

1. Summary and Introduction

The Skagit Valley Health Literacy Project was quickly, renamed the GetHELP project for marketing purposes. In this moniker, HELP stands for HHealth, Education, Library Partnership. GetHELP sought to reach out to the low literate and/or low-income population of health care consumers in Skagit County. The purpose of the project was to improve from a number of different perspectives, the health literacy of this population.

GetHELP project partners recognized that the lack of health literacy is not just an individual problem but also a social problem. Barriers to a health literate society include: a complex and uncoordinated health system that is characterized by enormous gaps and inconsistencies in health care coverage from both private and public and/or government-contracted insurers; the lack of consistent and coordinated K-12 health education programs; and a relatively undisciplined society that across many socio-economic and cultural divisions, does not take responsibility in adopting optimal health behaviors. These social problems are further compounded by the often misleading information promulgated through the intense marketing by the pharmaceutical and supplement industries, the hype and hope of media generated medical reporting and finally the explosion of health information resources both reliable and unreliable. The financial and time constraints of overburdened health providers both corporately and individually does not permit time for helping patients to navigate the healthcare system effectively nor time for effectively educating patients in healthy lifestyle choices. It is no wonder that a truly health literate public regardless of socio-economic situation has not yet been fully realized.

GetHELP initially sought to address health literacy issues that could be improved by simple education and awareness with a focus on basic health reference and online resources such as MedlinePlus. This initial effort was focused on helping the target population to become savvy finders and users of health information and in becoming users and appreciators of libraries and library services in general. The initial effort thus included training librarians and public health workers in the use of and in the key evaluation means for determining, reliable resources and in informing our target population and those who work directly with them, of the existence and importance of libraries and librarians.

GetHELP trained the public librarians and public library staff at the public libraries and the local community college library in basic health reference and in the use of the most reliable online resources. Six libraries in Skagit County participated, all but one, located in the population-dense Mount Vernon, Burlington and Sedro-Woolley area. It must be noted that there is no county-wide library system yet in existence in Skagit County. The public health department nurses were trained in the use of the best resources and provided a very brief introduction in evaluating health resources. The local Medicaid health services provider, SeaMar and 3 other clinics also were given brief presentations about our project. They agreed to utilize a simple health information pamphlet that directs patients to seek out information at the public libraries and to utilize health information prescription pads.

We involved the Skagit County Community Action Agency (SCCAA) as an access point to the low-income target population. It soon became apparent that their needs were slightly different than the need for just health reference and reliable resources. In response this, we developed a Health Literacy Curriculum. The first version was an effort to compress what should essentially be a K-12 curricula into a three-hour class. While it was never utilized, the process was enlightening and forced us to concede that this was indeed beyond our scope.

Another opportunity for tackling this educational need presented itself when the project manager was asked by her organization, Skagit Valley Hospital, to develop a health resources class for their Health Quest community outreach educational programs. They requested something more enticing than just a 'navigating the web/finding good resources' class. This provided just the right stimulus for developing a more concise, focused and more feasible health literacy curriculum that would fall well within the scope of what libraries, librarians, public health workers, other agencies and individuals could achieve. This resulted in the development of a basic health literacy class, *GetHELP Health Literacy*, which is appropriate for adults of any age.

The *GetHELP Health Literacy* curricula was developed from the experiences gained from working with the public librarians, the community college librarian, and the SCCAA as well as additional reading in the area of health literacy. Drawing on this research and experience, the project director identified three issues that could be addressed create the more enticing class desired by Skagit Valley Hospital's Health Quest program and which could contribute to improved health literacy. These issues were, 1) Personal organization & responsibility in health records (history, medication etc.), 2) Communicating with Health Care Providers (how and what questions to ask), and 3) Finding and Utilizing Reliable Health Resources. Thus, the *GetHELP Health Literacy* as a basic and very doable health literacy program was born.

At the time of this writing, two local health clinics SeaMar (low income and Medicaid-contracted clinic) and another clinic, North Cascades Family Physicians will offer the *GetHELP Health Literacy* program at their respective clinics to patients who wish to participate. A teacher has already been identified to teach the program.

As of this writing, the project director is working with a MSW student who is developing another module that will be a class in health care access and in navigating the health system. The emphasis of this program will be to gather into one place the options available for low and/or limited income health consumers and to be able to clearly and concisely delineate the options.

2. Geographic Region

Though GetHELP initially sought to focus on the low income population of Skagit County it is essentially available to all residents of Skagit County. The region impacted covered the area from West Mount Vernon to Marblemount, the easternmost city in the county.

3. Collaborations/Partnerships

Skagit Valley Hospital

The project manager is employed as the librarian and the CME coordinator at this institution. The opportunities to educate the public, staff and medical staff in choosing community health resources and in utilizing them are many and varied. Opportunities to work with the educational outreach programs are continuing and strengthening. The close working relationship with physicians has enabled the project manager to continue to dialog with physicians about health literacy and to get them to be more involved in this aspect of health care by utilizing the health information prescription pads, the health information pamphlets and in generating continued interest in the Basic Health Literacy curriculum. Because Skagit Valley Hospital is extremely interested in marketing to physicians and in anything that can be done to foster collaboration, all of the GetHELP educational initiatives are fully embraced by the organization.

Public Libraries

The public libraries listed below were involved in the GetHELP library and library staff, health reference and health resources training. Relationships with these libraries continue. More difficult health reference questions are forwarded to Skagit Valley Hospital library for help. Updates on reliable health links are sent to these libraries for optional inclusion on their web pages. As noted below, control of web page content is an issue for not only some of the public libraries but also for other GetHELP participants. In response to this, everyone involved in training was given various versions of the GetHELP suggested links, on CD (in WORD and HTML) format as well as listed on resources lists, so that they could load the links on laptops, reference desk computers etc.

Burlington Public Library

This library is able to totally control the content and format of their web page. Thus they are able to have a very logical and comprehensive representation of health links.

Mount Vernon City Library

This library must utilize the city web-page and thus they are limited to the providing library catalog and basic information about the library.

Sedro-Woolley Public Library

At the time of this writing, this library still does not have a web page.

Upper Skagit Library District

This library was able to put some of the resources on their web page.

Skagit Valley College – Norwood Cole Library

This library was not able to provide a separate page for consumer health links on web page.

Other Agencies*Skagit County Community Action Agency*

The SCCAA was not able to provide health links on their web page

Skagit County Health Department

This department must use the county web page and therefore could not put the health links on their web page.

Clinics

The following clinics are using the GetHELP information pamphlets and the GetHELP information prescription pads.

North Cascade Family Physicians
Physicians Care Clinics: Sedro-Woolley & Burlington Boulevard
SeaMar Community Health Clinic
Skagit Pediatrics
Skagit Valley Medical Center

The following clinics will begin using the GetHELP Basic Health Literacy educational program in their clinics later this year:

Physicians Care Clinics: Burlington Boulevard
SeaMar Community Health Clinic
North Cascades Family Physicians

4. Training – Table of completed and planned training

Training Type	Training Date	Training Place	Trained Population	Total No. People Trained	No. of minorities trained
Health Reference Training for Public Libraries	8/5/05	Skagit Valley College	Public Library Librarians/Staff	3	0
	8/8/05	Skagit Valley College	Public Library Librarians/Staff	6	0
	9/2/05	Skagit Valley College	Public Library Librarians/Staff	5	0
	9/8/05	Mount Vernon City Library	Public Library Librarians/Staff	5	0
	9/13/05	Mount Vernon City Library	Public Library Librarians/Staff	3	0
Total Library Staff Trained				22	
Health Resources Utilization Training for Public Health Workers	2/28/06	Skagit County Public Health Department	Public Health Nurses	7	0
Health Resources Utilization Training for SVH Nursing Staff	This occurs at each orientation where nurses are present	Skagit Valley Hospital	Skagit Valley Hospital (SVH) nurses trained	16	3
Total Public Health Workers & Hospital Nursing Staff Trained				23	3
Teacher Training for Basic Health Literacy Class	12/23/06	Skagit County Community Action Agency	Family Literacy Program Volunteers	4	1
Basic Health Literacy Class	1/23/06	Skagit County Community Action Agency	WIC* program	4	2
	2/22/06	Skagit County Community Action Agency	WIC* program	3	3
	2/8/06	Burlington Senior Center		5	0
	In the future as requested	Skagit County Community Action Agency	WIC*		

Physician Introduction to BHL and Info Prescriptions etc.	1/10/06	Skagit Pediatrics	Physicians	11	0
	Ad Hoc Physician One on One Sessions	Skagit Valley Hospital	Physicians	19	0
Total no. Physicians Introduced to Health Literacy & Health Info. Prescriptions				30	0

Training Still Planned					
Basic Health Literacy Classes	4/19/06	Camano Senior Center			
	5/09/06	Sedro-Woolley Senior Center			
	May 18, 2006	North Cascades Family Physicians	Initial presentation to health care providers; then the actual class for Patients/General Public		
	Date not yet confirmed	SeaMAR Community Health Clinic	“		
	Date not yet confirmed	Skagit County Public Health Department	“		
Physician Introduction to BHL and Info Prescriptions etc.	3/20/06	Camano Community Health Clinic	Physicians		
Health Literacy for Physicians CME	Fall 2006	Skagit Valley Hospital	Physicians	Expecting about 30	

The WIC* program depends on volunteers to teach classes for WIC participants. No volunteers stepped forward for the Skagit County Community Action Agency WIC program. The program was taught by the GetHELP project manager. The Family Literacy volunteers have not yet utilized the Basic Health Literacy curriculum.

5. Training Sites

Skagit Valley College

The college has excellent training facilities including a computer training room that was utilized for some of the training for public librarians and library staff.

Mount Vernon City Library

We had the use of a small conference room and utilized a lap top with multimedia projector.

Skagit County Community Action Agency

This facility has a small training room. The facility only has overhead projector. The Basic Health Literacy class can be taught with overheads or it can be taught using a computer and multimedia projector. The slides used in a multimedia projection format are simply printed on overheads.

Skagit County Public Health Department

This facility has an excellent training room and computer lab. They have offered it for not only ongoing Public Health Nurse training, but for other community outreach as needed.

Burlington Senior Center

This facility has a nice meeting room but had no computer access. A laptop with multimedia projector was brought in for training.

Skagit Valley Hospital

The hospital has multiple options and equipment for training. This includes a computer lab that is only available for medical staff and other SVH clinical staff and not for the general public. Skagit Valley Hospital conference rooms are equipped with multimedia projection and with Internet capabilities.

6. Exhibits

GetHELP did not utilize exhibits independently or in conjunction with any other activity.

7. Resource Materials

- a. GetHELP Information Pamphlet (English and Spanish Versions)
- b. GetHELP Health Information Prescription Pad (English and Spanish Versions)
- c. GetHELP Training & Resources CD
 - i. GetHELP Links (English and Spanish Versions)
 - ii. GetHELP Training for Librarians (Includes Power Point presentation and speakers' notes)
 - iii. GetHELP Training for Public Health Workers (Includes only a Power Point presentation as this is meant to be given by health sciences librarians).
 - iv. GetHELP Health Literacy curricula (Includes Power Point presentation and speakers' notes; this resource can also be used to teach volunteers to teach the *GetHELP Basic Literacy*).
 - v. GetHELP lists of health resources (English and Spanish Versions).
- d. URLS where GetHELP is promoted and advertised:
 - i. Burlington Public Library: <http://www.burlington.lib.wa.us/health.htm>
 - ii. Skagit Valley Hospital: <http://www.skagitvalleyhospital.org/> (Health Quest then Web Resources, scroll to the bottom for GetHELP and Links, the list of topics and drop down box link to MedlinePlus as pre-canned topic searches).

8. Web Sites

The Burlington Public Library web site is kept current by library staff. The Skagit Valley Hospital (SVH) web resources page includes a section on health resources. This page includes a table and drop down box that are database controlled. The SVH Library Information Resource Center (LIRC) is responsible for keeping this current. The categorized-health-resources section, located below the table/drop down box section, is also kept current by the LIRC. When and if the other participants are able to add and format content to their web sites, the GetHELP CD that each participant was provided will be useful in initial site implementation. As GetHELP resources are identified and/or changed, these will be forwarded electronically to all participants.

9. Document Delivery and Reference Services

The public and community college libraries perform document delivery and reference services per their respective institutions' policies. Statistics are not kept as to how many health science reference questions are answered and how many health science documents are requested. Skagit Valley Hospitals' community health resource service also does not keep track of statistics. On the average SVH answers 3-4 questions per week and frequently mails or emails results of simple searches from resources such as MedlinePlus.

10. Approaches and Interventions Used

Our first accomplishment was to develop a meaningful logo to use on promotional materials. The primary promotional materials were then developed: the GetHELP information resources and libraries brochure and then the information prescription pads. Next, training for librarians in health reference was developed using a variety of resources developed by others and combined into a single training. The two key librarians participating in the GetHELP project, Linda Hendrick, MLS and Sue Jacobsen, MLS created all the reference training materials. Participating libraries were then contacted to begin training. This occurred in August and September 2005. An initial version of a health literacy program was created but subsequently discarded since it was trying to cover what really should be taught in public health education programs. After much thought and subsequent to the request from the Skagit Valley Hospital community outreach department, the Sue Jacobsen and Linda Hendrick formulated what they coined as the *GetHELP Health Literacy* curricula, which is a curricula aimed toward an adult population. Included with the curricula is a teacher script that facilitates training volunteers how to teach this class.

Training for trainers to teach the *GetHELP Health Literacy* was offered. The Skagit County Community Action Agency (SCCAA) marketed this training to their corps of volunteers and also marketed the class to various populations (WIC recipients, Family Literacy participants and Transitional Housing participants), who might benefit from this program. Simultaneously physicians were approached to begin utilizing the *GetHELP Health Information Prescription* pads in their clinics. Skagit Valley Hospital was also interested in using the *GetHELP Health Literacy* class in their community educational outreach programs. This was and continues to be advertised via multiple hospital communications such as the quarterly *Health Quest* magazine, listings in the newspapers etc.

Finally, training with a slightly different focus was created for public health workers. This training involved teaching how and where to find the best, most reliable and most relevant health information for the populations typically served by Skagit County public health workers. They were contacted early on about this and were excited about this training. The training occurred and was very successful in accomplishing its goals but also in fostering a good working relationship between the public health department and Skagit Valley Hospital and also with the participating public libraries.

11. Evaluation

The project was evaluated from training sessions with librarians/library staff; train the trainer for *GetHELP Health Literacy* and from the training at the public health department. The evaluation results demonstrated that this was effective in raising awareness of the importance of health resources. The actual training sessions conducted using the *GetHELP Health Literacy* were not evaluated, primarily because the classes were small. We asked participants instead to just tell us what they thought we could do better. We continue to incorporate the changes in that particular program. We have tried to get formal feed back from physicians but have found this nearly impossible. They are simply too busy. Casual and ad hoc feed-back has been received by the project manager. This has been extremely positive.

12. Problems and Barriers Encountered

The *GetHELP Health Literacy* class was designed to be taught by either volunteers, library staff and hospital staff. The single largest problem was and is securing volunteers to teach this class. This is only an issue for the programs associated with WIC and the Skagit County Community Action agency.

Choice of class for WIC participants is optional and admittedly the *GetHELP Health Literacy* class is not popular. The *GetHELP Health Literacy* class took much longer to develop than originally planned.

Expertise in developing health related materials was not readily available as originally planned. The project manager and another librarian then spent much time developing these materials.

Some of the key participating organizations even at the time of this writing do not have much control or influence on the content they can offer on their web pages.

Marketing libraries and resources via pamphlets and printed materials is limited. Many of the places we sought to place these materials would not let us do so. We were limited to placing these in the public libraries, participating clinics and WIC offices.

In general it is very difficult to perform outreach to the low literate and low-income community. There seems to be a reluctance to come to educational activities. There is much more interest in attending educational programming from more literate citizens.

This final realization led the project manager ultimately to refine the *GetHELP Health Literacy* program and to formulate a plan for reaching this community. This is outlined in the section below.

13. Continuation Plans & Solutions to the Problems/Difficulties stated in 12, above.

The basis of these continuation plans is to go out directly to patients at the clinics and at the hospital.

The GetHELP project manager is working to continue to identify useful resources to the low-income health consumer population. As these are identified, they are forwarded to participating libraries. The GetHELP project manager is in the fortunate position to be directly involved in physician and clinic outreach in a number of ways (e.g, responsible to visit clinics to train physicians in library resources, in connectivity to the hospital, in developing physician CME) and can freely use these opportunity to discuss the *GetHELP Health Literacy* program etc. and the use of the GetHELP information prescription pads and the display of the GetHELP health information brochures. This access also presents the opportunity to initiate dialog in the usefulness of libraries and librarians in various pieces of the health literacy process.

The *GetHELP Health Literacy* program materials are all free from various resources, and thus do not represent an acquisition cost. They do represent a cost for copying. Funding for continued copying and placement into binders is being sought from local service organizations. Three clinics will be using the *GetHELP Health Literacy* program and for the next six months, these classes will be taught by the MSW student as part of her practicum. The *GetHELP Health Literacy* program, and the GetHELP health information pamphlets and prescription pads will continue to be marketed to all clinics.

A MSW student in need of a practicum is working on a whole set of resources and a curriculum for navigating through the maze of public and private insurance options. It was determined early on in the project that this is something that the librarians were not at all expert in and it was not until recently that the opportunity with the MSW student presented itself. This student will present this class to other social workers in the hospital and in the community. The goal is to make this a regular Skagit Valley Hospital Health Quest class and to train staff and community social workers to teach this class.

The *GetHELP Health Literacy* curricula will be continued to be used in Skagit Valley Hospital educational outreach programs and will be presented at more clinics.

The public health department is also interested in the *GetHELP Health Literacy* program and a second session with the public health nurses is being scheduled to present this program to them. It is hoped that a teacher can be trained to teach it or at least the public health nurses can use it in helping their patients.

Libraries not located Skagit County (e.g, the Stanwood and Camano regions) that serve patrons who are in the hospital patient region will also be able to participate in GetHELP reference services and GetHELP librarian training.

14. Impact

The GetHELP project was successful in defining and communicating the overall need for a more health literate population. Many of the key professionals who interact with the low income and low health literate population are now much more prepared to address the issues. The librarians are ready and prepared to provide health reference. The most amazing impact was with the physician group and their desire to help implement educational programming for their patient populations. Getting physicians more involved in any aspect of health literacy is likely to filter down to patients.

The public health nurses were incredibly grateful to receive their training in where to go for reliable resources and expressed this to the GetHELP project manager. Hopefully this is the beginning of a long lasting relationship between the public health department and Skagit Valley Hospital's departments for information and educational resources.

15. Recommendations for Improvement

In order to effectively reach the low income and low literature community one must find ways to infiltrate that community. This could include increased involvement much more in community groups who work with this population would probably increase trust in the GetHELP participants and also establish connections that we currently do not have. This involvement is difficult simply because we are busy people with our own work and family lives.

16. Responses to Followup Questions

16.1 Were your original project goals and objectives met? Many of the original goals were met. If not, why not? The goal that was least met was in the direct education of the target population. This was not met, because this target must choose to participate in health literacy programs. We have not found an effective way to help them choose these programs.

16.2 What significant lessons were learned which would be of interest or use to others conducting outreach projects? Outreach requires large commitments of staff and time. Relying on volunteers is probably not necessarily the best strategy. GetHELP learned this the hard way. Which strategies were the most effective in implementing the project? GetHELP actually was able to foster more outreach by incorporating it into outreach that is already occurring. Thus the change of focus near the end of the grant funding of this project was an epiphany for us.

16.3 If you were to start all over again, what, if anything, would you change about your goals, project plans, etc. ? I think GetHELP tried to work with too many agencies simultaneously and should have limited to the project to perhaps the libraries, the interested clinics and the public health department. This would have allowed actual implementation of the *GetHELP Health Literacy* program to begin much sooner and for the target population to be reached sooner and probably more effectively.