



Darfur Women Network
Mastora Bakhiet
Evaluation Report
March 28, 2016



Fitness & Nutrition Program Assessment

Summary

Nutrition and fitness are important for each individual immigrant and for her community. However, the majority of immigrant women are facing unique barriers that hinder them from achieving a healthy lifestyle. They do not know how to implement healthy behaviors, such as fitness or healthy eating, in their adopted Indiana home. Darfur Women Network (DWN) has identified lack of nutritional education, religious obligations and cost restrictions as a few key components that directly relate to the challenges to attaining a healthy lifestyle for immigrant women.

“I was really inspired to be part of a wonderful nutrition and fitness program of sisters that cared for each other like family.”

- Program Participant



Traditional gyms and health coaching programs do not have the resources or ability to provide guidance on how to integrate previous habits or lifestyle restrictions to the new American environment.

A large portion of the population (both immigrant and nonimmigrant) are unaware of the daily and long-term benefits that healthy diets and proper exercise can provide. In many cases, people opt for unhealthy foods choices because those options are convenient, inexpensive and nonperishable. DWN will also be educating participants on the importance of proper nutrition and ways to create budget-friendly meals that will have both an immediate and long-term positive impact on their health and that of their families.

It is important to educate immigrant women from various cultures and backgrounds on how they can include healthier lifestyle choices without jeopardizing religious obligations or restrictions they may have. These restrictions or obligations include the following: accessibility and location of exercise facilities, privacy and separation from male presence and exercise or fitness classes that can be implemented while still wearing preferred traditional religious garments.

Solution

Key volunteers at Darfur Women Network, in cooperation with Executive Director Mastora Bakhiet, are identifying the barriers to achieving a healthy lifestyle for immigrant women. The volunteers are developing programs that incorporate the fundamentals of nutrition while establishing partnerships with other organizations to provide additional healthy lifestyle resources for immigrant women. This program is creating a new paradigm of health by delivering the most current nutrition and fitness information while still honoring the women’s religion and culture.

Implementation:

The Nutrition & Fitness program started September 28, 2015 and ended February 24, 2016. The instructors provided 62 sessions at a total cost of \$6000 (including fuel donated by the staff). The borrowed fitness materials and equipment totaled to \$1,365.00. Additional equipment supplied by Center for Interfaith Cooperation (CIC) was not quantifiable. In addition, the equipped kitchen and a classroom as well as utilities were provided at no cost. The volunteers who participated in different stages of this project donated 590 hours.

The CIC helped arrange use of the venue, exercise equipment and funded some of the ingredients for nutrition sessions. CIC assigned an intern to reserve rooms for exercise and to facilitate any communication with others in the building. Additionally, the CIC secured an open kitchen with cooking equipment and a room for exercise at Fairview Presbyterian Church at no cost.

The partnership between DWN and CIC helps with the implementation of the project successfully and its continuation.

Human Resources:

All staff was volunteer-based.

- Renée McCord, *Certified Personal Trainer & Certified Nutrition Coach*
REAL Wellness Coaching Programs & Retreats, Founder
- Mary Ann Wietbrock, *RN MSN ACNS-BC*
Cardinal Elements Inc., Certified fitness trainer with a specialty in nutrition
- Taysir Ali, *Certified Dietician*
- Megan Nibert Intern at CIC,
Center for Interfaith Cooperation
- Mastora Bakhiet
Darfur Women Network, Inc., Executive Director

Program Goals and Specifics

Fitness:

Immigrant women often experience several challenges maintaining their cardiovascular capacity, flexibility, strength and a healthy body weight. A weekly exercise program offers safe, effective and culturally sensitive opportunities for women to exercise regularly resulting in both a healthy mind and body cohesiveness.

Through the classes, this program offered each participant the following:

- Opportunity to exercise safely and effectively in a supportive group environment for at least 45 minutes twice a week. The fitness classes included cardiovascular exercise; strength and flexibility training that rely on body weight and require minimal equipment.
- Support of other women who are experiencing similar barriers with exercise. Exercising in a group provides social support that is a vital component of achieving a healthy lifestyle.
- Nutritional and Fitness Education that supports the importance for individuals, their families and our community's health.



Nutrition:

The nutrition program conducted classes to educate immigrant and local women on how to shop and prepare meals within a limited budget. The program discussed the options ranging from growing and preserving fruits and vegetables, to buying in bulk and planning nutritious meals. It also allowed the participants to practice preparing new recipes in a fully equipped kitchen. Learning in an environment where everyone is starting from the same place creates an atmosphere with an open channel of communication and promotes a spirit of learning from one another. It also encourages participants to continue the program and help to recruit others to

take part in future programs. This unique blend of immigrant and local women will create a strong network for DWN to develop and expand other health-based programs.

Expectations & Evaluation Results

1. The participants will be aware of the impact of healthy meals and fitness on their health. A total of 11 women participated in the program from September 28, 2015 - February 24, 2016 at the Center for Interfaith Cooperation and, later, Fairview Presbyterian Church.
2. The immigrant women will learn how to exercise and the importance of exercise. The participants were offered 37 interactive workouts plus education. The workouts included creative cardiovascular options, a variety of strength training options and instructor-led flexibility with progressive intensity and modification as necessary. The group walks outside proved to be a favorite.
3. Program leaders will measure and record each participant's baseline weight confidentially with a portable scale at least once a month unless the participant's goal has nothing to do with weight management. The weight of participants who were in attendance on 9/30/15, 10/28/15, 11/25/15, 12/30/15, 1/18/16 and 2/24/16 was measured and recorded using a basic scale, Renee's iPad and Google Sheets.
 - A. In addition, since regular exercise, as a lifestyle habit is a main goal of the program, participants will measure success by keeping a written record of exercise compliance. Participants were encouraged to exercise at least 3/x per week. Two participants kept records of their lifestyle behavior compliance on sheets created and distributed by lead volunteers.
 - B. The ultimate measure of success will be shown if participants meet their goals initially set by the program participants. Many women want to lose weight. However, other important goals may include whether she is getting stronger in daily activities, whether she is able to get up and down off the floor, whether she has increased self-awareness, whether she has improved confidence, and if she making healthier meals for her family. The goals participants chose from at their first assessment were Weight Loss (WL), Regular Exerciser (RE), Nutrition Improvement (NI), Disease Prevention (DP), Increase self-confidence (IS), Social Support (SS), and Healthy Lifestyle for Family (HLF). They chose WL (4), NI (1), DP (3), HLF (2). Note: Not all participants were assessed as we had a few one-time visitors that didn't attend on assessment dates. One participant changed her goal from WL to HLF.
4. The participants will lose weight gradually and it will be proven via scale. Participants lost in lbs as individuals: 6, 25.6, 2, 1.4, 2.8 for a total of 37.8 lbs as a group. Three participants gained a negligible amount of weight, two of which whose goals were NI and DP. The other participant was a healthy weight at her first assessment and worked hard during the program, in effect probably gaining muscle. Note: One participant only weighed in at the first assessment and had to drop out of program due to medical issues; therefore, her results can not be included in overall group weight results.
5. The trainees feel good about themselves from the exercises. Therefore, this program will raise their self-esteem and their confidence. Over time, regular attenders appeared to increase confidence as evidenced by better body awareness, increased self-initiative in choosing a healthier lifestyle, increased excitement about participating in regular exercise, and improved attitude when experiencing difficult workouts. The giggles, smiles and beads of sweat were strong evidence as well.
6. They develop intercultural communication skills in the English language and share their cultures. Participants and volunteered showed respect for each other's cultures and beliefs, discussing holidays and how these religious observances affected the program schedule. The English language was used on signage and in cuing of exercise and meal prep. The volunteers tried to learn a few basics words from participants. Salaam, or Peace, became the one we could always understand and appreciate.
7. The participants will lower their health risks and will build a stronger bodies. Every single participant who attended more than once showed signs of a stronger body per the observation of leaders. Baseline strength data was not officially gathered; however, per Renee's observation, all women progressively become stronger evidenced by their need to use heavier weights for the same exercises and/or increase the number of repetitions per set. The women improved in every area: cardiovascular endurance, muscular strength, muscular endurance and flexibility. The program results can not assess if health risks were lowered as we did not gather medical information. However, the

women who exercised at least 3x a week at a moderate intensity, lost weight, and changed nutrition habits are more likely to have lowered their health risks.

8. By example, the program will inspire other immigrant women to adopt a healthier lifestyle. At the Festival of Faiths, DWN volunteers helped promote the program by interacting with festival attendees. Throughout the program, all leaders exemplified a healthy lifestyle and hoped to inspire other women to do the same. Several participants had already begun to make lifestyle changes prior to the start of the pilot program but were able to learn and grow during the program as well as bring their own experiences to the group to share. It is Renee's observation that Mastora's example of leadership in the area of healthy lifestyle changes inspired all of us.
9. They will improve their healthy lifestyles. This outcome was evident within a month of the program launch.
10. The participants will learn about different aspects of nutrition and the key roles they play. The participants were offered 12 meals and recipes in an interactive group setting. See more details below.
11. The participants will learn about different foods in food groups not commonly found in their cultural diets. Under the leadership of Mary Ann, the women prepared and ate together 12 healthy meals with ingredients typically served in the United States in a shared space kitchen of Fairview Presbyterian Church.
12. The participants will learn to make new meals that branch out from their common meals incorporating more fruits and vegetables and less processed grains and fatty sources of protein. The low-sodium meals incorporated more fruits, vegetables, less processed grains, lean proteins and healthy fats with recipe included.
13. The participants will network with one another, creating a network of women supporting one another on their respective roads to a healthier lifestyle. This outcome proved to be perhaps the most rewarding of all. Although it is difficult to quantify, networking certainly did occur between the women of different cultures, religions, ages and backgrounds as evidenced in our exchanging of contact information, sharing of personal life stories and connecting on social media. The most beautiful outcome can certainly be described as "haven" where women who started as strangers become friends in a safe and loving environment. See program photos for proof of networking and support.
14. The participants will be aware of the impact of healthy meals and fitness on their health. The participants were taught how to read food labels, how to choose healthier ingredients and why to choose them, how to substitute certain traditional ingredients for healthier ones. The nutrition education classes were a collaborative effort. Participants taught the volunteer important nutritional information, too.



Feedback and Testimonials:

1. From a Partner:

"I don't feel like it took a lot of effort to reserve a venue. Fairview was more than willing to be a part of the program and the CIC has been very willing to accommodate us when they could. I have never seen anyone else ever go into that room. I feel very good about the connection. We are partnering with them on other programs too now. I probably put in about five hours a week working on the project. I never heard anyone complain about the program being in the building and using the hallways and stairs. I thought this was an amazing program and I was so happy to be a part of it. I thought the whole program went well. I think in the future finding a permanent spot that is in one building would be beneficial. I would be interested in helping to duplicate the project in any way that I am needed."

2. From a Coach:

"I believe the fitness program went well with good time spent on flexibility, strengthening and endurance. The nutrition program worked well as we pre-planned the menu and items to bring. A recipe was provided with calorie information. We made a healthy breakfast, lunch, dinner and desserts. We worked on fitness and nutrition within the context of the women's different cultures. The biggest challenge was having two different locations for the events. Also there was a lag during the holidays due to the buildings being closed. I learned so much from the women, the fitness program, and the nutrition program. We developed and tweaked this program based on weekly feedback and a great multi-dimensional group of leaders. I appreciated all responses and made adjustments as I could. I believe this program has potential but needs a source of funding and one secure dependable spot. Getting certified trainers may be difficult unless there is funding."

"I loved meeting the new women and sharing experiences. Many of the women from this group had some experience with fitness and nutrition and were able to bring this to the sessions to continue their personal wellness program. It is very interesting to learn about their culture and how exercise and nutrition impacted their daily lives. I found a definite learning experience and will value the time I spent with this group of women."

3. From Beneficiaries:

"Teammates and sisters, I was excited and very eager to participate in this program that sister Mastora introduced me to for the past four months. I was really inspired to be part of a wonderful nutrition and fitness program of sisters that cared for each other like family. We inspired each other to do the best and to care to learn about our differences and likes. This group of ladies provided a safe environment for me to understand how to get the best results from my fitness and nutritional goals. I really felt that this was the ultimate program that was going to get me my goal to be a healthier me. I was excited to come to class knowing that I would learn new methods to make my food healthier and still taste good. I have cooked at home for my family and they actually enjoyed the new way of recipes even though the meals are healthy and low calorie. I worked with my greatest trainer Renee to learn strength and stretching techniques. I became a better me because she was great in understanding my inner wants and desires. With the great nutrition instructions from Marian I learned that you don't need salt or even extra carbohydrates to make me full or satisfied. This program has given me the insight that rigorous dieting is not necessary to maintain a healthy weight. Instead, she taught me that good food choices and persistence can help you achieve your goal. I was very happy to be part of a great program that included my mentors and sisters as teammates. I wish I could have completed this program but the hours interfered with my full time job. I hope I can work it out where the program can continue and I can be part of it in the near future. Greatly appreciated and thank you for all you have done for me."

Assalaamu Alaikum

“I started the program in November and I liked the time as well as the day of the week. The second day of cooking or other activity should be a choice of the individual. I like that the exercises are easy to repeat at home. The plus is to meet and have new friends and to share concerns with each other. It is important to know the original start and purpose of anything in order to fully participate. For example, it would be helpful to better understand what this program has to do with Darfur Women Network and how the program is helping the women in Darfur. This information would open the way to inviting others. Thanks for the inquiry and hope we can continue.”

“I came in halfway through the program so I am not sure what all I missed. I would have liked to have had more nutrition information and cooking time. If we do this again I would like to have more nutrition, cooking and exercise at each meeting.

“Yes, this was the first time this was done so like anything you have trials and errors. Having all the meetings at the church where we did the cooking would have worked out better because they had more room. I learned the importance of getting in your protein to keep your metabolism going and eating six smaller meals. Yes, I personally do better in a group setting so I would love to see it continue. If they continue the program, I would like to see more of what I talked about in question one about more nutrition information, cooking and exercise at all the meetings. I enjoyed meeting the new ladies in the group and working out together. I also enjoyed sharing different experiences that we have had in order to help each other out. I enjoyed working with our instructors and learning different tips. This is a good program for helping people to get healthy.”

Findings:

There were some important points/challenges raised. Changes or needs to maximize the impact of Fitness & Nutrition program are:

1. Increased funding
2. A location where programs can be accessed in one place
3. All participants were interested in continuing participation in the program

Additional Notes:

The culture and expectations of women in the household is another area that the program affects positively. Immigrant women tend to focus their attention on assisting their families with the process of adapting to a new country while neglecting their personal health. Additionally, it would be helpful to have an outlet or program that educates family members on the importance of supporting the health and wellbeing of mothers and wives.

Darfur Women Network noticed fitness-related and nutritional deficiencies in the community. After assessing the need for education and resources to address these deficiencies, DWN designed a tailor-made program to tackle these challenges specifically for refugee and immigrant women. DWN recruited volunteer coaches to participate and proposed a partnership with the Center for Interfaith Cooperation.

DWN is 501(c3) nonprofit organization that provides is local and international programs to help the survivors of Darfur genocide. Our most important resource is educating the survivors of the Darfur genocide on how to regain living whole and productive lives. The Fitness & Nutrition program is one of our local programs offered at no cost to all the people who attended. For more information please visit www.darfurwomennetwork.org.