

## **Elementary School Program Triggers Learning About Asthma**

### ***Issue***

Crystal Garrett, the 2007 Miss South Carolina inspired hundreds of students at Estill Elementary School in Hampton County with her PEAK (preparing and empowering asthmatic kids) message. She travels the state spreading the message about her personal bout with asthma. Nationally, nearly one in 13 children suffer from asthma. It's the most common chronic disease in children. According to a year 2000 asthma report done by South Carolina Department of Environmental Control (DHEC), the leading cause of children's hospitalizations was asthma, with over 5,000 admissions. Similarly, a report done by DHEC in 2005 showed the leading cause of hospitalization for children under 18 years old living in Hampton County was asthma or asthma related. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Environmental Protection Agency, research shows that secondhand tobacco smoke is a trigger for asthma attacks. Research further showed that children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to be diagnosed with asthma.

### ***Intervention***

Armed with these statistics, a third grade teacher at Estill Elementary in Hampton County and two of her single gender classes decided to address the asthma issue in their county. The Asthma Awareness Project was created to increase asthma knowledge and awareness in two third grade single gender classes at Estill Elementary School. Students learned about the triggers of asthma, signs and symptoms in a peer educator format, which empowered them to share what they learned with family, friends, peers, and the community. This project also served as a character building program and service learning project for the students involved. Thanks to funds from the Preventions Health and Health Services Block Grant, Estill Elementary has been able to expand their Asthma Awareness Project. The first year of the project the following on and off campus activities were coordinated:

- Several asthma education related books were purchased and donated to the school library;
- Students participated in read-a-louds and journaling about asthma;
- Asthma education fliers were given to students, parents and the community;
- Students in grades 2-5 participated in poster and essay contest;
- An asthma information booth was set up for students and parents at the field day in May;
- A morning asthma walk was coordinated; and
- A game show was held awarding prizes for correctly answering questions about asthma.

### ***Impact***

The students were empowered by learning about asthma and then passing their knowledge on to others in their school, family and community. The following results were accomplished by the project in the 2007-2008 school year:

- Received monthly All-Health Team Award and a First Team All-Health honorable mention for 2007-2008 which assisted in expansion of the project;
- Hired a project coordinator/health educator in Hampton to assist with improving project and providing technical assistance; and
- Trained all third graders in the school to become asthma awareness peer educators to help educate parents and the community about asthma triggers and prevention.

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