Community/Public Service Worksheet

Service Category: Health and Wellness Program

Title: Annual Rural Health Conference

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Community Partner(s) (If any): Felecia Jones (name) Black Belt Community Foundation (Organization)

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Program Description: This activity is sponsored by the Institute for Rural Health Research and the College of Community Health Science and brings a wide variety of academic/community partners from across the state together to share successful projects/research in order to encourage networking/collaboration. Conference themes have included: Partnerships in healthcare, rural mental health, the future of healthcare, emergency preparedness and response, obesity, and early childhood health.

Objectives/Outcomes: The Rural Health Conference objectives are as follows: 1) To share critical knowledge and information regarding health disparities that impact rural Alabama, 2) To discuss how issues relating to the future of healthcare access, delivery, and management affect health disparities, and 3) To describe effective models for reducing health disparities through programs that incorporate new and innovative approaches to rural health.

Assessment Measures: Conference attendance, regional influence, and disciplinary reach are the primary outcomes assessed for the annual conference.

Results: The annual Rural Health Conference averages 204 participants representing 19 Alabama counties. Participants include university students, rural community members, as well as professionals from various health-related disciplines including counseling, health education, medicine, nursing, nutrition, pharmacy, and social work. This year there were poster presentations by 54 community and/or academic groups, 9 breakout sessions with one community presenter and one academic presenter per group and 3 plenary speakers (one governmental, one community, and one academic). Two rural health hero awards were presented; one for a community hero and one for an academic hero.

Conclusions: From our formal evaluations and from anecdotal evidence, our annual rural health conference is providing useful information, skill development, and networking opportunities to community individuals and organizations, health care related providers, students, and academics. Programs have been adopted across various groups, new collaborations have been formed, and new efforts have been initiated. From activities initiated as a result of this conference grants have been applied for and award, schools have adopted programs, and local and state governmental entities have made policy changes.

Improvement Actions: In an effort to have continuous quality improvement, we have individuals who serve on the Rural Health
Conference Planning Committee on a rotating basis, this year one-third of those individuals will be replaced with new community members, health care providers, and academics who showed an interest at the latest conference. These individuals will review the formal evaluations as well as current issues in order to formulate the agenda and invite speakers for the next conference.