Bounc’N Cancer: Umatilla’s Success Story

The Confederated Tribes of Umatilla Indian Reservation consist of the Cayuse, Umatilla and Walla Walla peoples, who historically lived in the Columbia River Plateau region. They traditionally fished and traded amongst each other along the river and were brought together as a result of the Treaty of 1855. In 1949 the Tribes formed a constitutional government. The tribe currently has nearly 3000 members most of whom live on the ancient tribal lands of the Columbia River Plateau of Northeastern Oregon and Southeastern Washington states.

PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE

Between June 2006 and August 2010, The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation’s (CTUIR) Yellowhawk Tribal Health Center (YTHC) participated in a Cancer Navigator Research Program. Cancer navigators are culturally competent trained health care workers who work with patients with abnormal screening results or a cancer diagnosis to “navigate” the health care maze. Navigators help maintain communications between patients, their families, physicians and the health care system; they also help to access financial and social services. Navigators assist patients by: providing emotional support and information on what to expect; helping patients understand their diagnoses; coordinating appointments with providers to ensure timely diagnosis and treatment; helping arrange transportation and/or child/elder care for visits to cancer treatments; helping arrange language translation or interpreter services; and, assisting with related paperwork. Once the cancer navigator research was completed, the program and its funding ended, leaving the community without these key services.

Cancer is the second leading cause of death for American Indians/Alaska Natives. The 2011 Umatilla County Community Health Assessment reported that adult American Indians were
more likely to have been diagnosed with cancer (13% compared to 9% of the general population) and, when age differences are accounted for, Umatilla County had a higher cancer mortality rate than Oregon, the national rate and the Healthy People 2020 target objective.

PROGRAM INCEPTION

In the summer of 2008, Aaron Noisey, then Athletic Director of Nixaawyii Community High School, knocked on Jennifer Campbell’s door at the Yellowhawk Tribal Health Center. His visit had a specific purpose; he had a vision and he needed help to make it a reality. His vision involved his school’s basketball team, the school health class, Echo basketball team (a rival school) and the Yellowhawk Tribal Health Center working together to organize a community event where students give back to the community. As their discussion evolved, they saw a need to provide assistance and support to people with cancer in the local and surrounding areas. They wanted to lighten the burden for cancer patients, to help them access needed resources and services and to help them get to cancer treatment appointments. At another level, the opportunity to share personal experiences with cancer would empower cancer patients and lessen the sense of helplessness and feelings of being alone on their journey. To do all of this they needed to raise money.

After this first visit Jennifer and Aaron knew they could not do it alone and started to look for partners. Initially the partner list was small and included the NCS coach, the Echo coach (Jake Bacon), two YTHC employees (Jennifer Campbell and Laura Allen, Community Health Representative/Cancer Navigator), booster clubs and the chair of the local cancer support group (Nixyaaywii Multifeather Cancer Society). Together they shared a common goal, to provide support to members of their communities struggling with cancer. With these original partners the first event was pulled together in two short months.

With the success of the first event, community support and enthusiasm the partner list grew exponentially to include more Yellowhawk Health Tribal Center employees, Cayuse Technologies, members of local and surrounding communities, local small and large business, the Good Shepherd Hospital, the Pendleton Cancer Support Group, CTUIR Wellness Nurse, American Cancer Society and other service groups.

“The community has given so much to the school; we wanted to give something back. Many of our community members have been affected by cancer in some form. We wanted to recognize the people we’ve lost and we felt it was one of the greatest impacts on our community.”

Aaron Noisey, Former Athletic Director
Nixaawyii Community High School
**THE PROGRAM**

In its inaugural year, 2008, the Bounc’N Cancer Basketball Event was held between two rival basketball teams, the NCS basketball team and the Echo basketball team. Attending this event were 200 community members. The following year, attendance rose to 500. Team involvement continued to grow to four teams in 2009 to six teams in 2012, creating a tournament that had become a two-day, six-school bonanza.

The schools and teams participating in the tournament commit to donating all proceeds to support cancer patients in the local area; this includes the gate and concession money.

Each year a particular cancer has been highlighted and guest speakers, old and young, share their personal experiences with cancer. Cancer topics that have been highlighted thus far have included bone, breast, childhood cancers and colorectal (coinciding with the Oregon state wide colorectal campaign and presenting a partnering opportunity with the Oregon Health Authorities and Met group).

Schools and local clinic/hospitals and community volunteers coordinate resources to provide education and outreach materials at the tournament. Bounc’N Cancer volunteers provide tobacco education, nutrition and fitness education. They also staff the raffle table, gate, concession, and hospitality room. In 2013, a Cancer referee and individual whose family has been impacted by cancer sponsored and manned the hospitality room.

**ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND IMPACT**

The tournament demonstrates the solidarity of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation to unite around an issue that affects the health of its community members. The tournament is a true community initiative with local schools, clinics and hospitals, businesses and community volunteers coming together to raise funds to ensure those in need are able to access programs and services they need. The tournament has grown in popularity and support, up to 2012; the tournament raised more than $22,000 all dedicated to support cancer patients.

Since the beginning, the project is evaluated each year in addition to holding delta meetings. Delta meetings immediately follow the tournament, and provide people involved with a chance
to discuss the success of the tournament, what worked, and what didn’t. This has proved crucial to the success of the subsequent tournaments, and in helping to grow the event. They review the number of attendees, money raised and begin to plan for the next tournament.

In addition to the social dimension of the tournament, the planners have reached out to the youth justice system to involve youth who are at-risk. Working within a community justice approach, the event provides an opportunity for at-risk youth to do community service by working with the organizers to help to set-up the tables, man the booths and help to distribute health education materials. In this way the community is providing an opportunity for positive community involvement and individual growth.

A positive outcome is the increase in the number of businesses expressing an interest in participating in the tournament. This has led to an increase in sponsorship and in money available to support organizations in their outreach to people with cancer. Community involvement has gone up as well. This helped to promote a community wide awareness of cancer and cancer prevention. This year Bounc’N Cancer received its very first grant. The Northwest Tribal Comprehensive Cancer Program awarded Bounc’N Cancer a grant that has enabled the purchase of an event kit that consists of supplies and covers the cost of t-shirts and carnations. Carnations are given out as recognition for cancer patients, survivors, caregivers and families that have lost a loved one.

Since the community does not have the infrastructure and human resources to deliver a Cancer Navigator program, all funding raised by the Tournament has been donated to the American Cancer Society (ACS). The project team was able to negotiate an agreement with the ACS whereby all funds raised and donated by the community are a specific line item in the ACS budget to be used specifically for Umatilla and surrounding communities programs and services. This in effect replaced the Cancer Navigator Program lost when the research program was completed.

**CHALLENGES**

Beginning in 2014 the ACS is no longer able to channel the community donated funds into Umatilla and its surrounding communities to support the needs of community members affected by cancer. To address this challenge, the team is exploring options that include new ways and partnerships with organizations to fill this gap. Another option that is under consideration is for Bounc’N Cancer to step up and establish itself as a 501(c) 3 non-profit...
organization and direct the funds on its own. Part of this exploration for change is working with the Northwest Tribal Comprehensive Cancer Program.

Other challenges resulted from Bounc’N Cancer founders changing employers. They encountered problems recruiting volunteers from their previous employers and finding time to meet for event planning was proving difficult. To resolve the problems, the team made better use of technology, changed the meeting time to early morning using teleconferences to accommodate team member needs and Facebook to recruit volunteers.

**FACTORS THAT FACILITATE SUCCESS**

When asked about what key factors for the success of the project, Campbell and Noisey offered the following:

- A fully supportive and engaged community
- A school system and booster club that are generous with their time and resources
- A team that is collaborative, cooperative, flexible and supportive of each other “we don't let anyone fail”
- Use of technology such as teleconferences to facilitate meetings and Facebook to recruit partners and volunteers
- Networking and partnering outside of normal comfort zone to include partnering with organizations and agencies that share a similar passion

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