



Healthy Kids & Families™

Overcoming Social, Environmental and Family Barriers
to Childhood Obesity Prevention



Marline Ruiz (community health worker), the Coach for the **Healthy Kids & Families™** project, explored the nature playground and trails of a local nature sanctuary in Worcester, MA with several families participating in the project. Families learned about a new local place for physical activity as they enjoyed their walk through the woods on a glorious fall day. This trip was one of the community navigation events that are designed to bring families together as they connect to a community resource.

Healthy Kids & Families™, the applied research project of the UMass Worcester Prevention Research Center (UMass Worcester PRC) at UMass Medical School, is testing the impact of a community health worker (CHW)-delivered intervention aimed at helping families overcome barriers to childhood obesity prevention. The intervention is compared to a comparison condition aimed at helping families improve positive parenting skills.

Led by Milagros C. Rosal, PhD and Wenjun Li, PhD, the intervention addresses social, environmental, and family issues that may pose as barriers to healthy choices. Recognizing that families are typically pressed for time, Marline meets with families individually, both in person and by telephone, at times and locations that are convenient for them. She uses Motivational Interviewing to address families' concerns about healthy eating, physical activity and weight. She also shares information and refers to community resources that could help families meet their goals. Marline's work is supported through quarterly newsletters mailed to families and through organized community navigation events. In the upcoming months, families will also be invited to participate in a private Facebook group that will reinforce intervention messages and give families an additional way to get to know each other and share information.

In all, 244 families with children from Kindergarten through 6th grade (from nine elementary schools located in economically distressed areas of Worcester) are participating in the project. Families will be involved in the intervention for 2 years, and will be assessed at baseline, 6-, 12-, 18- and 24-months. The intervention will be evaluated on child and parent outcomes including Body Mass Index (BMI), dietary behaviors, physical activity, and sedentariness.

The project is a partnership of UMass Worcester PRC, Worcester Public Schools, and Oak Hill Community Development Corporation.



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