

Family Living Programs

The Hmong Family Strengthening Project: A community approach [Tsev neeg hmoob kev sib haum xeeb: zej zog kev tshawb xav]

Situation [Ilub caij zoo li cas]

Hmong families in Wisconsin struggle to preserve their cultural identity, while finding harmony within mainstream society. Their children are often torn between the traditional way of life and the way of their peers. Because Hmong youth are the first generation of Hmong to use alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs, parents want support and skills to deal with this new situation. A reason often cited for increasing rates of substance abuse, school alienation, and violence among Hmong youth is the difficult transition into American culture. Through the Hmong Family Strengthening Project, Hmong families living in Eau Claire have gained skills in communication, support, setting limits and family rules, thus reducing the risks associated with youth substance use and delinquency.

Response [teb (lo lus)]

The Partnership for Strong Hmong Families (PSHF) was formed in November 2000 to create a family strengthening program for Hmong families with early adolescents. The community partners included a state and county UW-Extension team, representatives from the Eau Claire schools, local youth and family organizations, the Eau Claire police department, and respected members and leaders of the local Hmong community. The goal of this community partnership was to identify, adapt, implement and evaluate an evidence-based prevention program to reduce drug use and violence, and promote school success and positive family relations.

The UW-Extension Family Living team provided leadership for project implementation and evaluation. A two-year grant from the federal Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) helped support the project. Based on a needs assessment with local Hmong parents and youth, the Partnership selected a prevention program that best matched family needs and community resources and took the following steps to implement the Hmong Family Strengthening Project:

- Training for Partnership members: 16 were trained as facilitators and thus became certified to teach “The Strengthening Families Program: For Parents and Youth 10-14.”
- Culturally appropriate adaptations were made to the selected curriculum to reflect Hmong beliefs and traditions.
- The Parent and Family sessions were conducted in Hmong; the Youth session was conducted in English.
- Nine Partnership members volunteered their time teaching the two-hour class sessions each week and organizing the meal. Twelve university students volunteered their time providing childcare.

- Three six-week series of classes, reaching a total of 30 families with 6th-8th grade children, were completed. All sessions included free childcare, dinner, parent, youth and family sessions.

Outcomes [qhov tiav, qhov tshum]

Evaluation strategies for the Hmong Family Strengthening Project included pre, post, and 8-month post surveys and parent interviews.

Parents reported that:

- family conflict decreased significantly, and
- expressions of affection and warmth towards their children increased significantly.

Youth reported that:

- parents monitored them more,
- parents expressed more praise and rewards, and
- family conflict decreased significantly.

Youth also reported that their parents now have stricter attitudes about drug use, have clearer family rules and are more likely to enforce the family rules. When families graduated from the program in May 2002, Hmong parents requested more classes. A booster session was held for all families in March 2003. The Partnership continues to meet and has expanded to take on a wider range of community issues. The Strengthening Families Program: For Parents and Youth 10-14 continues to be available and has expanded to reach families beyond the Hmong community.

The UW-Extension team used a community-based approach to develop and implement this family oriented program, which has helped Hmong families develop better family relationships. The program has also helped build awareness of Hmong cultural norms that impact parent-child relations. The collaboration-based approach has made more resources available to Hmong families and created community-wide ownership to sustain the program.

The project has made the Eau Claire community more aware of the special challenges of parenting between two cultures. It provides a model of how to provide positive family experiences for other immigrant groups.

Contacts

Mary Huser
Program Specialist and State Liaison
UW-Extension Family Living Programs
(608) 265-3589
mhuser@facstaff.wisc.edu

Dianne Weber
Family Living Educator
Eau Claire County UW-Extension
(715) 839-4712
dianne.weber@ces.uwex.edu