Fire Safety Solutions for Oklahomans with Disabilities 2011

Executive Summary

This case study summarizes a presentation at the National Symposium on Model Performance in Fire Prevention in May 2012.

Fire Safety Solutions for Oklahomans with Disabilities 2011 has had tremendous success, installing smoke alarms for Oklahomans who are deaf or hard of hearing. Great potential exists for sharing this model project with other states and local organizations to benefit from the lessons learned of the partners in Oklahoma. The program implementation guide provides strategies, forms, procedures, and links to accessible home fire safety materials for the target populations.

Overview

The Fire Safety Solutions for Oklahomans with Disabilities 2011 received funding to install specialized smoke alarms and alert equipment in 250 homes of individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing and live in the two metro areas of Oklahoma City and Tulsa. The program develops and disseminates accessible home fire and life safety messages as part of the home visit program. One of the key components of this project's success is the committed partnership between the Oklahoma Assistive Technology Foundation, a non-profit disability organization, and two Oklahoma State University entities – Oklahoma ABLE Tech (Oklahoma's Assistive Technology Act Program) and Fire Protection Publications. The individual and shared expertise of these partners uniquely positions the project to address and service the target population's specific needs related to both disability and fire safety. Additionally, the previously successful smoke alarm installation programs at OSU, *Fire Safety Solutions for People with Disabilities* and *SAFEOklahoma*, provide much in the way of both experience and lessons learned to this project.

A follow-up survey is distributed to all consumers who participate three to six months after the smoke alarm installation. This evaluation tool gathers information to assess the consumer satisfaction with the program equipment and materials. This survey also collects information about smoke alarm activations and home fire safety behavior practices.

Formative Evaluation (qualitative or quantitative risk assessment)

The USFA annually reports that the fire death rate in Oklahoma is more than double the national fire death rate per million population. At the time of this grant application, Oklahoma ranked 5th highest in the US and is currently 2nd, only behind the District of Columbia.

The current population in Oklahoma is 3.6 million with half of the state's population living in the two metro areas of Oklahoma City and Tulsa. With 15.8% of the population reporting at least one disability; it is estimated that 285,190 Oklahomans living in the metro areas have a disability. Half of those, or 142,600, are deaf or hard of hearing. Additionally, *Fire in the United States* (August 2007) reported those with limited physical/cognitive abilities are at a higher risk of death and injury from fire as well as those who live at or below the poverty level. Oklahoma ranks 9th highest in the US with residents living below the poverty level. These data, along with six years of smoke alarm project experience, are the basis of the risk assessment for the project design.

Process Evaluation (analysis of the program's development and early implementation)

Fire Safety Solutions for Oklahomans with Disabilities 2011 targets Oklahomans who are deaf or hard of hearing in the sixteen counties that comprise the two metro areas of Oklahoma City and Tulsa. The project is marketed to the target population through fully accessible formats at a variety of disability-related venues. The goal is to install specialized smoke alarms and alert equipment that meet the needs of the people who are deaf or hard of hearing in the targeted areas and deliver customized and fully accessible home fire safety education to all who participate. The smoke alarms, alert equipment and installation process are based on wakefulness studies and the National Fire Alarm Code, 2010 Edition. Trained installers install the smoke alarms and provide a personalized family fire drill and review of the home fire and life safety messages.

A follow up survey is distributed to all consumers who participate three to six months after the smoke alarm installation in order to gather consumer information to assess satisfaction regarding project equipment and materials as well as to collect information about smoke alarm activations and home fire safety behavior practices.

Impact Evaluation (identification of measurable changes that are cognitive gains or behavior changes that reduced risk)

At the end of the project, 256 homes received completed installations to protect 768 people including family members. This is 1,097 First Alert smoke alarms, 263 Lifetone alert devices, and 62 Gentex Visual alarms installed. The project installed alarms in every bedroom/sleeping area, as well as on every level and outside every sleeping area.Current numbers show that only 32% of homes met minimum code requirements for coverage and had existing alarms newer than 10 years. Finally, 68% of homes had NO smoke alarms or smoke alarms that did not work.

Outcome Evaluation (longer term documentation that supports reduction of injury, death or economic losses)

Two saves have been reported. The smoke alarms and alert equipment installed through the program alerted people to fires in two homes. *Fire Safety Solutions for Oklahomans with Disabilities and the SAFEOKlahoma* projects funded through USFA/FEMA, Assistance to Firefighters, Fire Prevention and Safety Grants awarded to Fire Protection Publications, Oklahoma State University, there have been

sixteen life saves documented over the past seven years as a direct result of the grant projects; therefore, it is fully expected that additional life saves will occur as the result of this grant funded project as well.

Recommendations for Others

Select committed partners; find appropriate state specific data appropriately identifying at-risk populations; network with key stakeholders to successfully advance the goals and objectives of the project; use people first language, stay current with codes, research and best practices.

The lesson in this project for the Vision 20/20 Symposium is the risk assessment and the use of committed partners that are uniquely positioned to implement best practices with an at risk population. The partners are working to build capacity with local fire departments and to help them recognize the unique communication needs of this target population. Data and lessons learned continue to be collected.

For More Information

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Go to IFSTA.org and click on Research on the red bar, click Fire and Life Safety Research, click Fire Safety Solutions for People with Disabilities to find the *Implementation Guide* and targeted home fire safety messages. Or contact Cindy Finkle (cfinkle@osufpp.org).

To see an expanded version of this case study that was presented at the 2012 National Symposium on Model Performance in Fire Prevention hosted by Vision 2020, click http://strategicfire.org/page.cfm/go/2012-Model-Performance.