

Project Summary

The *Franklin County Project* supports preservation of the Apalachicola Bay seafood industry and estuaries by preserving the health, images and stories of its workers. The project brings awareness to the industry, including its unique artistry and the individuals who form the culture, through simultaneous oral history, mural and health projects. From March 7-14, 2010, an interdisciplinary team of faculty, students and healthcare



professionals from the University of Florida Center for the Arts in Healthcare spent one week in Franklin County documenting the histories of the industry and its workers and creating a set of murals reflecting the industry, the bay, and the lives of the people who sustain them. The team's health professionals from the UF College of Nursing and Shands Hospital provided health screenings and health information to seafood workers and community members throughout the week at project sites, which included home visits in Eastpoint, Carrabelle, and Apalachicola and oyster houses along the bay.

The spring break project was developed as an extension of Shands Arts in Medicine's *AIM for the Panhandle* project, a multi-year project begun in 2008 and supported by the State of Florida Division of Cultural Affairs and the National Endowment for the Arts. The project was designed to create a working model for arts in healthcare programs in rural communities, and resulted in the implementation of the Weems Arts in Medicine program.

Project Background and Overview

Located in the Florida panhandle, Franklin County is one of the most rural and health challenged areas in the state of Florida. Franklin County has a diverse multigenerational population of proud, independent people who are deeply connected to the seafood industry. In an effort to preserve the beautiful Apalachicola Bay estuary, the local oystermen hand-harvest the oysters rather than dredging as is the norm in throughout the broader industry. Franklin County is ranked as the third poorest county in the State of Florida. According to the most current census, Franklin



County has an estimated median household income of \$26,756, which is 31% below the State average of \$38,819 and 36% below the National average of \$41,994. The area's seafood industry workers, including the oystermen, experience significant health challenges as a result of their long and hard work, extreme exposure to the sun and other natural elements, low wages, poor nutrition, and lack of preventive and other healthcare.



In 2009-10, environmental and political challenges caused increased unemployment in the seafood industry. In February of 2010, the USDA declared Franklin County an agricultural disaster area, less than two weeks after Franklin County commissioners declared a local state of emergency. Due to freezing weather and closings of the Apalachicola Bay due to flooding upriver, many seafood workers, particularly oyster

harvesters, are out of work and experiencing a critical economic crisis. Without work, many of these workers and their families are experiencing shortages of income, loss of their homes and are living without electricity and running water. According to a report from Big Bend Community Organizations Active in Disaster (COAD), between 1,000 and 1,300 families are suffering financially because of closings in Apalachicola Bay.



A concerted effort, called BAY AID, was established, and immediate partnerships between local organizations were formed. Our project was quickly adapted to address the current needs. Instead of working in a health fair or festival format, artists and healthcare personnel would now be working directly at the seafood broker houses, where catches are brought in, with the seafood workers collecting oral histories, developing the murals, distributing aid kits, and completing health screenings while distributing health information. The seafood industry workers, specifically oystermen and women, were in need of health screening and care, and were anxious for awareness to be brought to their

current situation of need as well as to their industry overall.

Oral Histories

As a key component of the Franklin County Project, oral histories of seafood workers and their family members were recorded and transcribed, and will be preserved in Franklin County by the Franklin County Arts Council. More than twenty oral histories were recorded by members of the interdisciplinary team throughout the Franklin County community, including in Apalachicola, Eastpoint, and Carrabelle. Below are examples of excerpts from some of the oral histories recorded:

My dad was in it [the seafood industry]. My granddad, his Dad, was in it. I guess I first started going out when I was probably eight or ten. I spent all my summers on the shrimp boat. My summer vacation in the summer time,



we would go out to Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana. That's where we shrimped in the summertime. So, when I got out of school, I get on my big boat and spent my whole summer out there shrimping. Then, I would come home for school. It was fun. It was fun man.

Allan, Fisherman (Apalachicola, FL)

I am an oysterwoman. I've been oystering since I was 14. Its just life around here. I mean it's the best way, quickest easiest way to make money. It's a hard job, but it gets easier once you've done it. It's a good job. I have tonged. I have culled. I have ran the boat. I can do a little bit of it all.

Amber, Oysterwoman (East Point, FL)

Murals



Local Gainesville artist, Sandra Murphy-Pak, designed four murals to raise awareness of the uniqueness of the Franklin County seafood industry and honor the lives its workers. The mural themes immersed through

input from community members and from local literature and historical records. While stories from the literature informed each of the paintings to an extent, it was the people's stories of their personal way of life that truly inspired the final design. The first painting represents an oyster harvester at work on his boat employing the trademark of their profession, the Oyster Tong.



The second painting depicts a husband and wife team, with him tonging for oysters and her shucking them. Panels three and four, respectively depict the bay and shrimp boats. With mobility in mind, four panels, each 48"x48' in size, were created. Plans are in place for the murals to be exhibited at

rotating locations throughout Franklin County.

Home Health Visits

In partnership with Franklin's Promise, nurses from Shands Hospital in Gainesville, Florida, completed approximately 15 home family health visits, and made provided services for approximately 30 individuals. During each health visit, a general healthcare assessment was taken, including questions about preventative care in regards to wearing sunscreen, smoking, proper nutrition,



and appropriate hygiene. Emphasis was placed on connecting these individuals with an array of local health and social services resources. Visits included the delivery of necessary medications to individuals in the home and/or signing up women for mammograms. Each individual receiving a home visit received a health kit that included basic healthcare supplies such as toothbrushes, toothpaste, lotion, hand sanitizer, band-aids, and sunscreen. Each of the supplies were collected through donations made by food and general supply stores, including Publix, Sweetbay and Albertson's, and personal donations by team members and the local Gainesville and Franklin County communities.

Community Service

Between home health visits and the recording and transcribing of oral histories, the interdisciplinary team focused significant efforts on a project identified by local community members as high priority. The team undertook an "extreme home clean-up" for a highly regarded seafood industry family who had been struggling with health and economic challenges for some time, and whose property had deteriorated to an unlivable state. Each day, members of our team worked on clean-up, repairs, and aesthetic design of the property. By the end of the week, the property was transformed and major repairs to facilitate running water and sewage disposal were undertaken.



Health Fair and Coloring Book



The project culminated with an all-community health fair at the Eastpoint Church of God. The fair celebrated the seafood industry and its workers through the presentation of the oral histories and murals, and included a seafood lunch, art activities, and health screenings. Prior to spring break, project artist, Sandra Murphy-Pak, led the team in the development of a coloring book designed to encourage healthy eating, healthy cooking, and exercise. The book included coloring activities, recipes for children, and basic health information, and was distributed during home visits and at the health fair. The book

will also be distributed through the Weems Emergency Department and Franklin's Promise.

Project Outcome and Future Plans

In response to the success of the trip, and its impact on the Franklin County community and interdisciplinary team of nurses, artists, and students, the Center for the Arts in Healthcare Research and Education (CAHRE) plans to make the Franklin County Project its annual spring break trip. The short week-long visit heightened the team's awareness that positive change is possible, even with limited resources. We will continue working with Franklin's Promise, and its local partner organizations, to identify current health and economical challenges and develop sustainable solutions.



Project Partners

This project was made possible through the commitment and collaboration of organizations in both Franklin County and the Gainesville community.

BAY AID



Established by Franklin's Promise Coalition, Inc. a non-profit organization in partnership, BAY AID Franklin is a disaster relief fund organized by a coalition of partners, including over 30 civic organizations, churches, government entities, businesses, and volunteers, determined to work together so that the residents of Franklin County can face challenges more independently. The mission of BAY AID is to develop, maintain, manage and distribute a fund to expeditiously address and develop sustainable solutions to basic human services for Franklin County residents, including empowerment and raised awareness of the seafood industry, develop sustainable alternatives for personal income, and encourage and support education and technical training regarding preventative healthcare.

Weems Arts in Medicine

Weems Arts in Medicine program is a multidisciplinary organization, with programs in the visual, literary, musical and performance arts focused on transforming healthcare environments through the arts, and providing leadership for arts in healthcare throughout Franklin County. An essential component of the Weems



AIM is to create collaborations with other hospital departments, community arts organizations and groups within the county. These collaborations spark projects that move the message of art and wellness to a broader audience. Currently, the AIM Program is partnering with many groups that serve elderly and seriously sick or disabled folks in Franklin County to provide a healing environment through the use of the arts.

Franklin County Seafood Workers Association (FCSWA)

The Franklin County Seafood Workers Association Inc. has been an active non-profit association since 1978. The FCSWA strives to be a definitive voice for the men and women who work within the Seafood Industry, to voice their concerns and act as their representatives between, local, state and federal government to assure their best interests are being brought to the table. It is their mission to preserve, protect and promote the bay, the worker, and the industry and to preserve the history, traditions, culture and heritage, which has been the backbone of Apalachicola and surrounding areas for over a hundred years. Both local seafood and the seafood industry are specifically promoted to encourage the protection of the bay and the surrounding areas to insure that the future of the industry remain productive as a vital part of our community.

Shands Arts in Medicine

Shands Arts in Medicine (AIM) was founded in 1990 at Shands Hospital at the University of Florida. AIM is a multidisciplinary organization, with programs in the visual, literary, musical, and performance arts. AIM serves inpatients and outpatients of all ages, their families, visitors, health care providers, the Gainesville and statewide communities. The program is focused on transforming healthcare environments through the arts, and providing leadership for hospital arts programs throughout the nation. The Shands AIM program facilitates arts activities, workshops and performances in three hospitals and numerous out-patient clinics, and is known internationally as one of the leaders in the field of arts in healthcare.

