

Terri Gremillion had her work cut out for her. Hired by the Health Resource Services Administration's Better Health for the Delta program, Terri was a brand new "Community Encourager" for Avoyelles Parish, Louisiana. She had been entrusted with developing a rural health network to address health access issues for the parish residents. Avoyelles Parish is her home, and she knows the rural delta community well. The population of 41,481 suffers from a poverty rate of 25.9% and an unemployment rate of 8.3%. Avoyelles is a prime example of a challenged community in a very challenged state, recently ranked as the least healthy state in the US in terms of life expectancy and infant mortality.

Louisiana Turning Point

Encouraging the Encouragers

Terri quickly learned that being a "part time" Community Encourager takes more than 20 hours a week. The challenges of creating a network and addressing deep-rooted problems are huge. For Terri, "it was like being thrown into the deep end. We were several months behind...and I had nothing to go on." Her background in health care was helpful, but she didn't feel confident about the skills required in her new role. Terri was afraid that she might burn out in the face of these challenges, as others had before her.

Just as Terri was starting her work, the Center for Community Capacity, a program of Louisiana Turning Point and the Louisiana Public

Health Institute, arranged to provide technical assistance to Community Encouragers. Terri enthusiastically attended trainings focused on leadership, strategic planning, coalition building, meeting facilitation, conflict

resolution, advocacy, and lobbying. One training in particular, on collecting and assessing community data, gave her a perfect starting point for her work. Terry decided to conduct a needs assessment in Avoyelles Parish.



Terri had never conducted a needs assessment before, but she knew she had to hear what community members felt their health priorities were. From her community of 41,000, Terri received 2,497 surveys. And a great surprise came out of the survey results—even though health care was important, stress

and anger management were a greater concern to residents of Avoyelles Parish.

Community residents had never before expressed that stress and anger management were problems, but then again, before Terri's survey, they didn't have a way to voice their concerns. Something had to be done to alleviate the stress and anger of the residents if health and quality of life were really going to improve for the community. Terri is now leading her network in developing strategic action plans to address stress and anger management, as well as other issues identified in her needs assessment.

Terri is busy but not burned out. With support and training, she has grown into her position as a Community Encourager. Terri has the satisfaction of trying to make the world a better place, starting right in her own community. Her success in Avoyelles Parish is a prime example of how, with a small investment from Better Health for the Delta and technical assistance from Turning Point's Center for Community Capacity, Louisiana communities can mobilize for health improvement.

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At a Glance: *Louisiana*

Aim of Louisiana Turning Point

The Louisiana Turning Point Partnership is a statewide, multi-sector coalition dedicated to improving the quality and effectiveness of public health efforts in Louisiana and working to collectively transform our current health system into one that is more effective and responsive to the needs of our communities.

Louisiana's Public Health Challenges

Louisiana's public health system suffers from a lack of adequate funding and resources and a lack of effective cooperation among organizations that provide health care. For a decade, Louisiana has consistently ranked among the lowest 10 states for the health of its residents. Louisiana also has some of the highest levels in the US of unemployment, uninsured workers, and people with chronic diseases.

Louisiana Turning Point's Contribution to Improving Public Health

Louisiana has led a collaborative planning process, developed a dedicated coalition, and instituted dramatic system changes and innovations, including:

- The first comprehensive assessment of Louisiana's public health environment, culminating in the Louisiana Public Health Improvement Plan in June 2000
- Two programs were developed based on needs identified in the comprehensive assessment of the Louisiana public health environment:
 - The Access to Care Congress**, which convenes organizations engaged in improving the public's health in statewide forums that have allowed for comprehensive problem solving among local organizations to ensure access to care in the state
 - The Center for Community Capacity**, which helps communities gain the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully develop and sustain local health initiatives
- Training and technical support for 29 Delta Parishes on effective leadership, network development, and successful grant administration
- Strategic partnerships with other statewide organizations to coordinate public health efforts across the state and to increase collaboration and the efficiency of public health services

For More Information

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