



An Interview with Gwenn White

Gwenn White is a Health Education Specialist for the Nutrition and Physical Activity Project within the Community Wellness and Prevention Program at Contra Costa Health Services. In addition to providing nutrition and physical activity coaching to community based organizations, health care providers, and CalFresh eligible families, Gwenn also participates in multiple regional and local collaborations throughout the Bay Area. In this feature Gwenn talks about the role of collaboratives in physical activity initiatives.

1. How long have you been part of BANPAC (Bay Area Nutrition & Physical Activity Collaborative)? How did you come to be involved within it? What is your role within it?

As a grantee of the USDA, Contra Costa County was encouraged by our state funded program, Nutrition Education, and Obesity Prevention (NEOP), to participate in regional obesity prevention efforts to address the staggering increase of individuals who were overweight or obese within the Bay Area. BANPAC strives to help all Bay Area residents live active and healthy lifestyles in communities where policies and environments promote life-long health. It is through being part of BANPAC that Contra Costa Health Services has gained the partnerships needed to empower communities to make the necessary systems and environmental changes to better support nutrition, physical activity, and increase access to healthy foods. For the past ten years, I have been an active participant in BANPAC's movement, and for the last six years have been part of the Leadership Council.

2. Bay Area Moves! works to promote and support active communities. How is BAM! accomplishing this?

BAM! is an exciting multi-county collaborative to support active communities by providing other professionals with low-cost training curriculums and resources to promote physical activity among youth, families, adults, and older adults throughout the day. We encourage everyone to visit the website to get more information and to share these resources with their communities.

3. From a public health perspective, how have you seen initiatives and messaging around being physically active outdoors change over the last few years? How do you see it changing in the future?

As a public health professional, I have seen an increase in physical activity initiatives and social marketing messaging that feels more positive, simple, and doable for everyone! Campaigns such as the "Let's Move Outdoors" campaign, the Surgeon General's "Step it Up" campaign, and the "Play Better" campaign from the California Department of Health Services. All of these serve as great social marketing initiatives to get our communities moving. As a Health Education Specialist I work with a wide range of professionals, including healthcare providers at



our local clinics and hospitals, and what I see as new and exciting is that there are more efforts being made by providers to prescribe outdoor activity to their patients. I believe as we continue to educate our communities and increase our efforts to provide access to physical activity, we will begin to see changes in the behavior of individuals. I also believe that as the population continues to mature, we will also begin to see more focused efforts on older adults.

4. In looking at the future of public health initiatives that encourage others to be physically active, what role(s) do you think collaboratives can play in accomplishing the goals of these initiatives? What are some of the benefits of collaborative work? What are some of the challenges?

In my opinion you cannot tackle a big issue such as obesity alone. Our Bay Area obesity prevention alliances are numerous, and there is such amazing work being done locally by so many people. We should be connected to what is happening throughout the Bay and be able to share our ideas and resources with one another. BANPAC has been one vehicle to bring our counties together, and has enabled us to accomplish so much more as a region than what we could as individual entities.

Benefits:

When thinking about social marketing and public health initiatives, how great is it that whether someone is in San Mateo or Sonoma, they are able to see and hear the same health promotion messaging? Or whether you work in the parks or public health realm, the same message is being conveyed? Even if we might only be able to replicate a small portion of what someone else has done, this could take what we are doing to the next level. Certainly when applying for funding, collaborative work is essential.

Challenges:

Each county within the Bay Area has varying degrees of challenges. As a collaborative it sometimes becomes difficult to focus on just one area because we are all at different levels of our work. But with that being said, this also helps bring stronger best practices to the table and aids in offering better outcomes from our lessons learned.

5. Do you think that collaboratives such as HPHP: Bay Area, BAM! and BANPAC are natural partners at the intersection of health and nature? If so, why?

Looking at everyone's visions and goals, I see a commonality – helping to create policy, systems, and environmental changes for the health and wellness of our communities, especially among those that are underserved. Collectively, we are all contributing to the common vision of physical activity as a part of living a healthy lifestyle. Connection to the outdoors can be a great motivator for people to be active and I believe that the more that collaboratives such as these can intersect on this vision, the more our communities will thrive.

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