

Spring 2005 PACE Progress Report for the Wabasso Environmental Assessment

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March was a very productive month in terms of furthering the progress of tangible results we have been working so hard to develop since the Protocol for Assessing Community Excellence in Environmental Health (PACE EH) project was implemented in Wabasso. When we began the PACE process in January 2004, we did not anticipate so many projects to develop. My goal for March was to stay committed and actively involved in seeing these projects through. In Wabasso, government involvement is absolutely essential at this stage in the "game," due the fact that the residents are accustomed to being promised resources which never materialize.

I think that this is a key point in the PACE process that has not yet been fine-tuned. It will be unique to each community and coordinator in terms of how they handle their involvement in continuing to be a presence in their communities when the seed money is not available. A commitment to continue to be a presence in the PACE community that has been selected, even after the money is gone, is crucial. If this commitment is not made, there is a risk to the community, and the agency involved (the Indian River County Health Department (CHD)), of falling back into the cycle of government addressing a community's concerns, identifying issues, but then doing little to assist them.

I spent a lot of time in March making sure we stayed "connected." I met with twenty families that have been selected by the World Changers organization to have external repairs to their homes and helped them with the application process. I arranged meetings between the World Changers executives and participated in the meetings so that the residents would

be at ease with understanding this wonderful opportunity that has been presented to them. I also worked on coordinating the demolition of three houses which are scheduled to be demolished in May 2005.

Mid-March was full of excitement about the water project, due to the fact that the collaborative efforts of the Wabasso community, County Commissioners, Utility Department, and the Indian River CHD have been successful in acquiring 95 percent of the easements needed to proceed with the project. The utilities department applied for \$825,000 in funding for the project, which has already been designed. There was a problematic area of the project that lacked legal access which would hinder the ability to supply homeowners with potable water; however, as luck has it, a developer submitted plans regarding a nearby land parcel which Erik Olson, Utilities Director, is requiring this developer to run a water line at a distance where the Wabasso resident can access it! This is an excellent example of how agencies and communities can work together to solve issues and really make a difference in a community.

March 7th was the monthly community meeting which was held successfully by the West Wabasso Civic Progressive League. On March 28th, I conducted a steering committee meeting upon request of the community to brief them on the progress and to have discussions regarding the community. I continue to attend and actively participate in these monthly meetings as I believe it is crucial to continue to show our commitment and involvement in ensuring this community stays motivated and empowered to solve their issues. By utilizing the PACE process, we have demonstrated improving

the quality of life for the residents of Wabasso is possible, and now we must prove to them we will support them in making their plans a reality. We have regained their trust by working alongside them to acquire the things they deemed necessary to improve their community such as streetlights, park improvements, potable water, and sidewalks.

On April 15th, 2005, we were successful with applying creative solutions to identified problems, proving that making such an effort can pay off immensely in terms of improving the quality of life for people. We received news that the \$825,000 grant to supply Wabasso with county water was officially awarded to Indian River County! Although the money will not be available until next year, the Utility Director, Erik Olson, deemed the project of high importance and has decided to borrow funding so that construction may start this summer. This is an excellent example of how working together with other agencies can truly make ideas come to fruition. The PACE process helps facilitate such roles and allows a vehicle for public health officials to step out of the traditional role and truly listen to the people we serve. More importantly, it lets us get in the "trenches" to help them fight to do something about issues that they have the power to change. The end result is a drastic improvement in the quality of life. Folks, that's powerful—and yes, it's Public Health.