



Wahkiakum Community Health Workers

The Wahkiakum Health and Human Services Department (WCHHS) has a contagious enthusiasm for their community's involvement in the improved health and wellbeing of county residents. The greatest example of this community support is in the undertakings of three local high school teenagers, who are embracing the Community Health Worker program. The regional program utilizes residents within a neighborhood or county to provide resource education for people trying to navigate the often- confusing world of human services and public health. With support and direction from WCHHS, the Wahkiakum teens have customized the program to meet their community's needs in a unique way.

WCHHS presented the Community Health Worker program to the three recruited teenagers as a way to explore an interesting health topic that they felt could use improvement in their community. The group decided to focus on the sex education program provided by their public school. Local residents have criticized the current program, citing a lack of transparency on a broad range of topics including pregnancy, STD and pregnancy prevention, human physiology, and mental and emotional changes associated with pregnancy and teenage development. With guidance from WCHHS staff, the teens were able to obtain a curriculum called "Flash," which is used for peer-led sex education courses in King County. The group presented a proposal to the school board to implement a similar program in their local high school. The proposal was met with great encouragement, and the group is now preparing to launch the curriculum this fall. The intent of this peer-led program is to provide students with a



more comprehensive education of sexual health in a safe, inclusive, and nondiscriminatory manner.

The teen group’s forward-thinking project is only the beginning of Wahkiakum’s inventive Community Health Worker Program. Adult Community Health Workers are working more independently within the community, using their knowledge of local resources and social services to help people access public assistance. One example of this work is food bank volunteers collaborating to communicate healthy eating habits and offer healthy food choices to the residents they serve.

Overall, Wahkiakum County’s Community Health Workers are acting as connectors between residents and available resources. They are also acting as informal advocates between the community members and service providers. In fact, the staff at WCHHS has begun referring to these workers as “CHA CHAs,” replacing the word “worker” in “community health worker” with “advocate.” With their knowledge of resources and the public transportation system, these community health advocates are making valuable connections and providing meaningful assistance to the residents of Wahkiakum County.