



Spanish-Speaking Promotoras Build Community Support for Smokefree Multi-Unit Housing

The Success

Unidos Por Salud, a program of the California Health Collaborative, engaged Spanish-speaking residents of Woodlake, California, a small, rural community in Tulare County, in attempt to create support for smokefree Multi Unit Housing. During the campaign, residents were trained to become Community Health Workers, and in turn, educated their neighbors and other town residents about the dangers of secondhand smoke. Even though the campaign did not result in policy change, the Community Health Workers, or Promotoras de Salud (Promotoras), as they are called in Spanish, learned how to advocate for community issues, become more involved in local government and felt empowered in the process.

The Approach

Unidos Por Salud Project is a regional tobacco prevention program funded through the California Department of Public Health-California Tobacco Prevention Program. In 2018, the Coalition initiated a campaign by doing outreach to apartment complexes in hopes of setting up informational meetings about the dangers of secondhand smoke. Response from apartment managers was low, but gained traction thanks to a collaboration with one apartment manager who was responsive and supportive, and two educational presentations were held in the complex community room. The presentations offered a chance to share more information about secondhand smoke and recruit new Promotoras. The majority of the community outreach was done in Spanish, a language many residents were most comfortable with.

Once recruited and trained, the Promotoras surveyed apartment residents and participated in community events, such as the annual Cinco de Mayo celebration and an Easter event, during which they continued community outreach to event participants to educate them on the benefits of smokefree multi-unit housing and



State Senator recognizes Promotoras for their work at a special ceremony

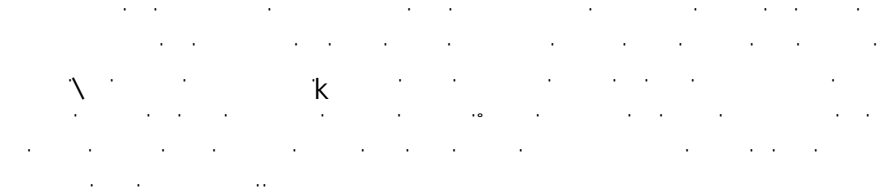
disseminate information materials. The Promotoras received a stipend for their work. Planning meetings were held during times convenient to the Promotoras – most of them mothers juggling childcare, jobs, and household responsibilities, and at parks where activists' children could play while the grown-ups strategized. "It was very important to hold family-friendly meetings and always have something for kids because no one had childcare and we wanted them to feel like they can come," said Celeste Ramos, the Unidos Por Salud organizer who spearheaded the campaign in Woodlake.

The Promotoras were all Spanish-speaking women who themselves lived in apartments and, due to this shared background, were easily able to connect with their Latino neighbors. Latinos make up 40 percent of Woodlake residents. The Promotoras also shared personal stories about the impact of secondhand smoke on them and their children. The group also met with the city manager and mayor, and, in January 2022, presented to the city council, but received a lukewarm response. The campaign ended in 2023 when funding ran out, but some of the Promotoras have remained engaged in local issues, regularly attending city council and school board meetings and speaking during the public comment section on the council agenda.

“We have to keep working for our goal and not give up,” said Cecilia Espinoza, one of the Promotoras who worked on Woodlake’s smokefree Multi-Unit Housing campaign. “Of course it was frustrating and disappointing to not get the law changed, but at the same time I feel like I’m more knowledgeable about how local government works and now understand how to get in touch with local officials.”

Key Takeaways

Make it easy for people to participate: y h o



Holiday events help to tie in fun events and include children: In planning an informational meeting at Woodlake apartment complex, the Promotoras knew they had to bring attention to the number of kids who live there. With Easter approaching, the Promotoras created a fun activities in which kids could participate. “While the kids were painting, we used the time to explain what we were doing, why it was important, and reinforce messaging that we could still pass a policy for the complex, even if the city wasn’t interested,” Ramos said.

Leverage connections to open doors: When Celeste Ramos began doing outreach to apartment complexes, she had a hard time getting anyone to respond to her requests. However, when

she connected with an employee of LifeSTEPS, a community organization already embedded in many local apartment complexes, she finally identified a complex who was interested. LifeSTEPS agreed to partner with Unidos Por Salud. They helped to promote the Easter event among their channels. Their event promotion and support helped spread the word about the campaign and the importance of smokefree multi-unit housing.

Celebrate the small wins: Even though a new citywide policy was not passed, organizers felt it was important to recognize the Promotoras’ work. They did this by asking the State Senator, who represents the area, to hold a ceremony and issue certificates to participants. “We wanted people to feel proud of their work,” Ramos said.

For more information, go to:
unidosporsalud@healthcollaborative.org

▶ **Check out the Center's Resources at organizingtoendtobacco.org**
 "How to Give Public Comment at City Council Meeting"
 "Tips for Engaging & Retaining Coalition Members"