Health CREW (Community Resources for Empowerment and Wellness)

**Project Summary**

Concise Summary: Help us pitch this solution! Provide an explanation within 3-4 short sentences.

The CREW is an innovative health worker training and education program with the mission to empower disenfranchised young men of color to pursue health careers and teach others.

**About You**

**Location**

- Project Street Address
- Project City
- Project Province/State
- Project Postal/Zip Code
- Project Country

**Year the initiative began (yyyy)**

1995

**YouTube Upload**

Project URL (include http://)


**Plot your innovation within the mosaic of solutions**

Which of these barriers is the primary focus of your work?

Young men’s missing voices and input leads to disconnection and failed policies

Which of the principles is the primary focus of your work?

Create credible choices and opportunities

If you believe some other barrier or principle should be included in the mosaic, please describe it and how it would affect the positioning of your initiative in the mosaic:

This field has not been completed

**Innovation**

Describe your program or new idea in one sentence.

The CREW is an innovative health worker training and education program with the mission to empower disenfranchised young men of color to pursue health careers and teach others.

What makes your initiative uniquely positioned to create change in your community?

The CREW grew from data and realization that young men of color, while having poor health status, lack access to education and health care services. Disproportionately affected by health problems, young men of color often lack health insurance, access to employment, job training, health care services and experience racial/ethnic disparities. Implementing a peer outreach model the CREW men are from the communities they serve; 72% are African American, 20% Latino and 8% Other. Drawing upon their strengths and experience, the men provide preventive health education, resources and serve as role models to others while simultaneously pursuing a career. As one of the major medical centers in the country, Boston’s healthcare related jobs account for over 30% of the city’s workforce, and although Boston is a racially and ethnically diverse city, the healthcare workforce does not reflect the composition of the city’s population. Completion of the program launches the CREW into the health career arena including medicine, nursing, emergency medical services, outreach and family planning counseling professions.

Describe how you organize and carry out your work?

Young men from inner city neighborhoods participate in a rigorous nine month curriculum divided into three training phases: Phase I - Wellness and
Personal Development, Phase II - Outreach and Advocacy and Phase III – Employment Readiness. Paid as full time employees the men serve as outreach workers, providing peer education and referrals for health services. The final phase involves transitioning the men into the workforce by providing assistance on writing resumes, cover letters, interview skills, networking and locating available positions in the community.

**What is your plan to scale and expand your innovation into your community and beyond?**

The plan is to build 10 new community collaborations to provide the CREW members with health and other needed services and employment opportunities. Increasing exposure of the program internally and community-wide is a crucial next step for program expansion. Last year we modified the program to include focused trainings, longer internships, research projects and facilitator experiences. We would like to see the CREW members positioned as leaders in community health and have a successful job training program for young men, especially men of color. The success to date indicates the potential for replication in other settings.

**What other resources, institutional, or policy needs would be necessary to help sustain and scale up your idea?**

Funding is the key resource necessary to expand the program timeframe and number of participants. Each year the program receives 18-25 applications, but resources limit the enrollment to six men for 36 weeks. At their final evaluation assessment all of the participants express the benefits of a longer timeframe to fully implement their new skills, reach more young people and create a larger impact.

**Impact**

**Describe your impact in one sentence, commenting on both the individual and community levels.**

The greatest impact is employment followed by the health benefits for vulnerable, hard to reach young men in the community who are not likely to visit health centers.

**What impact has your work achieved to date?**

Our key achievement is providing health information, peer education and referral to health services to over a thousand vulnerable young men in our communities. Since 2003, 34% of applicants have been accepted into the program, and once enrolled 99% graduate as qualified health workers with 72% securing employment, 60% in the Health Care/Social Service field, 15% in retail or security. Approximately 33% of the men entered the CREW with criminal records. In addition the CREW members facilitate intensive workshops for 8 weeks at a Department of Youth Services (DYS) center, conduct community outreach and attend legislative sessions, lobbying on the issues affecting to men.

Graduates of the program achieve the following:

- Certification as Health Outreach Workers
- Improved skills in public speaking and facilitating workshops, groups and meetings and public advocacy skills;
- Gained understanding of issues affecting men’s health;
- Learned job search skills and techniques;
- Enhanced leadership skills.

**Number of individuals served**

During their training the CREW members provide critical health services to the community through their internships and outreach activities. CREW internships include work with the Commission’s Communicable Disease Control, Reach Elders 2010 and Intergovernmental Relations, while also partnering with community organizations. Last year, through 5 outreach activities, over 215 hard to reach men received health information on STD’s, Mental Health, AIDS, Violence and Safe Sex. The CREW’s work at the Department of Youth Services (DYS) center provided intensive targeted education to over 100 young at-risk young men.

The program funds six men for the 36 week program. Salaries for the CREW are necessary due to the full time commitment and to allow the men to focus on their training rather than work extra jobs. Upon completion 99% of the CREW gain employment, the men self report increased confidence, public speaking skills and overall health knowledge.

**Community impact**

The program teaches a holistic view of health – physically, financially and emotionally. Our greatest impact in the community is employment, job and life skills for men who in turn serve as role models to others in the community. Through their work CREW members influence another generation and connect these vulnerable young men to important health screenings and services. Because they live in the communities they serve, CREW members understand the challenges faced by other young men and can offer realistic solutions.

A major employment barrier for many young men is having a criminal record, lack of core skills, (specifically writing skills) and discrimination. The CREW efforts fit the framework of the Commission’s racial disparities initiative providing the men tools to understand and overcome the barriers caused by institutional, personal, and internalized racism. Through their research projects the CREW gain greater understanding to teach others. Some of the topics chosen last year include: Why the high incarceration rate for Black men in America? and Why should Black men concentrate on Physical Wellness?

**Society at large**

Our greatest societal impact is educating and empowering men on the legislative process and its impact in the community. In 2007 CREW members attended legislative sessions on the following topics: Mental Health, Health Insurance, and CORI reform (Criminal Offender Record Information). The CREW lobbied members of legislature on the CORI issue by writing letters and making phone calls to Senators. The understanding and ability to address changes at a legislative level empowers the men beyond the CREW trainings.

**What measure do you use to gauge your impact and why?**

The CREW program evaluation is prospective and retrospective in design. The results assess, help redesign and improve program elements as needed and will assist in replication. Information regarding program process is collected prospectively, during the year (e.g. training evaluations) and retrospectively, at the end of the program year (e.g. key informant interview and focus group with CREW). Evaluation tools are designed specifically to gather information regarding the program objectives.
Sustainability

How is your initiative currently being financed and how would you finance further expansion and/or replication?

A program of the Boston Public Health Commission, the Commission continues to fund the program at current levels. To expand we are actively seeking Foundation grants and sponsorships targeting private sector funding. We are working to include health related sources of funding, (including Federal support), and possible reimbursement for outreach and advocate activities conducted by the CREW. We are also looking to hospitals and community-based organizations to support professional development.

Provide information on your current finances and organization:

a. annual budget: $129,200
b. annual revenue: $129,200
c. sources of revenue (please provide percentages if known) 100% Boston Public Health Commission
d. number of staff (full-time, part-time, and volunteers) 2 full-time staff; A Project Coordinator and Educational Trainer; 6 Full-time CREW members are paid a salary for their full-time participation ($300/week)

Who are your potential partners and allies?

The CREW program partners with the following Commission and City programs to create internships: Communicable Disease Control (CDC), Intergovernmental Relations, and Reach Elders 2010. We also partner with the following external organizations: HELP for Black Men’s Health, Alternative Environment for Communities (ACE), Whittier St. (Men’s Health Program), Ten Point Coalition, Union Minority Neighborhoods, and Eliot Center DYS facility

Who are your potential investors?

Healthcare agencies, specifically hospitals and health centers, are the most logical investors since the disproportionate burden of morbidity and mortality is to men, which results in financial costs and negatively impacts families, employers and society as a whole. We are seeking to leverage resources from health care institutions to support this crucial workforce development program.

The Story

What is the origin of this innovation? Tell us your story.

The Health CREW began in 1995 with funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Dr. John Rich, then the Boston Public Health Commission’s Medical Director, and most recently awarded a MacArthur Genius Grant, founded a Men’s clinic in 1992 targeting this population for primary care. He discovered a serious lack of community resources for developing the health of young men, particularly in the area of preventive health. His work and research showed young men of color are disproportionately affected by public-health problems such as violence, sexually transmitted diseases, unemployment, under-education and despair. His research results were published by the Kellogg Foundation in A Poor Man’s Plight: Uncovering the Disparities in Men’s Health 2002. The report provides information, details the historical, social, and political causes and identifies institutional and public policy issues with the potential to create change.

The CREW was started under the Commission’s Men’s Health Access Initiative with the goal to improve access to needed medical care and other health-related resources for men in Boston and thereby improve their overall health and the health of their communities. In recent years the CREW is recognized for a mission and activities that fit under Boston Mayor Thomas Menino’s framework to address racial and ethnic disparities in healthcare in the city of Boston. The CREW’s work demonstrates the importance of training men of color as a critical part of the public health workforce and the importance of keeping men’s health issues and education needs on the radar screen of public health.

Please provide a personal bio. Note this may be used in Changemakers marketing material.

Albert W. Pless Jr., Program Coordinator, started with the Health CREW in 2002, sharing Dr. Rich’s vision to empower the minds of young, marginalized, underrepresented men of color with skills and knowledge in the field of Public Health so they not only help themselves, but in turn help other young men. Focusing on three areas- employment, legal and educational, Mr. Pless continues building the list of stakeholders for the program. He is currently completing his Masters of Public Health.

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