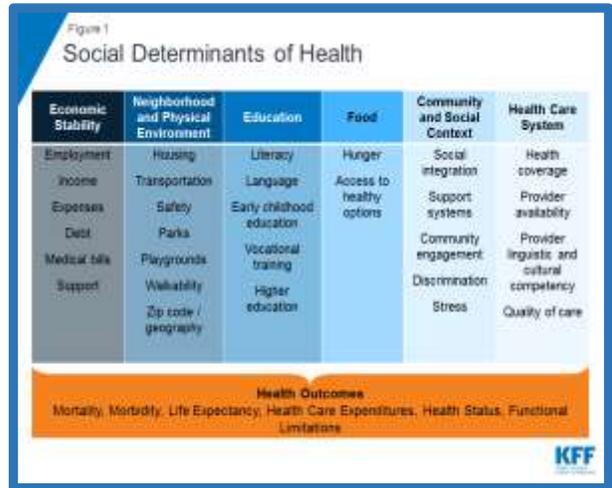
Building on the many informational interviews conducted during the initial assessment, WAHA partnered with the Nooksack Valley School District (NVSD) to hold a meeting in Everson, Sumas, and Nooksack in April and May 2018. Because school vacation and the heaviest season for agricultural work are in the summer, we intentionally completed all meetings by early June.

WAHA chose to hold the meetings in community locations outside of the schools based on the school district's experience that the three towns have individual identities and see themselves as separate communities. District personnel also observed that holding meetings at schools created a perception that the effort was school-sponsored, when in fact it was intended as a community-wide event.

All meetings were held in the evenings while dinner and childcare were provided. Meetings were conducted entirely in Spanish, and a total of 20 adults participated. School district

personnel were absolutely critical to promoting the meetings and encouraging community members to attend.

The introductory part of the meeting included sharing a schematic of the social determinants of health, which we described as various aspects of life that impact our health. The six areas, based on a construct from the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation.¹ We touched on this because we wanted to convey that WAHA’s definition of health is more than just getting health care, and to give a broad frame for participants’ thinking and discussion about community issues.



The same three questions were posed at each meeting. Taking an asset-based approach, the first two questions were:

- What are PLACES that are valuable to the community, and help with any of these areas [reference to social determinants of health schematic]?
- Who are the PEOPLE who are helpers in the community [trusted community members who other people go to for information or advice]?

The third question was:

- What would make the Sumas, Everson, Nooksack area a better place to live?



WAHA reviewed the responses from all three meetings and identified common themes. With these themes identified, we “circled back” for verification and prioritization, using two approaches:

- 1) We held a fourth discussion on June 7th at the Everson elementary school, integrating it into the end-of-the year meeting of the NVSD’s Parent Literacy Night for Latino families. About 25 adults participated in this meeting, reviewing and discussing the common themes and prioritizing with “dot voting” (two dots per adult).
- 2) We conducted a very brief survey using pre-stamped postcards that could be mailed to WAHA. Because there were relatively few people at the meetings, it seemed important to create a way for more people to express their views, even if only by convenience sampling. At the June 7th meeting, we requested that participants think of 1-3 *specific*

¹ See www.kff.org/disparities-policy/issue-brief/beyond-health-care-the-role-of-social-determinants-in-promoting-health-and-health-equity/

people they would ask to complete and mail in the postcard surveys. NVSD staff and the owner of La Gloria market in Everson also distributed numerous surveys, and a total of seventy-five postcards were distributed.

Findings

There was remarkable correspondence between the places and people identified as community assets. The following were mentioned by participants in at least two of the three meetings.

Places:

- The school
- Parks
- Food Bank
- Pharmacy
- Food stores
- A Watered Garden

People (all from NVSD):

- Sylvia Mendoza
- Becky Robertson
- Mrs. Walkinshaw
- Enedina (Head Start)



For the third question, participants tended to identify people in formal positions, such as school district staff or church leaders. In addition, it was difficult to translate this question into Spanish in a way that made sense to participants. For these reasons, we learned we needed to use examples and additional questions to get them thinking about friends, neighbors, co-workers or family members who played a “helper” role in the community. Six community members were mentioned by participants in at least one meeting; some were mentioned more than once. One-on-one follow up conversations with these individuals at a later date will explore their possible role as a CHW.

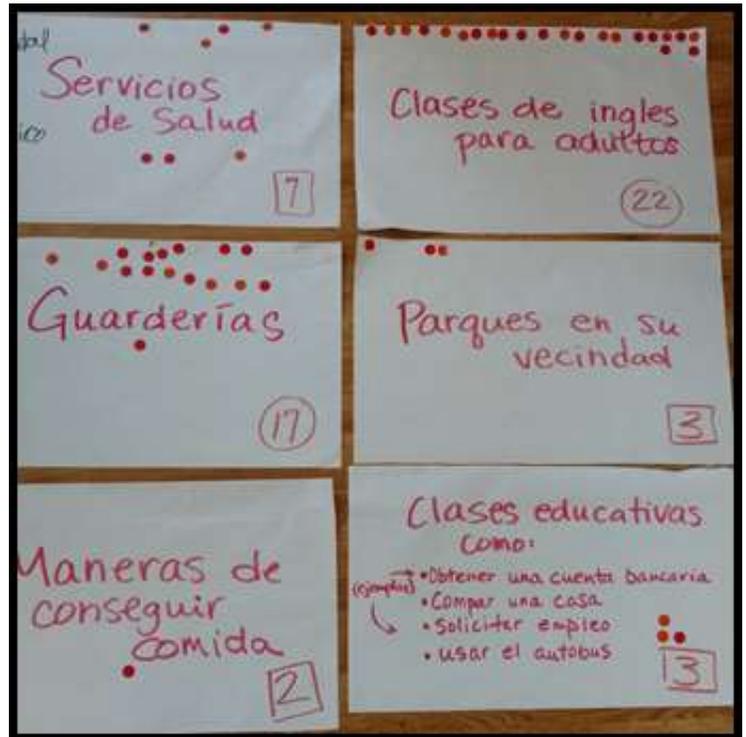
Ways to make the community a better place to live:

- Neighborhood parks
- Ways to get food [in SEN area]
- English classes for adults
- Childcare
- Health Services
- Classes on practical skills such as how to open a bank account, buy a house, apply for work, or ways to use the bus

The dot voting at the June 7th meeting clearly revealed that English classes for adults and childcare were seen as the two most important community needs. The returned surveys may show similar or different priorities.

Community priorities (number of “votes”):

- English classes for adults (22)
- Childcare (17)
- Health Services (7)
- Classes on practical skills such as how to open a bank account, buy a house, apply for work, or use the bus (3)
- Neighborhood parks (3)
- Ways to get food [in SEN area] (2)



Postcard Surveys:

Eleven of the 75 postcard surveys were returned (15% return rate). Nine of the respondents lived in Everson, two in Nooksack, and none in Sumas. English classes for adults was by far the item the most frequently selected (10 out of 11); child care and health care were each selected by 4 people. Though limited in number, the postcard survey results mirror the priorities identified at the June 7th meeting in Everson.

Other learnings from the process:

- Holding separate meetings in each town did not seem to be important for the Latino community.
- There is an extremely high level of trust of key school personnel; there are two or three staff members who were among the first people to be mentioned at every meeting. This reinforced our perception that NVSD is a powerful partner for this project.
- For both these reasons, in hindsight we realized that meeting at the schools would likely have been more familiar and comfortable, and would therefore have increased the number of participants.
- We noted a lack of familiarity with community resources. For example, in Sumas one participant stated she wasn't aware of the Senior Center (the meeting location), or that it also housed the public library and the Sumas food bank.
- Similarly, we were surprised by the lack of acquaintanceship among Latino community members at the meetings. For example, in one town, two women had children of the same age attending the same school, but they did not know each other.



Next Steps

Summer isn't a good time for meetings with the school district or many community members since it's the height of the agricultural season. Therefore, our immediate next steps will focus on learning about and strengthening relationships with organizations and programs working in the area:

- Investigate further what organizations or programs are already working on in the SEN area. This will help us find the opportunities to form partnerships and complement other programs; it will also ensure we aren't duplicating others' efforts.
- Specifically investigate what currently exists in terms of the two priority areas: English classes for adults and childcare.
- Nurture relationships with people and organizations that could contribute to working in the two priority areas. For example, Goodwill is interested in the possibility of offering English classes, and there is a Latina community member who runs a licensed home childcare in Everson.

In the Fall, we'll move to convening small, short-term workgroups around the two priority areas. This will involve identifying both community members and organizational staff to work together; we believe this approach will help with:

- Increasing the chance of the efforts' "traction" and success (for example, having community members involved with planning the classes - time, location, needed supports such as childcare – will likely increase the participation and viability).
- Capitalizing on the resources and expertise already present in the community (for example, the woman who provides childcare has offered to share her expertise on setting up a childcare and the licensing process).
- Enhancing community members' sense of efficacy related to impacting their local communities and the social determinants of health.
- Continuing to identify community helpers and leaders who could potentially become CHWs.

When or if the need emerges, WAHA will also convene a broader group of SEN stakeholders to learn more about interests, priorities, and opportunities for action related to health and well-being.

In the longer term, it remains WAHA's goal to partner with others to develop a structure for training and supporting community-based CHWs. We regard the community capacity building currently underway as helping to lay the foundation for that goal.

WAHA would like to thank the following people for their assistance and support:

- All the community members who attended the meetings, returned surveys, and shared their perspectives.
- NVSD staff for spreading the word about the meetings.
- Sylvia Mendoza of NVSD for encouraging community members' participation and allowing us to participate and engage community members at the final Parent Literacy Night of the school year.
- Cheryl Brown of A Watered Garden for hosting and promoting the first Everson meeting.
- Dixie Mitchell for helping to secure the Sumas Senior Center for the Sumas meeting.
- Jessica Alvaro, WAHA Community Health Worker.
- Petra Apreza of La Gloria for catering the delicious dinners.
- The organizations listed on the title page of this report for their generous financial support for this project.