Tailoring a Physical Activity Promotion Program for a Rural Area

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The VERB™ Summer Scorecard (VSS) program was designed with the purpose of promoting physical activity among ‘tweens’ (8-13 year olds). A unique aspect of the VSS program is the scorecard which serves multiple purposes. The scorecard primarily serves as a behavioral reinforcement for physical activity. The scorecard also tracks physical activity for each participant. An additional purpose (CBPM) approach was taken to adapt the VSS to meet the needs of the rural, diverse population in the southeastern United States. Formative research was conducted with the target audience. Focus group interviews were conducted with parents and their children. Content analysis showed significant changes were needed for program. Previous versions of the Scorecard did not test well with the target audience, who suggested the use of smaller Scorecards and fobs as a secondary reinforcement. These changes offer many potential benefits to participation reinforcement and physical activity promotion tracking.

METHODS

Sample and Data Collection

Two parent focus groups (N = 14) and two child focus groups (N = 12) were conducted by trained focus group facilitators for each focus group. The parent and child focus groups included a diverse sample of participants. Twelve African-American parents and two Caucasian parents participated in the parent focus groups and 10 African-American and two Caucasian children participated in the child focus groups. Both groups of participants were recruited through the local Boys and Girls Club, the lead community partner in the VSS program development. Each focus group facilitator used a focus group guide to conduct the focus groups with parents and children. The guides included covered aspects of VSS that might need adapting for work to target the population, including price, product, place, and promotion. The transcripts were coded specifically to social marketing constructs, including marketing, pricing, distribution, and promotion.

RESULTS

Based on the common themes identified in the formativeative, major adaptations were needed to implement VSS in the rural community. The major program adaptation highlighted changes needed to use the Scorecard within the community.

Two versions of Scorecards that had been in use in other states were tested by youth and parents (see Figure 1). Neither version tested well. Parents believed that youth would not want to read or understand the scorecards and would ultimately lose them. Youth participants also discussed the difficulty of reading and understanding the previously used Scorecards. One option for the Scorecard discussed by parents was a chain with fobs (dog tags). This option tested well with both parents and youth. The use of fobs is a familiar item within this community. One local element of the rural community uses ‘dog tags’ as a child incentive and according to the focus group responses are very popular among the local youth.

Parent 3: “They use something to do the tags at a local school as well—so, you want something you would add a tag to the chain and they were proud of that thing.”

Parent 4: “Ava my kids were about [sic] to fight over a dog tag, ‘I got to’ [sic] do such and such so I can get my tag back.”

Nine times out of ten the reading of the VSS, they’re not going to be able to read. So you want something that they can actually read and actually relate with. Parent participants also agreed that if a paper Scorecard were to be used, the Scorecard needed to be smaller and something ‘tweens’ could carry with them such as ‘wallet size’ or “pocket guide” (see Figure 2). During both of the children’s focus groups, the participants were asked about the ‘dog tag’ option. All participants supported the idea. When asked why the ‘dog tag’ was preferred, the child participants agreed it was because “you get to wear it.”

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REFERENCES


De Meij, R. M., van der Weem, T., Boer, M., & Huissoon, A. (2011). Formative research was conducted with the target audience. Focus group interviews were conducted with parents and their children. Content analysis showed significant changes were needed for program. Previous versions of the Scorecard did not test well with the target audience, who suggested the use of smaller Scorecards and fobs as a secondary reinforcement. These changes offer many potential benefits to participation reinforcement and physical activity promotion tracking.