



New Community Tools for Improving Child Health: *A Pediatrician's Guide to Local Associations*

John L. McKnight

The Asset-Based Community Development Institute
Institute for Policy Research
Northwestern University

Carol A. Pandak

Community Access To Child Health (CATCH) Program
American Academy of Pediatrics

CATCH

Community Access To Child Health

American Academy
of Pediatrics



**THE ASSET-BASED COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE**

The Asset-Based Community Development Institute is a research and training center focused on the identification and mobilization of local community resources for development and problem solving purposes. The institute's programs and publications are described on its web site (see page 4). The institute address is: Asset-Based Community Development Institute, Northwestern University, 2040 Sheridan Rd., Evanston, IL 60208.

A CATCH program is a broad-based community partnership that increases children's access to medical homes or specific health services not otherwise available. Every CATCH program must be led by, facilitated by, or have the significant involvement of a pediatrician.

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This document was prepared jointly by the Asset-Based Community Development Institute, Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University, and the American Academy of Pediatrics Community Access to Child Health (CATCH) Program for presentation at CATCH 2000, National CATCH Meeting, April 15-16, 1999, Oak Brook, IL.

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As pediatricians focus on projects to enhance the health of young people in their community, modern epidemiology is very helpful in guiding their efforts. The epidemiological research is quite clear in pointing toward five basic determinants of children's health status. They are:

- The individual's behavior
- Their social relationships
- Their physical environment
- Their economic status
- Their access to medical care

While there is considerable debate as to which determinants are most significant, it is clear that access to medical care is only one, and not the most significant determinant.¹ Therefore, effective children's health initiatives must include a focus that reaches beyond the clinic, hospital, or doctor's office.

Current Partnerships of CATCH Programs

The recognition of the need for this broader focus is exemplified by many of the children's health projects supported by the Community Access to Child Health (CATCH) Program of the American Academy of Pediatrics. These projects, conceived and designed by pediatricians in their communities, involve many initiatives that require community action outside of pediatric medical settings. For example, an analysis of CATCH programs funded over the past two years (1997 & 1998) indicates that nearly half involve initiating changes in the community as a way to increase access to children's health care. These community-oriented projects focus on issues such as:

Prevention of Psychosocial Disorders

- *Success for Geneva's Young Children* provides parenting education covering organic and psychosocial problems of young children between the ages of 0 to 8 years.

¹ See Dubois, R.J. (1959), *Mirage of Health*. New York, NY: Harper; Fuchs, V.R. (1975), *Who Shall Live?* New York, NY: Basic Books; McKeown, T. (1979), *The Role of Medicine*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

- *Prevention of Psychosocial Disorders in Youth through Behavioral Parenting Education* will assess methods to motivate families and agencies to invest the time, energy, and ultimately, the money to take a parenting course.

Influencing Child Development

- *Fit for Life* will be designed to mobilize community partnerships and collaborations to develop a comprehensive cadre of physical fitness activities for inner city children ages 6-12.
- *Community-based Child Care Center and Pediatricians-in-Training as Educators in Early Childhood Development* provides early childhood developmental and health education for parents, child care providers, and pediatricians-in-training.

Influencing Teenager Health Behavior

- *A Teen's Best Friend* is an innovative, comprehensive, and cost-effective program in primary and secondary prevention designed to identify and provide services for high-risk teens.
- *Promoting Empowerment of Adolescents in Creating Community Health Services* aims to engage adolescents to gather information from adolescents on the physical and mental health needs and perceptions of the adolescents in the community.

Diminishing Child Abuse and Violence

- *Children's Advocacy Center Outreach Program* will focus on child abuse prevention, evaluation, and treatment.
- *Trauma Family Clinic* will address high child morbidity issues resulting from psychosocial stress and family dysfunction rather than from physical trauma per se.

Dealing with Community Safety

- *Not One More* will support the development of a comprehensive guide to reduce pediatric firearm injury using preventive methods.

- *The Inside Out Playground* is a safe, creative, developmental play space that encourages parents to play with their young children in a stimulating environment while in the company of other parents.

Environmental Concerns

- *The Center for Lead Poisoning Prevention and Treatment* will create a Safe House that provides temporary housing for families of children with very elevated lead levels and will develop programs involving parent education.

Promoting Nutrition

- *Breastfeeding Coalition on the Eastern Shore* is a diverse, community-based coalition to promote and support breastfeeding.
- *Promoting Nutrition and Fitness from Birth to School Entrance* is planning a community-wide health promotion project for children age birth to five years aimed at preventing nutritional problems.

These projects reflect the pediatricians' recognition of the non-medical determinants of health as reflected in the "new morbidity." They are attempting to influence the behavior of young people, the social relations they experience, and the physical world that surrounds them.

When pediatricians attempt to influence these community health determinants, they must find allies outside the medical field. They develop community partners or create a community team in order to achieve their goals. This is the reason all the community-focused projects identified participants such as school officials, social agency leaders, public officials, media professionals, or business groups. These institutional leaders and their resources are being mobilized by the pediatricians in order to change the community and therefore improve child health. In a sense, these local institutions and their leaders are the tools used by the CATCH projects to build a healthier community. The project outcomes depend on how effectively these tools are mobilized and collaborate in the work to be done.

While many CATCH projects have been exemplary efforts to mobilize local institutions, there is one set of very powerful community tools they usually fail to involve. These are the local associations in the neighborhood. Associations are small groups and organizations of local people who join together for a wide variety of purposes from baseball leagues to block clubs to choirs to men's and women's clubs to churches. They are generally small, face-to-face groups where the members do the work and are not paid. This distinguishes them from the three kinds of local institutions – not-for-profit organizations, for-profit businesses, and governmental agencies. These three institutions are usually larger in scale, and the work is done by paid people. They are the traditional tools used in CATCH programs.

Local Associations as Partners in CATCH Programs

There are several reasons for pediatricians to begin using the local associational tools. First, local associations can reach and involve many more people in local action than the institutions can. Their combined members often represent a majority of people in the neighborhood.² Therefore, they can greatly magnify the number of people reached with new information or involved in community action.

Second, social science research has demonstrated that associations are usually the most significant vehicles for changing both the attitudes and behavior of local people.³ They set norms and provide incentives for new forms of action. Therefore, they are critical forms for shaping community attitudes about health.

Third, while most associations are focused upon one particular goal or interest, they consistently take on additional functions that reach beyond the members' primary purpose. For example, a baseball league may take on the maintenance of a local ball park, a women's social organization may raise money for cancer research, a veterans' organization may "Adopt a Highway" and clean the right of way, a youth

² For an exploration of the associations in a low-income urban neighborhood, see *Voluntary Associations in Low-Income Neighborhoods* by John Kretzmann, John McKnight, and Nicol Turner, available from the Publications Department, Institute for Policy Research, 2040 Sheridan Road, Evanston, IL 60208. It may be downloaded from the webpage at <http://www.nwu.edu/IPR/abcd.html>.

³ Susan A. Wheelan (1994). *Group Processes: A Developmental Perspective*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

group may visit homebound seniors, and a church group may create a fitness club. In many neighborhoods, a great deal of community improvement is the result of the primary and secondary activities of the local associations. Thus, associations represent a vital local vehicle for achieving community change or improvement.

In summary, associations have three important community functions:

- They reach a large number of people.
- They shape members' attitudes and behavior.
- They mobilize members to act on many different issues.

For these three reasons associations represent powerful new tools to use in planning and implementing child health projects.

Types of Local Associations

In most neighborhoods, local communities, or small towns, there are numerous associations of many types. However, they are not usually found in a directory. As a group, they tend to be invisible. Nonetheless, research on local associations indicates that the following types of groups are usually present:

Master List of Associations

1. Addiction Prevention and Recovery Groups

- Drug Ministry/Testimonial Group for Addicts
- Campaign for a Drug Free Neighborhood
- High School Substance Abuse Committee

2. Advisory Community Support Groups (friends of...)

- Friends of the Library
- Neighborhood Park Advisory Council
- Hospital Advisory Group

3. Animal Care Groups

- Cat Owners' Association
- Humane Society

4. Anti Crime Groups

- Children's Safe Haven Neighborhood Group
- Police Neighborhood Watch
- Senior Safety Groups

5. Block Clubs

- Condominium Owners' Association
- Building Council
- Tenant Club

6. Business Organizations/Support Groups

- Jaycees
- Local Chamber of Commerce
- Economic Development Council
- Local Restaurant Association

7. Charitable Groups and Drives

- Local Hospital Auxiliary
- Local United Way
- United Negro College Fund Drive

8. Civic Events Groups

- Local Parade Planning Committee
- Arts and Crafts Fair
- July 4th Carnival Committee
- Health Fair Committee

9. Cultural Groups

- Community Choir
- Drama Club
- Dance Organization
- High School Band

10. Disability /Special Needs Groups

- Special Olympics Planning Committee
- Local American Lung Association
- Local Americans with Disabilities Association
- Local Muscular Dystrophy Association

11. Education Groups

- Local School Council
- Local Book Clubs
- Parent Teacher Association
- Literacy Council
- Tutoring Groups

12. Elderly Groups

- Hospital Seniors Club
- Westside Seniors Club
- Church Seniors Club
- Senior Craft Club

13. Environmental Groups

- Neighborhood Recycling Club
- Sierra Club
- Adopt-a-Stream
- Bike Path Committee
- Clean Air Committee
- Pollution Council
- Save the Park Committee

14. Family Support Groups

- Teen Parent Organization
- Foster Parents' Support Group
- Parent Alliance Group

15. Health Advocacy & Fitness Groups

- Weight Watchers
- TOPS
- Neighborhood Health Council
- Traffic Safety Organization
- Child Injury Prevention Group
- Yoga Club
- YMCA/YWCA Fitness Groups
- Anti-violence Group
- Senior Fitness Club

16. Heritage Groups

- Black Empowerment Group
- Norwegian Society
- Neighborhood Historical Society
- African American Heritage Association

17. Hobby and Collectors Groups

- Coin Collector Association
- Stamp Collector Association
- Arts & Crafts Club
- Garden Club of Neighbors
- Sewing Club
- Antique Collectors

18. Men's Groups

- Fraternal Orders
- Church Men's Organizations
- Men's Sports Organizations
- Fraternities

19. Mentoring Groups

- After School Mentors
- Peer Mentoring Groups
- Church Mentoring Groups
- Big Brothers, Big Sisters
- Rights of Passage Organizations

20. Mutual Support Groups

- La Leche League
- Disease Support Groups (cancer, etc)
- Parent-to-Parent Groups
- Family-to-Family Groups

21. Neighborhood Improvement Groups

- The Neighborhood Garden Club
- Council of Block Clubs
- Neighborhood Anti-Crime Council
- Neighborhood Clean-up Campaign

22. Political Organizations

- Democratic Club
- Republican Club

23. Recreation Groups

- Kite-flying Club
- Bowling Leagues
- Basketball Leagues
- BodyBuilders Club
- Little League
- Motorcycle Clubs

24. Religious Groups

- Churches
- Mosques
- Synagogues
- Men's Religious Groups
- Women's Religious Groups
- Youth Religious Groups

25. Service Clubs

- Zonta
- Optimist
- Rotary Clubs
- Lions Clubs
- Kiwanis Clubs

26. Social Groups

- Bingo Club
- Card Playing Club
- Social Activity Club
- Dance Clubs

27. Social Cause/Advocacy Issue Groups

- Get Out the Vote Council
- Peace Club
- Hunger Organizations
- Vigil Against Violence
- Community Action Council
- Social Outreach Ministry
- Soup Kitchen Group

28. Union Groups

- Industrial (UAW)
- Craft Unions (Plumbing Council)

29. Veteran's Groups

- Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW)
- Women's Veterans Organizations

30. Women's Groups

- Sororal Organizations
- Women's Sports Groups
- Women's Auxiliary
- Mothers Board
- Eastern Star

31. Youth Groups

- After School Group
- 4-H
- Girl and Boy Scouts
- Junior Achievement
- Campfire Girls
- Boys and Girls Clubs
- Explorers Club
- Teen Leadership Club

How Local Associations can Support Local Child Health Initiatives

Engaging local associations in local child health efforts will significantly increase project success.

Generally, local associations can participate in community-based efforts in three ways:

1. Associations can serve as vehicles to communicate information, both to their membership as well as to the community at large, e.g., by distributing informational flyers.
2. Associations may be involved in planning a particular effort, e.g., by serving on a steering committee.
3. Associations may actively engage in the implementation of a community activity, e.g., by conducting a specific educational component of a program.

Planning for Associations' Participation in Health Projects

The project worksheet on the next page is a simple tool for planning how associations can be involved in a child health project. The worksheet lists all of the various types of associations. It then identifies the three ways associations can participate – communication, planning, and implementation. Using this matrix, project planners can think through the types of local groups that could help the project be successful.

**Local Association Involvement in
 Community-based Child Health Initiatives
 Project Worksheet**

Program name: _____

Levels of Engagement	Communicate	Plan	Implement
Association Types			
Addiction Prevention and Recovery Groups			
Advisory Community Support Groups			
Animal Care Groups			
Anti Crime Groups			
Block Clubs			
Business Organizations/Support Groups			
Charitable Groups and Drives			
Civic Events Groups			
Cultural Groups			
Disability/Special Needs Groups			
Education Groups			
Elderly Groups			
Environmental Groups			
Family Support Groups			
Health Advocacy & Fitness Groups			
Heritage Groups			
Hobby and Collectors Groups			
Men's Groups			
Mentoring Groups			
Mutual Support Groups			
Neighborhood Improvement Groups			
Political Organizations			
Recreation Groups			
Religious Groups			
Service Clubs			
Social Groups			
Social Cause/Advocacy Issues Groups			
Unions			
Veteran's Groups			
Women's Groups			
Youth Groups			

Using the Project Worksheet for Planning: An Example

An actual CATCH project is *Success for Geneva's Young Children*. It is described as an initiative intended to "provide parenting education covering organic and psychosocial problems of young children between the ages of 0 to 8 years."

Using the Project Worksheet, a project-planning group could discuss which associations might participate in the project, and what kind of participation would be possible. The completed worksheet might record the following decisions:

Program name: *Success for Geneva's Young Children*

Levels of Engagement	Communicate	Plan	Implement
Association Types			
Addiction Prevention and Recovery Groups			
Advisory Community Support Groups	X		
Animal Care Groups			
Anti Crime Groups	X	X	
Block Clubs	X		
Business Organizations/Support Groups	X	X	
Charitable Groups and Drives			
Civic Events Groups	X		
Cultural Groups	X		
Disability/Special Needs Groups	X	X	X
Education Groups			
Elderly Groups			
Environmental Groups			
Family Support Groups	X	X	X
Health Advocacy & Fitness Groups	X	X	X
Heritage Groups			
Hobby and Collectors Groups			
Men's Groups			
Mentoring Groups			
Mutual Support Groups	X	X	X
Neighborhood Improvement Groups	X		
Political Organizations			
Recreation Groups			
Religious Groups	X	X	X
Service Clubs	X		X
Social Groups			
Social Cause/Advocacy Issue Groups	X		X
Unions	X		
Veteran's Groups			
Women's Groups	X	X	
Youth Groups			

In this example, the project planners decided the selected associations could participate in the following ways:

- **Advisory Community Support Groups:** *Communicate* (e.g., Friends of the Library might request the library to place information in its newsletter, which is distributed to the community at large, and to post flyers in the library).
- **Anti Crime Groups:** *Communicate and Plan* (e.g., Children's Safe Haven Neighborhood Group and Police Neighborhood Watch could distribute informational flyers and serve on a steering committee).
- **Block Clubs:** *Communicate* (e.g., block clubs could inform their membership of available parenting classes. They can also disseminate information to the community at large).
- **Business Organizations:** *Communicate and Plan* (e.g., the Jaycees could communicate information to their members who in turn could pass it along to their employers and colleagues; they may also serve on a planning committee).
- **Civic Events Groups:** *Communicate* (e.g., Health Fair or Art Fair).
- **Cultural Groups:** *Communicate* (e.g., a drama club might create a community play to raise awareness of parenting issues and parenting classes).
- **Disability/Special Needs Groups:** *Communicate, Plan, and Implement* (e.g., for parents of children with asthma, the local American Lung Association could place ads in the local newspaper for parenting classes, could help plan a curriculum that includes the specific health issues of children with asthma, and coordinate a program to parents on a specific topic).
- **Family Support Groups:** *Communicate, Plan, and Implement*
- **Health Advocacy and Fitness Groups:** *Communicate, Plan, and Implement*
- **Mutual Support Groups:** *Communicate, Plan, and Implement*

- **Neighborhood Improvement Groups:** *Communicate* (e.g., the council of block clubs could adopt as a community project the dissemination of information about parenting classes by posting flyers, making phone calls, etc.).
- **Religious Groups:** *Communicate, Plan, and Implement* (e.g., a synagogue could communicate to its membership via an announcement during services, serve on a steering committee, and provide space for parenting classes).
- **Service Clubs:** *Communicate and Implement* (e.g., a service club might invite a particular project to address the club; service clubs can help implement programs with volunteers and financial support).
- **Social Cause Advocacy Groups:** *Communicate and Plan*
- **Unions:** *Communicate* (e.g., unions can disseminate information to members).
- **Women's Groups:** *Communicate and Plan*

In this example, the selection of certain association types to participate in the project, such as Family Support Groups and Health Advocacy and Fitness Groups, appeared self-evident. On the other hand, more creative thought was necessary to determine how association types such as Anti Crime Groups and Cultural Groups might function in relationship to the project.

As noted on the exemplary Project Worksheet, 16 types of associations were selected as likely to have an interest in *Success for Geneva's Young Children*. Of these, all 16 might serve the communication function; eight might serve the planning function, while seven might participate in implementation activities.

Identifying Local Associations

Rarely will you find a directory or ready-made list of local associations. Therefore, to connect local associations to child health projects you must locate associations and involve their leadership. There are four basic approaches to doing this:

1. Your contacts

Begin by listing all of the associations in which you are a member or participant as well as others that you may know. Often, this results in identifying 10 to 20 groups. Because you probably know members or leaders of many of these associations, a call to a personal associational contact or convening a meeting of several contacts is a good starting point. These contacts represent an excellent source of additional associations that might be involved, and who may be willing to recruit the people they know from these groups.

2. Contacts of well-connected citizens

Every community has some local residents who are very active in civic life and are well-known in community life. Asking several of these people to prepare a list of local associations and to contact people for each will result in a very substantial list of groups. By involving these connected citizens in identifying local groups, you may also be able to get them to join you in contacting associational leaders to discuss a project.

3. Meeting with an association

Identify one association of any kind and ask to meet with its members. When meeting with an association, ask each member to make a list of associations, clubs, groups, or organizations of which they are a member. Also request that they list a contact person for each group. Potential recruits for your project can then be identified. Describe your project to those present and ask them which association(s) on their lists might be interested in the project. By doing so, you may be able to identify potential recruits for your project. Ask each person whether they would be willing to invite one of the potential associational leaders to come to a project meeting.

4. Focusing on particular kinds of associations

The Master List of Associations (see pages 6 and 7) describes associations by type. As a project plan is developed, it may be clear that certain types of associations might be appropriate. For example, some women's organizations might be especially interested in teen pregnancy projects. Recreation and sports leagues might be attracted to fitness programs. Block clubs would probably be interested in community safety projects. Using the Master List of Associations, project designers can identify those types of associations of highest potential interest. The next step is to identify which of those associations are in the local community. The best methods for doing this are outlined in items 1 and 2 above.

In gathering names of local associations, consider contacting faculty members or graduate assistants at local colleges or junior colleges who could have their class identify local associations for a project. Because local associations are the basic components of "civil society," sociologists and political scientists may be especially interested in this kind of research.

As noted above, in recruiting project participants, it is especially effective to try to involve the people identifying associations in contacting the leaders of the associations. Usually, well-connected people who can identify many associations are just the right people to interest associational leaders in a project. Thus, the same people who help identify can also recruit if they are initially informed about and interested in the activities.

Summary

Engaging local associations in child health projects is not a difficult task. Only three basic steps are involved.

First, identify which types of associations might be usefully involved. The Project Worksheet is a simple guide to both identifying associations and deciding how each type of association could be involved.

Second, identify the particular associations in your community. This can be done based upon your own knowledge, knowledge of well-connected friends, members of an association to which you belong, or by a local college class.

Third, contact and recruit the leaders of the appropriate local associations. Often, the people who help you identify the associations will also be willing to contact and recruit their leaders.

The effort to take these steps will be well worth the time because they will result in your involving the most effective activators of local people – their associations.

Additional Assistance

If you have additional questions or would like consultation with your project design, you may contact:

Carol A. Pandak, EdD
CATCH Program Manager
American Academy of Pediatrics
141 Northwest Point Blvd.
Elk Grove Vlg, IL 60007
Ph: 800/433-9016, ext 4903
Fax: 847/228-5097

The Asset-Based Community Development Institute

Institute for Policy Research
Northwestern University
2040 Sheridan Rd
Evanston, IL 60208

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141 Northwest Point Blvd
Elk Grove Village, IL 60007
