

Bob Cassa serves his community by developing the conditions that will keep the population healthy. In his case, his community is a nation within a nation, the San Carlos Apache Nation in Arizona. A public health educator with the Indian Health Service, he coordinates, organizes, and implements a variety of health promotion and disease prevention activities in the schools and community. He especially loves working to improve the health of kids because he remembers what it was like to be young and making life-altering decisions. One of those decisions led him to public health and back to the San Carlos Apache Nation.

Arizona Turning Point Collaborating for Community Health

Twenty-nine years ago, San Carlos tribal leaders saw the future of their nation in a promising kid and encouraged him to pursue higher education. When Bob first started at Arizona State University, his options were wide open, but he soon found himself in pursuit of a BA in Health Services. As a child, Bob recalls being a patient in the local hospital, where he remembers noticing the great number of non-native doctors and nurses. His decision to go into the health field came in part from his awareness of the need to increase the number of native providers. After receiving his bachelor's degree, he followed up with a Master's in

Public Health from the University of Hawaii. He started his career with IHS in 1985 in Nevada but soon found his way back home to San Carlos in 1988.

Bob had already been serving in his community for 16 years when he was asked to participate in a training program called the Academy Without Walls. Created by Arizona Turning Point and the Mel and Enid Zuckerman Arizona College of Public Health, the Academy delivers training to frontline public health workers in Arizona. San Carlos was chosen as a pilot site for the Academy's competency based training in basic public health science skills, community dimensions of practice, and cultural competency. Tribal health department employees and the employees of the Indian Health Service Unit planned to participate in the

Academy together to strengthen communication and collaboration between the two entities.

For Bob, the experience allowed him to revisit key principles in health education and the underlying purpose of public health. For others, some or all of the information was new. The training sessions prompted Bob to identify how he could improve health education through better collaboration, communication, community assessment, and community participation. Bob recognized that although he and his colleagues valued collaboration, sometimes in the daily activities of doing their jobs, the importance of collaboration was lost.

The training sessions prompted Bob to identify how he could improve health education through better collaboration, communication, community assessment, and community participation.

The Academy Without Walls provided public health workers who serve the people of San

Carlos with tools, resources, ideas, and the opportunity to explore collaboration. Several agencies within San Carlos had been planning programs for kids during spring break. As a result of their participation in the Academy, some IHS departments and the tribal health programs collaborated with other community groups, such as the Boys and Girls Club, to put on a spring break event together. The larger event allowed them all to do more for the kids with the same resources. The spring break event and the lessons learned from the Academy Without Walls are living on in San Carlos. Agencies and community groups now collaborate in other ways to improve health and are moving in a new direction to achieve public health gains—together.

At a Glance: Arizona



Aim of Arizona Turning Point

Arizona Turning Point works to make the public health system more responsive to community concerns. Working collaboratively with communities and key partners, Turning Point addresses public health workforce development needs, consumer and public health information dissemination, disparities in health status, and public health advocacy.

Arizona's Public Health Challenges

Arizona's population has nearly doubled in the last 20 years, and yet the public health workforce has not kept pace. Arizona has only 48 public health workers for every 100,000 residents (nationally the rate is 158 public health workers for every 100,000 residents). Arizonans' life expectancy trails the national average by 5 years, and Arizona Native Americans' life expectancy falls short of the national average by more than 20 years. The leading causes of death are largely preventable through access to care, education, and changes in behavior.

Arizona Turning Point's Contribution to Improving Public Health

Arizona Turning Point has provided workforce development opportunities, increased access to information, and increased community capacity by:

- Designing and implementing the Arizona Academy Without Walls, a series of trainings intended to build capacity and competencies of the workforce so that they are better able to address the state's public health concerns. A pilot phase included the development, delivery, and evaluation of competency-based curricula in three areas: basic public health sciences, community dimensions of practice and cultural competency. Trainings were delivered to 326 participants through pilot training sites. The curricula has now been refined and will serve as the basis for ongoing continuing education through the Academy.
- Designing and implementing a Web-based resource to facilitate access to public health and consumer health information for public health professionals and the general public. AZHealthInfo.org is a continuously expanding Web site developed by Turning Point through an innovative partnership with the Arizona Health Sciences Library and other partners.
- Developing a series of training sessions in partnership with community groups, organizations, coalitions, local Turning Point initiatives, and leadership development programs. Trainings are being designed to augment the work the partners are already doing and will cover basic public health topics with the goal of enabling public health to come to the forefront of community issues.



For More Information

Catharine Riley, Project Director
Maricopa County Department of Public Health
1845 E. Roosevelt, Phoenix, AZ 85006
www.aztpp.com
tel: (602) 506-1248 e-mail: catharineriley@mail.maricopa.gov