

Front Porch Project in Easton: A Model Partnership

In October, PFSA partnered with two Lehigh Valley groups, Easton's Weed and Seed Office and the Bethlehem Partnership for a Healthy Community (with financial support from the Two Rivers Health and Wellness Foundation) to offer our Front Porch Project (FPP) training to residents of the west ward in Easton. Together we created an exciting model for how FPP works. The training was held on three evenings, in the Salvation Army community center, with food and child care for participants. Over 20 people turned out each night, and had a lively discussion on how to help kids and support families. We asked Laura Accetta, Weed and Seed Site Coordinator in Easton to share some of the reasons for the program's success.

Q: What is Weed and Seed?

A: Weed and Seed was originally started as a statewide initiative in 2000, with support of the PA Commission on Crime and Delinquency. The city of Easton continued funding the program when it was cut from the state budget. The name describes its two critical components: "weeding" out the violent offenders in high-crime areas and then "seeding" the neighborhood with prevention, intervention, treatment and other revitalization services. Though Weed and Seed serves all the residents in Easton, the target area is the West Ward.

Q: Why did Weed and Seed want to sponsor the FPP training?

A: Last year I was chosen as Victim Advocate of the Year by Crime Victims Council; in my capacity as Weed and Seed coordinator, I come into contact with many victims of crimes. I attended the awards event but I was shocked to learn about the large number of Northampton County children who are victims of abuse. When Two Rivers Health and Wellness Executive Director Paul



Easton Public Library

Brunswick approached me to work on the Front Porch Project, I knew it would be **a fantastic opportunity to make a positive difference** in the Easton community.

Q: How did you recruit participants?

A: It was really word of mouth. We got the word out on Facebook and talked about it everywhere we went, spoke at neighborhood meetings such as Blockwatch, and at the Cops and Kids Reading Room. Faith-based groups and organizations like the Guardian Angels and the Northampton County work release program were key partnerships for us. We also hung a banner at the Weed and Seed flagship Summer Nights program, held at the community park.

Q: What was the most valuable part of the FPP training to your folks?

A: Sharing experiences and learning from one another, and learning how to diffuse situations that can negatively impact a child; things like responding to a parent with a sympathetic look or a caring remark – it was a fabulous community engagement tool.

Q: How did the participants respond?

A: Everyone who attended had nothing but positive comments on how much they learned and understood so much better about ways they can be positive role models in their community. Folks of all ages, nationalities, genders and educational backgrounds attended and were appreciative of the overarching theme of cultural respect, and sharing experiences and ideas.

Laura added, "I think that anyone in the capacity of community building and community safety should seriously consider taking this training. The facilitators made receiving the information pleasurable and interesting, and the information itself is very important when it comes to increasing the quality of life in a community and most importantly keeping children safe." The Easton training was facilitated by independent trainer Marcie Lightwood and PFSA Program Director Beth Bitler.

To learn more about sponsoring Front Porch Project training in your community, contact PFSA. ❖