

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 and the area's waters. In an effort to preserve the 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 one of Florida's Areas of Critical Concern. With 23.1% of its residents living below the poverty level (as compared to 13.3% in the state), and ongoing challenges to the seafood industry resulting from changing weather conditions, recent gulf oil spill, and changing FDA regulations, Franklin County faces significant threats to its only industry and to the health and security of its residents. 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. According to Florida Department of Health's Bureau of STD Prevention & Control, the rate of bacterial sexually transmitted diseases (STD's) in Franklin County is more than twice that of the state's overall rate.



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. According to a report from Big Bend Community Organizations Active in Disaster (COAD), between 1,000 and 1,300 families were suffering financially because of closings in Apalachicola Bay. Then in April of 2010, the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill devastated the gulf region. A recent study conducted by the UF Emerging Pathogens Institute showed that among people living in Franklin County, where oil had not reached the shore, participants showed similar levels of

anxiety, depression, fatigue, anger and overall mood disturbance as the citizens living in Alabama's directly affected communities, especially if the participant's livelihood depended on fishing or had been directly impacted financially by the spill. Since the spill, many buyers have avoided Gulf seafood, and local tourism has been significantly reduced. These circumstances and high levels of stress impact everyone living in Franklin County.

CAHRE's *Franklin County Project* is designed to address critical health disparities as identified by local health and human services partners in Franklin County. From March 6-12, 2001, a group of 26 students, faculty members, and professional artists from the University of Florida and Shands Arts in Medicine worked in Franklin County in partnership with the Weems Arts in Medicine program, Franklin's Promise Coalition, the City of Apalachicola, Senior Services, the Franklin County School, the Apalachicola Bay Charter School, and several other health and human service agencies. The team undertook four major projects addressing health literacy, access to healthcare, and community engagement.

Home Health Assessments: Facilitating Access to Health and Human Services

ABC School Art Garden Project: Facilitating Nutritional Health Literacy

STI Education through Theatre: Enhancing Health Literacy in Grades 6-12

Oral History Project: Documenting the History of a Unique Local Culture

Weems Arts in Medicine Home Visit Program: Training for Local Artists

Senior artists from the Shands Arts in Medicine program provided on-site training for Weems Arts in Medicine artists in preparation for the launch of the Weems AIM program's **home-based arts services program**.