

Block by block: A campaign to combat diabetes

April 19 2010

It started with a simple medical survey in the Humboldt Park neighborhood on Chicago's near Northwest side whose results were reported in the Journal of Epidemiology in 2006.

The rate of [Type 2 diabetes](#) in Humboldt Park was 14 percent, double that for Americans nationwide. For Puerto Ricans in the neighborhood, the rate was even worse: 21 percent.

The community didn't sit back.

On April 23, community-based organizations, together with Rush University Medical Center, are hosting the grand opening of the Greater Humboldt Park Community Diabetes Empowerment Center. The event launches Block by Block, a multifaceted grassroots campaign to educate residents about diabetes, increase early diagnosis and provide resources to improve medical care and self-management for 13,000 adults in a 72-block section of Humboldt Park.

"It takes a village to raise a child, but it takes a community to tackle a health crisis," said Dr. Steven Rothschild, a [preventive medicine](#) and family practice physician at Rush. Rothschild is leading the campaign together with Jose Lopez, director of the Humboldt Park Puerto Rican Cultural Center.

The project is being funded by the National Institutes of Health and overseen by the Cultural Center, Pueblo Sin Fronteras, and the Greater

Humboldt Park Community of Wellness Coalition, in collaboration with researchers from Rush and Sinai Health System. Norwegian American Hospital, located in the community, which has also joined the project, is providing a full-time dietician, a demonstration kitchen, and other material support for the Center.

"Health care professionals can go into a community and talk to people about nutrition and exercise, but we believe that for an intervention to truly succeed, the change has to come from within," Rothschild said.

"Our goal is to partner with the community - not just residents, but businesses, schools, churches, restaurants - to reduce the impact of diabetes. We want to make this a social phenomenon, something people are buzzing about."

Under the four-year project, 20 residents have been trained on diabetes prevention, self-management, and community organizing. Four have been hired to serve as block captains. They will conduct household screenings to identify everyone with diabetes and pre-diabetes and follow up with those who are diagnosed, encouraging them to seek medical care and make necessary lifestyle changes.

Other efforts will include launching educational programs, screenings and self-management training at the new Diabetes Empowerment Center; implementing an intervention program for children identified as at risk for diabetes, involving both parents and neighborhood schools; developing a case management program to help residents with [diabetes](#) organize their care; and working with community-based organizations to improve access to fresh produce and physical activity opportunities for residents of all ages.

If successful, the Block by Block project will provide a blueprint for others to follow.

"When community members own the solution, the solution then becomes an organic part of the culture of that community," Lopez said. "I believe this approach will ultimately be the answer for communities like ours facing major health problems."

Provided by Rush University Medical Center

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