

Hermosa Vida at North Country HealthCare

BEST PRACTICES

Addressing Community Conditions

Community Engagement & Leadership Development

ISSUE FOCUS

Displacement of Low Income Residents

Health Impact Assessment

Background

North Country HealthCare is a Federally Qualified Health Center in Flagstaff, AZ, serving fourteen communities in northern Arizona. In 2010, North Country received a grant from the **Kresge Foundation** to create a program called **Hermosa Vida** that works upstream to improve the community's health outcomes. Hermosa Vida does this by reducing barriers and increasing access to resources that allow people to live healthy lives. Hermosa Vida later received funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's **Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) Su Comunidad program**, which works to advance health equity in Hispanic and Latino communities.

Hermosa Vida is located within and managed by North Country HealthCare and engages community members to address social determinants of health on the individual, family, community and policy levels. Its staff consists of a program coordinator, a community organizer and a community health worker (CHW), who are sponsored by North Country HealthCare to be trained by the renowned **Industrial Area Foundation**. North Country values its clinical and non-clinical staff's cultural competency skills. According to the CHW, the organization promotes "the use of strategies that will help address social determinants of health such as meaningful patient engagement." This type of prioritization strengthens the clinic's ability to support community-driven, upstream, preventive health work.

Various local organizations partner with Hermosa Vida, including the Sunnyside Neighborhood Association, Northern Arizona University's department of Anthropology and Interdisciplinary Health Research Institute, Flagstaff Unified School District, the City of Flagstaff Recreation Department, Flagstaff Community Supported Agriculture, Northern Arizona Interfaith Council and Coconino Coalition for Children and Youth.

American Community Survey 2008-2013	Arrowhead Village Census Tract	Coconino County
Population	6,714	134,795
White Alone	68%	62%
Latino/Hispanic	30%	14%
American Indian & Alaskan Native Alone	8%	27%
Persons Living in Poverty	37%	23%
Persons Living in Mobile Home	22%	16%
Median Household Income	\$33,224	\$49,555
Renter-Occupied Housing Units	69%	40%
Median Gross Rent as a % of Household Income	49%	33%

Community Challenge

ADDRESSING COMMUNITY CONDITIONS

In 2013, Hermosa Vida's community organizers began working in Flagstaff's Arrowhead Village Mobile Home Park within La Plaza Vieja neighborhood to address environmental conditions that were impacting health and quality of life. Around 80 percent of Arrowhead Village residents are patients at North Country HealthCare, and most residents live in poverty. When the Hermosa Vida team began working with the neighborhood, they initially intended to focus on access to healthy foods and safe spaces for physical activity. However, understanding that community health decisions needed to be informed by the community members' needs, the CHW went door-to-door to discuss personal and community-level barriers to health. After talking directly with many residents, the CHW realized that the residents' main concern was not access to physical activity or healthy eating, but rather a serious housing issue they faced.

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Residents of the 56 mobile homes in Arrowhead Village own their homes. However, they rent the land on which those homes sit. Landmark Properties, a real estate and developing company, had recently proposed to develop a mixed-use, five-story building for luxury-student housing and retail development. This development, called "The Standard," would have displaced more than 100 residents from

Arrowhead Village. The developer would have given each displaced family \$3,500 to move, but that would not have been enough to compensate for the immense financial implications of dislocation. While the families lived in "mobile" homes, most could not afford to move their homes or rent a new one. Many of the homes were also too old to be relocated due to Arizona state statutes that prohibit the relocation of older mobile homes that have not been modernized to meet current state standards. Given these restrictions and the limited affordable housing options in Flagstaff, the community desperately needed help to prevent being dislocated and subsequently falling deeper into poverty.

Solution

EXPANDING THE CLINIC'S FOCUS

After learning about the role of affordable housing as a social determinant of health, Hermosa Vida's staff promptly began working with Arrowhead Village residents to increase awareness around the new development and the looming displacement. In order for The Standard to be developed, City Council and the Planning and Zoning Commission would need to approve of a zoning change. The time between the zoning change proposal and the city's decision gave Hermosa Vida an opportunity to help Arrowhead Village residents learn how to meaningfully voice their concerns and engage others around the development. Internally, North Country Healthcare had to justify working on this project because they were focusing on housing (which some interpreted as a topic seemingly unrelated to health) and were about to engage in a publically controversial issue that would result in publicity and unwanted attention.

FLAGSTAFF, ARIZONA

CLINICAL-COMMUNITY COLLABORATION CASE EXAMPLES

RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT & LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

During the next few months, the Hermosa Vida Community Organizer and CHW began to plan and take action. They partnered with the Arrowhead Village residents, the La Plaza Vieja Neighborhood Association and other community members to publicize the controversy by sharing stories with the media and attending public meetings. By meeting with local officials and City staff, the partners learned about their options and the decision-making processes involved with zoning and development approval.

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Around this time, the Hermosa Vida team attended a healthy communities conference and learned about Health Impact Assessments (HIAs), which identify potential health effects of proposed policies, regulations, projects and programs. The health effects an HIA considers tend to be broad and include social, economic and environmental factors. With full support from North Country HealthCare, the Hermosa Vida team decided to conduct an HIA as a tool to defend Arrowhead Village residents and stop the development. In a few months, the Planning and Zoning Commission and City Council would decide to approve or reject the development. Given Hermosa Vida's limited time and resources, the CHW, Community Organizer and an independent health impact assessment consultant began to conduct a *rapid* HIA that would provide unbiased, evidence-based research to determine the health impacts of the development.

The HIA process helped further foster and supplement community engagement, education and leadership already occurring. Hermosa Vida and stakeholders met to discuss the planning of the HIA, which included scheduling, interpreting Spanish and English materials and aligning the differing goals of La Plaza Vieja Neighborhood Association and Arrowhead Village residents. Stakeholders learned the process of organizing as a united community, voiced their feelings and concerns regarding displacement and developed effective communication skills to defend their stance.

Through this process, it became clear that participants' concerns, whether they involved physical displacement or a loss of social cohesion, were all associated with health. The Hermosa Vida team also met with community members, researchers and city staff members to prepare for public meetings related to the City Council's final decision. In order to better represent residents' concerns, Hermosa Vida trained resident leaders to testify in front of the Planning and Zoning Commission on behalf of their community.

It was essential for Hermosa Vida to not only conduct an accurate and meaningful HIA, but also to use the HIA effectively and ensure that it would be acknowledged by the City and inform its ultimate decision. The HIA's recommendations were incorporated in the City's Planning and Zoning packet that covered the Standard development. During the hearing in June 2014, dozens of speakers defended the Arrowhead Village residents, citing the HIA's findings.



**ACTIVE LIVING
BY DESIGN**
Catalyst for a culture of health

This resource was developed by Active Living By Design to enrich a learning network with useful material about clinical-community collaboration. For more information, visit activelivingbydesign.org.

Outcomes

The Planning and Zoning Commission voted against the proposed Standard development, and weeks later the developer withdrew its proposal. This was quite an accomplishment in a city that rarely rejects development projects. The publicity and dialogue surrounding Arrowhead Village had long-term implications for the public sector: affordable housing and displacement are now pressing issues that the city's planning department is addressing. On a community- and policy-level, there is an understanding and a recognition that affordable housing is directly associated with health. The new 2015 [La Plaza Vieja Neighborhood Plan](#)'s policies and goals are highly informed by the feedback and comments from The Standard rezoning case. Largely due to this case, the plan promotes new affordable housing to replace the mobile home village, taking into account safety and temporary and permanent relocation costs. The plan explicitly discusses the Arrowhead Village Mobile Home Park, recognizing the social and land-use challenges involved with the property. Planners are now teaming up with developers to address displacement in Flagstaff, and the city even considered a relocation ordinance soon after the case ended. The CHW has heard by word of mouth that developers view this case as a lesson on community-engagement.

The community now knows how to organize around important causes. According to the Hermosa Vida's main CHW, "Something that helped to change the course of this story was meaningful civic engagement through capacity building. Many of these residents learned how to advocate for themselves and others, and that is easily transferrable to other issues that may come up. They now have skills that can potentially help ensure they are at the table for issues that affect them directly." This shows how Hermosa Vida's community engagement is a long-term investment with the potential to improve social determinants of health within the community.

Due to Hermosa Vida's success, the program is currently involved with many community-based changes to promote CHWs and even expanding their own efforts. They are participating in statewide efforts to recognize and sustain the [Arizona Community Health Worker Workforce](#). The success of Hermosa Vida's CHW's efforts to address social determinants

of health is generating demand for more staff to work on these issues. For example, North Country HealthCare recently received funding to hire more CHWs. Hermosa Vida is also helping to form a new statewide coalition of former REACH grantees that will identify and secure funding to sustain present and future local strategies.

Tools

- [A Model for Evaluating the Activities of a Coalition-Based Policy Action Group: The Case of Hermosa Vida](#)
Hardy, L. J., Wertheim, P., Bohan, K., Quezada, J. C., & Henley, E. (2013). A Model for Evaluating the Activities of a Coalition-Based Policy Action Group: The Case of Hermosa Vida. *Health Promotion Practice*, 14(4), 514–523. <http://doi.org/10.1177/1524839912461253>
- [Defying Displacement: Organizing for a Beautiful Life in Flagstaff, Arizona](#)
Hardy, L. J., Wertheim, P., Bohan, K., Quezada, J. C., & Henley, E. (2013). A Model for Evaluating the Activities of a Coalition-Based Policy Action Group: The Case of Hermosa Vida. *Health Promotion Practice*, 14(4), 514–523. <http://doi.org/10.1177/1524839912461253>
- [The Role of Community Health Centers in Health Impact Assessments: One organizer's account of a HIA's impact on her community](#) by Michelle Thomas
- [A Beautiful Life – Hermosa Vida – Rapid Assessment, Response and Evaluation \(RARE\): Results and Implementation 2012](#)

Contacts

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