

## **Asian Health Coalition Promotes Colorectal Cancer Prevention for Korean Seniors**

In 2011, RRF awarded a one-year, \$30,000 grant to the Asian Health Coalition of Illinois (AHC) to provide culturally competent education and outreach on colorectal health issues for Korean American seniors. Colorectal cancer is the second most commonly diagnosed cancer among Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. However, only 28 percent of this population, age 50 and older, gets screened.

The project involved a collaborative partnership between the Asian Health Coalition, the University of Chicago's Comprehensive Cancer Center, Hanul Family Alliance (a comprehensive social service organization for Korean Americans), and Community Health (a free nonprofit health clinic). Four of Hanul's staff participated in a full-day training session conducted by University of Chicago's Comprehensive Cancer Center in preparation for conducting the educational sessions.

The Asian Health Coalition created a linguistically and culturally competent education program and marketing materials in both Korean and English. Hanul staff used the materials to conduct two educational events about colorectal cancer. Although more than 200 Korean seniors expressed interest in attending, space constraints limited participation to the first 132 who signed up. At the sessions, home kits for testing fecal occult blood were distributed.

Eighty-seven percent of the participants completed pre- and post-session surveys. The completed surveys were analyzed by the University of Chicago's Office of Cancer Engagement and Disparities. Results showed significant improvement in knowledge and beliefs about colorectal cancer risk. Prior to attending the session, 73 percent of the participants reported they had never heard of a fecal occult blood test. Only eight percent had ever used a home kit. Fifty-seven percent of those who took a home kit completed and returned it. This rate is more than double the usual response rate for such screenings.

Asian Health Services contracted with Community Health to provide diagnostic treatment and colonoscopies for Korean seniors who did not have insurance. Three of the home tests were found to be positive. Two uninsured participants received colonoscopies; one had a polyp removed. The third participant who had health insurance was instructed to follow up with his primary care physician.

Based on the first year's success, in 2012, the Asian Health Coalition was awarded a second \$30,000 RRF grant to accommodate the growing number of Korean American seniors who have expressed interest in participating in similar education and screening events.

## Four Houses of Worship Make Accessibility Improvements

Over the past few months, four houses of worship completed accessibility improvements made with funding from RRF's Accessible Faith Grant Program.

Saint Mark Parish is a 1,500-member, Roman Catholic Church located on Chicago's near west side. Nearly one-third of this Hispanic parish is composed of seniors. In addition to many worship and fellowship opportunities, the church offers several programs and services to the community, including a twice-weekly food pantry, healthy eating programs, and health screenings through St. Mary of Nazareth Hospital.

Prior to receiving an Accessible Faith grant, the church building and annex, where many activities occur, was inaccessible to many users. The main entrance door was too heavy, existing ramp and railings were not compliant with accessibility requirements, and the asphalt leading to the entrance was in disrepair, making it both inaccessible and unsafe.

Thanks to a \$23,383 Accessible Faith grant, the parish now has a new main entrance with an accessible automatic door, a new ramp, handrails, staircase, and concrete walkway. The project was completed successfully on time and within budget. The parish was able to repair additional damaged concrete areas with the help of *pro bono* services.

The project director's final report included several stories that conveyed the sense of inclusiveness that parishioners now feel as a result of the accessibility improvements. The parish has also shared information about the Accessible Faith Grant Program with two other churches.

Saint Joseph Church is a 1,060-member, Roman Catholic Church located in Richmond. Seniors comprise nearly one-third of the parish membership. In addition to worship and several fellowship activities for seniors, the church also provides space to many community organizations that regularly use its facility. It hosts several self-help groups, offers temporary shelter, and serves as a site for flu shots.

To its credit, prior to receiving an Accessible Faith grant, the parish had made a number of accessibility improvements such as shortening or removing pews for wheelchair space, installing an assistive listening system, and putting in a chairlift. However, the chairlift had become obsolete.

The church received a \$26,362 Accessible Faith grant that enabled it to replace the obsolete chair lift with a vertical platform lift. The church was also able to restripe the parking lot to provide more handicapped parking spaces closer to the accessible entrance.

The project was successfully completed on schedule. The project's cost increased by 10 percent because more work was done than initially anticipated. A radiator heater needed to be relocated and the electrical system needed to be upgraded

to accommodate the electrical connection to the lift. However, the parish was able to raise the additional funds from auctions and pledges and received a loan from the Diocese of Rockford. Some parishioners volunteered their professional services to keep costs lower.

There has been much positive feedback on the project. Parishioners have expressed appreciation for the multi-level access and for the project's respect for the existing architecture. The report noted that members of the parish have been sharing their pride with others in the community.

Church of the Holy Nativity (CHN) is a 220-member, Episcopalian Church in Clarendon Hills. Seniors comprise 26 percent of the congregation. This is a very active congregation with many worship and fellowship opportunities as well as several community programs. CHN serves as a temporary shelter, hosts a women's club, and a Ham Radio Club with many senior members. The church has shown a commitment to prior accessibility improvements, including construction of a ramp and installation of automatic doors.

Prior to the Accessible Faith grant, the lower and upper levels of CHN's facility could only be reached by steep stairs. A \$30,000 Accessible Faith grant enabled the church to provide access to both levels. Originally, CHN planned to install a LULA (Limited Use/Limited Application elevator) to create an accessible main entrance and provide interior vertical access. However, the church and the Village of Clarendon Hills disagreed over an interpretation of the municipal accessibility code, and the Village insisted on a full elevator. Although CHN was eventually proven correct in its interpretation and a LULA would have met requirements, the church decided to install a full elevator anyway. The Village also required installation of sprinklers and soil and concrete testing, with which CHN complied.

The project was completed successfully, however at a cost of more than \$100,000 over the initial projection due to the revised plans and compliance with the Village. The congregation was able to raise the additional funds from its members.

The report eloquently expressed the way in which the congregation came together in an "extraordinary exercise in promise, hope, and endurance." It shared this advice: "Expect the unexpected. The project will take longer than you expect, even if you do everything right. And, no matter how hard you try, how smart you are, how dedicated your team, you probably won't do everything right after all." However, the parish is now proud to include the accessibility logo on all print and electronic communications.

The final report also included poignant comments from people who can now use the elevator. One gentleman who had to be carried up and down the steps prior to its installation conveyed a new sense of dignity. Another congregant in his mid-70's said, "If I was a little tired when I woke up on Sunday morning, I'd picture that staircase, and pull the covers back over my head. I always felt bad when I did that because I love this parish. I don't need to do that anymore, and that's really great!"

Ravenswood Evangelical Covenant Church is a 134-member congregation. Seniors comprise 20 percent of the membership. The church hosts a large monthly senior citizen group, provides counseling, and sponsors meetings of the community policing program. The church is also affiliated with two nearby senior residences operated by the Methodist Home. Members provide services at these facilities.

Activities are held on all four levels of the church building. However, prior to receiving a \$16,000 Accessible Faith grant, only the first level was accessible due to an obsolete, non-functioning elevator. With RRF funding, the church replaced obsolete electronics and other elements of the non-functioning elevator to restore it to use.

The project was successfully completed earlier than anticipated and under budget. The church was able to meet code requirements without having to make improvements to the door openers, which would have cost an additional \$6,150.

The final report provided examples of members of the church who are now able to return--one after recent surgery and another after being away for several years due to her inability to access the facility. The pastor indicated that attendance at coffee hour, which is a crucial time for the church's members and guests to connect and build relationships, has increased dramatically. The report said, "Our senior population is much more eager to join us now that the trek downstairs isn't such a perilous one." It indicated that, with accessibility improvements, elders who reside in the Methodist Home's facilities will hopefully be able to enjoy worship and other activities at the church.

## **Older Women's League Advocates for Work for Older Women**

In 2011, RRF awarded a \$27,000 grant to the Older Women's League (OWL) in partial support of an advocacy campaign to promote employment opportunities for older women. The grant supported the research and production of the 2012 Mother's Day Report that served as the centerpiece of the campaign. It is OWL's tradition to issue a policy report each Mother's Day on a subject that is important to aging women.

The report described several employment obstacles for women. They include age and gender discrimination; pay inequality; under-representation in business ownership, high-paying science, technology, engineering, math, and upper-management jobs; caregiving demands and penalties; underemployment; and lack of retirement security.

The report included examples of existing public and private sector programs as exemplary efforts to increase women's participation in under-represented areas. Examples included Experience Works, One-Stop Career Centers, Green Jobs Initiative, and the Plus 50 Initiative of the American Association of Community Colleges. Several initiatives such as community college-employer partnerships and entrepreneurial and non-traditional business models were also included. The report presented a series of policy and legislative recommendations, including those it considered to be "outside the box" and ideas for strengthening existing legislation.

OWL worked with several other organizations to gather data for the report and elicited their help in disseminating it. Some of the organizations that assisted were current or former RRF grantees, including National Council on Aging, National Easter Seals, Wider Opportunities for Women, and Women's Institute for a Secure Retirement. OWL held a briefing on Capitol Hill to unveil the report and promote recommendations to policymakers and national leaders in the employment field. Sixty people, including legislative staffers, federal department employees, and representatives of nonprofit organizations, attended the briefing. Media outlets, such as Huffington Post and ABC news blog, covered the campaign.

*Note: RRF staff takes much of the information for Grant Highlights directly from grantees' final reports. Staff often asks questions and holds discussions with grantees to get a more complete understanding of the results of grants and to understand challenges grantees faced.*