

Fl♥rida KidCare *Innovations* Highlighting Innovative Outreach Strategies

Effective Outreach – Tools of the Trade for Heading Back-To-School

Effective marketing and education through outreach strategies are critical to guarantee uninsured but eligible children enroll and retain coverage in Children’s Health Insurance Programs, such as Florida KidCare.

Mathieson and Kronenfeld (2003) found that “the availability of a program often does not mean that most of those who are eligible enroll.” The implementation of effective outreach can eliminate enrollment barriers, like the perception of parents that health insurance is not a necessity or confusion surrounding renewal process. The authors cite that the tools for innovative practices for effective outreach strategies include: personal contact and involvement with an outreach coalition.

Personal contact outreach models transform outreach from an informational table at a back-to-school event to the development of a helping, dependable relationship with families. Outreach workers spend time with families, assisting them with enrollment during events, and the follow up with families post-events, acting “as a liaison and advocate for the family during the entire process.” Bartholomeaux and Johnson (2010) explain that “health insurance is the single most important attribute in determining whether or not a child will have access to health care.”

The “manpower” of a coalition is an outreach asset, particularly when it comes to advocacy for Florida KidCare, coordinating and staffing events. Coalitions are collaborative community partnerships that offer outreach workers opportunities to network and event planning. Bartholomeaux and Johnson (2010) refer to school districts as the central hub of a coalition, if not as a coalition member, as a community supporter for coalition enrollment events.



In August 2010, the Florida KidCare Coalition of the Panhandle (the Coalition) hosted its fourth annual back-to-school bash, where 43 Florida KidCare applications were completed at the event. The Coalition’s event follow-up resulted in an additional 50 applications completed post-event. The success for the number of enrollments into Florida KidCare at this annual event can be attributed to the Coalition’s utilization of the personal contact model and coalition building best practices for planning their event. This innovative coalition was formerly established on January 22, 2008 and reaches into populations in a rural, five-county area. With 35 members representing multiple agencies, organizations and businesses throughout the region, the Coalition has utilized event evaluation results and invested time in developing an effective outreach plan. It started in 2008, when the Coalition had big plans to host a back-to-school event. They planned for months, partnering with health care and social service entities from across their region.

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Rosie Smith, Jackson Hospital



Florida KidCare Coalition of the Panhandle

For this first event, members of the Coalition posted fliers, wrote news releases, and reserved a few tables and chairs – they could hardly wait to begin counting the number of families they would enroll into Florida KidCare.

Rather than become discouraged and pledge to never host another event, the Coalition evaluated their efforts and reconvened to set forth with a different strategic approach. The decision to evaluate their efforts allowed the Coalition and their event to gain momentum year after year.

The Coalition subsequently completed three applications at that 2006 event.



*Karen Edwards, Panhandle
Florida KidCare Coalition*



The Gurganus Family *Yours, Mine & Ours - a Florida KidCare Family*

Melanie Gurganus is the parent of Florida KidCare kids and she shared her family's story during the Coalition's 2010 news conference. Melanie said she wanted to share her Florida KidCare experience with other families because the program allows her children to receive comprehensive health care. Having a medical home is very important to the Gurganus'. Melanie's daughter has been diagnosed with hyperthyroidism. She stated that had the family not had Florida KidCare, the child would not have been diagnosed in time to receive treatment and without treatment her daughter would have severe developmental damage. Melanie's son also has a condition that requires a medical specialist. Melanie spoke about her two step-daughters that play sports. She shared with the back-to-school audience, if they have kids that play sports they need to have health care coverage because those kids get hurt.

Melanie said that what families need to understand about Florida KidCare is that it is a program designed for families, to help families. At events like the Coalition's back-to-school enrollment bash, families have the opportunity to talk with Florida KidCare families and learn not only about the program, but that they are not alone. "We are a working family, I work, my husband works, but we could not afford to pay for basic or preventative health care for our family. Other families want to know from someone who has been through the experience about the Florida KidCare application process and payment."

Melanie stated, "Some families may be afraid to apply because they don't think that they qualify for the program." Melanie likes being able to go out to events and share with families that "my family qualified, so their family may qualify too, but they won't know unless they try, so walk over there and apply today!"

Florida KidCare Coalition of the Panhandle Back-To-School Bash

According to the members of the Coalition the first back-to-school event in 2008 was overwhelming to plan and host then resulted in an underwhelming outcome. They believe the lead agency took on many of the planning responsibilities and did not rely on additional community support. Four years later, the Coalition hosted a back-to-school event for over 543 community residents and enrolled over 90 children into Florida KidCare. This success is directly connected to effective planning and making sure families receive personal contact from the coalition membership at this event.

The members of the Coalition have a common goal - to make sure kids within their community have affordable, comprehensive health care. The Coalition does not utilize a formal event planning committee. The back-to-school event is planned by the entire coalition, with special workgroups. The Coalition, as a whole, assesses the different strength sets of their membership then ask those with specific connections or expertise to participate in one of the workgroups. For example, Coalition members from Jackson Hospital, preside over the marketing and public relations workgroup. The hospital's marketing department uses their expertise to review the press packets, press releases, event flyers, and puts together the materials and speakers for the event's press conference.

The Coalition understands the challenges of living in a rural community. The event location is the most critical factor in planning an event and the impact this has on reaching uninsured eligible children. Transportation is limited and trying to get everyone to one event location can be a challenge. A successful enrollment event must be held at a central location familiar to partners, vendors, families, and attract the community at large. Hence, the Coalition starts and ends each event planning cycle by assessing event site logistics. The number one requirement for

the ideal event location should be a comfortable setting for families. The event needs to be accessible for families without transportation. Families should feel welcome to bring their children. Both children and teens ought to enjoy the event.



*The Florida KidCare Panhandle Coalition
2010/2011*

The next unique aspect to the Coalition's event planning process is their creative tactic to ensure their event includes vendors and non-traditional partners, such as the forestry department.

The Coalition's approach is that all groups, organizations, government entities or businesses should be involved in back-to-school enrollment efforts. While working with partners and vendors, the Coalition frames their message around the idea that the back-to-school bash is not about filling a free back pack with supplies, but about trying to get kids to have a great first day of school. At the heart of it all is the need for children to have health insurance. They provide the message at the event that *paper, pencil, pen and health insurance should be on everyone's back-to-school checklist*. A critical component of planning is that prior to the event day, the coalition trains partners and vendors about how to talk with families about the Florida KidCare program. They ensure that no matter what table or booth a family visits they will learn about the program, and know that Florida KidCare enrollment, renewal and application assistance is available during the event and all year round.

Another essential planning strategy is how the Coalition motivates and markets the event to families. Incentives for adults to attend the event include free health screenings and notary services. The Coalition knows that this event may be the only time of year that an adult receives preventative health services. Also, the notary service is vital and helpful, as there are several school forms parents need to have notarized and due to the lack of transportation it is difficult to get to a notary. Planning event marketing takes a three-prong approach:

- Traditional media: newspaper articles, radio and television public service announcements;
- School orientations: Meetings where Coalition members speak to parents about the event and event postcards are placed into all parent packets; and
- "Shoe Leather Express": What the Coalition calls their door-to-door approach to distributing event postcards throughout their community.

Media Coverage and Elected Official Support

The Coalition's annual back-to-school bash is also a press conference to promote Florida KidCare enrollment and renewal opportunities. Their elected officials and community leaders request to be a part of this event. The Coalition cites that their involvement is due to their officials and key leaders being invested in children's health care. State representatives, county commissioners, county Florida KidCare program and want to see it promoted within the Panhandle communities. These Florida KidCare champions are what



State Representative Marti Coley



*State Representative Curtis
Richardson*

Lessons Learned

Lessons learned about effective outreach strategies are based on qualitative research. The key elements need to include:

- Enlisting trusted messengers-known and trusted community-based organizations that can help and advocate on behalf of families.
- Location, Location, Location-stage outreach events, application and renewal assistance sites, and basic program information where it will make the greatest impact and reach families in need.
- Hands-on-information and education are not enough for families to enroll or retain their coverage- application assistance keeps enrollment and retention on track, "there was a 28% higher rate of enrollment when there was application assistance in the community compared to communities without assistance".
- Create an event where entire families want to come and spend the afternoon-Don't host a health fair, offer a family fun day.

-St. Luke's Health Initiatives, 2007

sheriff, hospital CEO's, business owners, and administrators from the Florida KidCare partners (Department of Health, Agency for Health Care Administration, Department of Families and Children,

and the Florida Healthy Kids Corporation) believe in the value of the draw the media, along with the personal touch of ensuring each news conference features a Florida KidCare parent's personal story (See "Yours, Mine, & Ours, page 2).

The Coalition wants to let other outreach collaboratives know that these relationships, both with the elected officials and the media must be cultivated year-round. It is an on-going process not just a simple step in the planning for the event. The Coalition members cite that their elected officials, community leaders and media representatives are "our neighbors, and through them we have the ability to impact the critical mass, encouraging families with uninsured, but eligible children to apply for Florida KidCare coverage."

It Is Not All About the Main Event

The back-to-school enrollment bash is hosted in Jackson County yet it is not just this one annual event that makes the Coalition innovative. It is how the Coalition's effective outreach strategy reaches all five rural counties. The strategy begins with the composition of the coalition; coalition members provide services to all five counties. Therefore, part of the back-to-school event planning always includes regular email communications to the entire coalition, partners and vendors to announce opportunities to attend other outreach events within the surrounding four other counties. Then the Coalition uses the back-to-school season as a means to highlight to their community the needs of uninsured children and the availability of Florida KidCare application and renewal assistance. Not only does the Coalition staff events throughout the five county area, they connect directly with their school districts, to ensure uninsured children are being identified and families referred for application assistance. The Coalition also follows up with each partner/vendor from their events to ensure they have updated Florida KidCare materials and application assistance site locations. The Coalition continues their conversations and relationships with their elected officials and community leaders, educating on behalf of Florida KidCare families. To quote the coalition members, "we truly believe it takes a village, not just to raise a child, but to raise a healthy child".



Credits

Agency for Health Care Administration
College of Nursing and Health Sciences, Tucson, AZ
Covering Kids & Families
Department of Children and Families
Department of Health
Florida Covering Kids & Families
Florida KidCare
Florida Healthy Kids Corp.
Lawton & Rhea Chiles Center for Healthy Mothers & Babies
Melanie Gurganus
Panhandle Florida KidCare Coalition
St. Luke's Health Initiatives
USF Health

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Florida Covering Kids & Families is a statewide program working to ensure that all eligible children and families are enrolled in Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Its statewide coalition is a broad representation of Florida's agencies, organizations, and key leaders-representatives from child advocacy groups, child care organizations, provider groups, private health plans, private coverage programs for low-income children, the business community, minority organizations, in addition to numerous state agencies charged with Medicaid and federal program implementation. The Coalition also works with community coalitions in targeted regions around the state.



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