

The Evolution of Outreach to Meet the Needs of Farmworkers Along the U.S./Mexico Border

Outreach Promising Practice

Vista Community Clinic (VCC) designed adaptable outreach efforts to meet the needs and challenges faced by San Diego's farmworker community through relationship building, asset mapping, and community engagement. VCC provides regular outreach visits to community and job sites to deliver health education ("Mini-Health Fairs") and resource information ("pláticas"). The outreach team has built rapport with growers, farmworkers, and community members, which enabled them to adapt to the needs of farmworkers at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Organization:

- Name: Vista Community Clinic (VCC)
- Location: Southern California



About:

Since originally opening its doors in 1972, VCC has been operating for 50 years in the North San Diego area, more recently expanding to Riverside and Orange Counties. As a Federally Qualified Health Center, VCC provides medical, dental, behavioral health and specialty care services to approximately 70,000 patients annually. Through the Community Health Department, a wide range of programs and services are provided to the community including direct population outreach, youth development, HIV support, tobacco, alcohol, and drug prevention, mobile clinic services, migrant health education, and local food distribution. A primary mission of the clinic is serving communities that have been disproportionately impacted by social determinants of health. Given the clinic's location near the United States border with Mexico, their migrant population experiences unique challenges compared to migrant communities in other regions. VCC's migrant worker health programming provides access to culturally appropriate education and healthcare for farmworkers.

Unmet Need Addressed

For VCC and other farmworker-serving organizations, there are few centralized locations to reach the farmworker population, as they live scattered throughout various areas in the region. Farmworkers in the San Diego region are generally not as transient compared to other migrant populations, with over 60% of workers being permanent residents, and there is limited employer-provided housing for farmworkers in the area. Therefore, VCC had to initially identify ways to reach farmworkers that did not rely on a centralized location such as housing sites or labor camps.

VCC's outreach utilized an assets mapping strategy to understand their community's available resources and existing gaps. This asset mapping strategy has been informed by VCC's team members that have over 20 years of experience in the community. Based on their asset mapping, VCC concentrated their outreach efforts on sites where jornaleros (seasonal farmworkers looking for work) gathered, and shared VCC resources and services. At these sites, farmworkers invited the VCC outreach team to contact site managers or employers. After this introduction, employers invited the VCC outreach team to host platicas (informal chats) over the farmworkers' break or lunchtime.

From this process, the outreach team identified other locations. VCC's approach to outreach has evolved further and is focused on saturating the community and workplace with resources, health education through pláticas and Mini Health Fairs, and services, such as care management, appointment booking navigation, free transportation, and food and diaper distribution.

Description of the Practice

VCC's outreach efforts were designed to actively adapt and evolve to the needs and challenges faced by San Diego's farmworker community. To actively meet these needs, VCC maintains a wide range of practices which include:

- Welcoming promotores/community leaders to the table
- Asset mapping
- Informational listening sessions
- Distributing health education flyers and other promotional materials at a variety of community sites
- Conducting door-to-door visits in neighborhoods
- Providing outreach services at job sites, such as platicas and Mini Health Fairs.

The goal of VCC's outreach efforts is to constantly maintain a visible presence in the farmworker community by building relationships and partnerships, identifying needs through asset mapping, and strengthening outreach based on evaluation efforts and input from community leaders known as Poder Popular. Their outreach team focuses on topics that are relevant and beneficial to farmworkers' health, which helped to garner buy-in from employers. VCC's investment into outreach proved beneficial at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic when VCC was able to leverage the relationships it built with employers to identify farmworker needs and provide personal protective equipment (PPE), COVID-19 testing, and vaccination clinics in their mobile unit. Furthermore, VCC's longtime presence in the farmworker community set them up as trusted messengers, which helped with providing COVID-19 information and combating misinformation.

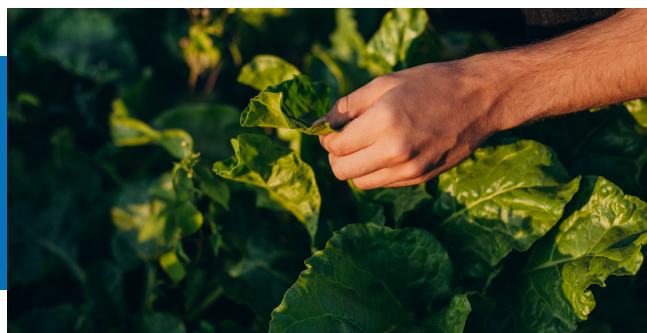
Key Strategies

Asset Mapping

Asset mapping was a critical, ongoing component of the development of integrated outreach services provided by VCC. Outlining the available resources and gathering input from long-standing community leaders helped to create a better understanding of existing gaps in services. This approach has also fostered partnerships with other community-based organizations. These partnerships align to meet the hierarchy of needs experienced by community members such as housing, employment, immigration, healthcare, and education. Ultimately, asset mapping has informed the evolution of VCC's outreach efforts in neighborhoods and work sites and has enabled the development of much-needed resources and services.

Pláticas

After making connections with employers or site managers, VCC will often visit worksites during the lunch hour or break period to host pláticas or informal chats with farmworkers to inform them of available services and community-wide resources. This type of communication helps to cultivate relationships, encourages farmworker engagement, and ensures employers see the benefits provided by VCC.



The pláticas are an important step in VCC’s ability to adapt services, as they encourage connection and transparency to gain buy-in from farmworkers, employers, and community members. Furthermore, the pláticas served as an introduction to VCC’s services. As follow-up, and after relationships were established with employers, the outreach team was allowed to host larger events, such as “Mini Health Fairs.”

The popularity of the pláticas later evolved into “Mini Health Fairs,” which are focused health initiatives centering on topics such as skin cancer prevention and blood pressure and blood sugar screenings. These sessions are conducted at worksites and last roughly four hours. Both efforts of the pláticas and the “Mini Health Fairs” synthesize information into smaller, more digestible pieces, and focus on topics that are relevant and beneficial to farmworkers’ health, which helped to garner buy-in from employers.

Mini Health Fairs

VCC’s Mini Health Fairs began in 2017 after receiving funding for skin cancer prevention. As part of the initial effort, VCC partnered with dermatologists and conducted outreach at agricultural worksites. The term “Mini Health Fair” was coined by VCC, and is a focused health initiative conducted at worksites.

Worksites in the area are not the typical site for health fair events or outreach, and employers often resist hosting programs during the workday for a variety of reasons, including a reduction in work time. VCC understands that visiting a worksite may not be the preferable choice for farm managers. Thus, they build trust and a rapport with farmworkers through introductions and pláticas over break periods so they do not interrupt the work day. Additionally, each Mini Health Fair covers one specific topic and is developed to provide information clearly and concisely. This approach helps to cut down on time taken away from the workday.

VCC’s Migrant Health team partners with University of California San Diego Border Health and Kaiser Permanente to host approximately five annual health fairs on agricultural sites. Leveraging relationship-building efforts from the pláticas, VCC is seen as a trusted messenger, sharing relevant and reliable information. As a result, farmworkers and many employers in the region are open to engaging with the Mini Health Fairs.

Results

VCC has seen positive outcomes from the evolution of their outreach services. Asset mapping has allowed for effective collaboration with other community-based organizations, and has ensured their services are provided appropriately to meet farmworkers' needs. The pláticas and Mini Health Fairs allow their organization to effectively reach farmworkers and community members that are otherwise largely dispersed throughout the county.

Farmworkers in San Diego are primarily employed in avocado groves, strawberry fields, nurseries, and livestock production. The flexible, mobile format of the pláticas and Mini Health Fairs allows visits to these and other sites. Additionally, the scale of their outreach can range from 15 to 300 farmworkers present at each event. VCC's recent acquisition of a mobile health unit has allowed their programming to expand access to services at community locations and job sites.

Key Challenges and How to Address Them

Promotion and Messaging

As part of their COVID-19 pandemic response, VCC regularly updated and distributed educational materials communicating that COVID-19 resources were to be provided at "no cost." Early in vaccine distribution, VCC staff learned that some farmworkers and many employers were concerned when vaccination teams asked for insurance information. This was a learning opportunity for the VCC team regarding ways to communicate using messaging that were clear and consistent, and to assess beforehand when messaging can be confusing or seemingly contradictory. Now the outreach team is diligent in preparing and providing information and answering questions during outreach.



The VCC outreach team also regularly promotes available resources and services to the farmworker community. VCC found that assuming that people will access an existing service or available resource is not necessarily true. For example, community members may not be accustomed to receiving medical care in tents or mobile units. To encourage the use of these important services, outreach workers needed to dedicate time to explain and give space for the community to understand the setting and the benefits surrounding this new form of care delivery.

Resources Needed and Expenses

Centralizing Coordination Efforts

Collaboration can be an effective strategy to maximize resources. Although mutually beneficial, collaboration between different groups and organizations can present challenges due to different priorities, resources, and communication styles. Therefore, VCC also serves as the backbone organization of the Farmworker Care Coalition (FWCC), an organization representing the combined efforts of several local community-based organizations and institutions. As the backbone organization, VCC is responsible for planning, managing, and supporting the activities of the FWCC, and provides leadership, structure, and keeps the momentum going.

Approximately 20 staff members support the work of community events and the Mini Health Fairs. VCC may be present for onsite service delivery from 4 to 8 hours during these events.

VCC employs two, full-time migrant health educators. These health educators have been in the community for decades, and serve key roles in connecting with farmworkers in the area. At this time, the greatest expense is staff time and transportation to each site for Mini Health Fairs, platicas, and asset mapping.



Partnerships

The following partners help to promote VCC's services as well as coordinate outreach and care delivery:

- Community leaders (lideres and promotores), referred to as Poder Popular
- University of California San Diego Border Health Project
- Kaiser Permanente
- Head Start program
- Farmworker Care Coalition
- National Council of Skin Cancer Prevention

Learn More

- Website: <https://www.vistacommunityclinic.org/>
- Contact: Deysi Merino, Migrant Health Program Supervisor, Deysi.Merino@vcc.org

Tools and Resources

- [Community Health Needs Assessment Toolkit](#)



Pro tip:

Consider incorporating programming that is flexible and can be adapted to the needs of your community. This requires soliciting input from the communities served through efforts such as listening sessions and needs assessments. Additionally, providing available resources related to housing and citizenship concerns through community partners also helps to expand programming to the community. This flexibility and partnerships bring greater name recognition and trust to an organization.

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