

The Public Health Institute is pleased to announce the winners of the Adeline Hackett Innovations Initiative Small Grant Program for 2009: Sonja Herbert of the Berkeley Media Studies Group (BMSG) at PHI and Cheri Pies of the Contra Costa County Health Services. The small grant program is intended to spur the development of creative thinking within the PHI community that has the potential to propel public health innovations forward.

Herbert's grant, entitled "Raising the Voices of Youth Leaders," will allow BMSG to develop approaches to better design media advocacy training for young people. BMSG will hold a series of learning circles to glean promising practices for effectively training youth advocates. BMSG intends to blend its own lessons providing trainings to youth in Girls Inc., SYBOP and Youth ALIVE! with the principles of youth leadership development and new digital storytelling approaches. Although BMSG tailors language, case studies and experiential activities such as theater games and role playing to young people it works with, "we can do better," said Herbert, BMSG program director for training and strategic consultation, in her application. "Youth advocates deserve that."

This project is the precursor to developing a youth-centered media advocacy training curriculum that will allow BMSG to effectively support youth advocates in becoming innovative leaders who can confidently stand up for the community health policy changes they deserve. The curriculum will be modeled after adult programming BMSG created for The California Endowment. There is a particular need to train youth advocates to present a strong case for their goals because "youth-funding foundations are often unfamiliar with media advocacy techniques and foundations that fund advocacy may undervalue the perspectives and unique learning needs of youth," Herbert said.

Pies' award will enable her to write an article for publication in a peer-reviewed journal on the practical application of a new paradigm that is emerging in the maternal and child health field, the Life Course Perspective. She will also prepare an outline for a second article. The new life course model has implications for the ways in which we might reduce racial and ethnic disparities, particularly in birth outcomes, and points to the importance of critical periods for intervention and the cumulative impacts of environmental and other factors on health. "For the past several decades, efforts to improve birth outcomes have addressed only the nine-month period of a woman's pregnancy, focusing on more immediate medical and behavioral conditions rather than on long-term social, economic, or environmental factors," Pies wrote in her application. The Life Course Perspective looks at health over a lifespan, not as disconnected states such as infancy, adolescence and childbearing years, that are unrelated to each other, but instead as an integrated whole. Pies, who is director of Family, Maternal and Child Health Programs for Contra Costa County, has been incorporating this approach into her program since 2005 and is frequently asked to speak to audiences about this paradigm shift.

Her grant is entitled “Integrating the Life Course Perspective into a Local Maternal Child Health Program.” With the award, Pies will take a short sabbatical to write the article on the application of this model in a local health department. She will also prepare a working outline for a second article on a life course intervention called “BEST: Building Economic Security Today.” BEST is a pilot project using innovative strategies to reduce disparities and inequities in health by improving low-income families’ financial security in Contra Costa County.

An unprecedented 19 proposals were submitted for the Adeline Hackett Innovations Initiative Small Grant Program, which was established at PHI in 2002 to honor Dr. Hackett, a particularly talented and renowned researcher. Her groundbreaking work in breast cancer research resulted in an effective new approach to detecting the disease. She served on PHI’s board of directors from 1979 to 1999.