

Reducing Preventable Injury Risk among Refugee Youth: The New American Safety Festival

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Purpose: The new American community in the greater Burlington Area identified a challenge in purchasing and installing safety equipment recommended or mandated in the United States, such as child passenger safety seats. The Pediatric New American Clinic at the University of Vermont Children's Hospital partnered with University of Vermont Medical Center Injury Prevention, Safe Kids Vermont, and AALV to develop a program specifically designed to meet the needs of the community. The result was the New American Safety Day.

This annual event which relies on small grants and the support of community partners has grown over the years into the New American Safety Festival. By creating a festive atmosphere, outreach to an underserved population has developed community networks and new partnerships to provide support year round to the new American and refugee population. The first New American Safety Day in 2014 provided 32 child passenger safety checks, 37.5% of which were new installs of a child passenger safety seat. Of the 62.5% checks of already installed safety seats, 90% were shown to have a misuse error, much higher than expected or seen in the community at large.

By 2019, the number of child passenger safety checks had increased to 96. 75% of these checks were of already installed safety seats and misuse errors were identified in 75% of them. This marked a substantial decrease of 15% in misuse error rates in the five years the event had been occurring.

The New American Safety Festival not only decreased the misuse of child passenger safety seats, but increased access to water safety education, bike helmets, and many other safety focused resources in the community. The changes in behaviors and knowledge initiated by the New American Safety Festival has reduced the risk of preventable injuries among refugee youth in our area.

Resources: The key resources are a free or low cost location to host the event that is within the community and easily accessible, grants to cover the purchase of safety equipment and other miscellaneous needs such as translation services, generators, and day-of interpreters, and a network of engaged community partners. This project can be scaled to match the resources and needs of your specific communities and can grow over time.

Description: The New American Safety Festival is an event designed to engage with refugee and immigrant populations around injury prevention and best practices for safety using culturally-appropriate messaging, safety equipment, and a festive atmosphere.

Effectiveness: While the festival included multiple injury prevention interventions, the child passenger safety checks are used as a baseline to demonstrate the changes in knowledge and attitude. In 2014, the CPS station found a misuse rate of 90% at New American Safety Day. By 2019, the misuse rate had dropped to 75% at the New American Safety Festival and included three times as many inspections.

Lessons Learned:

Pros:

- Cultural change can be accomplished over time
- Strengthens community partnerships and expands services year round to families
- Increased proper use and knowledge around preventable injuries and pediatric health
- Positive interactions and engagement between organizations and the community

Cons:

- Requires flexibility and ability to adjust program annually to accommodate the changing needs of the community
- Dependent on the weather
- Managing expectations of community members and partners

Conclusions: Creating cultural change around safety is a long term goal that can only be accomplished when you meet the community where they are and build strong community support networks. The annual and festive nature of the New American Safety Festival makes it an event that children and families look forward to attending each year and allows an increasing number of resources to be made available to them.