

Project coordinator begins health literacy project

By Lindsay Reed

Grace Grebel has accepted the Health Education Literacy Project (HELP) coordinator position at the Barry County Health Department. The local health department is hosting the project, which will be funded by a \$150,334 grant, for the Ozark Regional Alliance.

“The big thing we want to do is focus on dealing with the problem of health literacy,” said Grebel. “This is a national problem. Only 50 to 60 percent of the population is health literate enough to get instructions from their doctor and follow those instructions and the labels on their medication correctly.

“As a result, we are seeing more people in the emergency room instead of the doctor’s office,” said Grebel. “We want to understand the health literacy issues and help make materials that are more user friendly.”

Grebel graduated from Seymour High School and Three Rivers Community College in Poplar Bluff, before attending the University of Oklahoma in Norman, Okla., as a pre-medical student. As a junior in college, when asked to declare a temporary major, Grebel selected education.

“All of this time, I had been focused on pre-medical,” said Grebel. “I was told that I had to select a major so I chose education and received a bachelor of science in secondary science education.”

After completing college, Grebel served as a substitute teacher at several southwest Missouri schools before accepting her first full-time teaching position. She now has over eight years of experience in education, including three years at the Wheaton R-III School District.

“I thought this position sounded interesting, because it will allow me to use my teaching skills in a different setting,” said Grebel. “It also involves a lot of research work and working with different people, which I enjoy. By developing new materials to teach the trainers with, I will also get to write.”

Grebel will be responsible for developing educational materials based from a needs analysis of 16 southwest Missouri counties, including Barry. The training materials will be designed to fit into each health department’s current programs.

“All counties are different, so they will have different issues,” said Grebel. “I will identify the five or six highest priority topics and develop materials for those topics.”

Grebel plans to talk with each of the participating health departments’ administrators to introduce the project and build support for completing a needs analysis survey. After the survey has been completed, she will develop the list of proposed topics.

When the modules have been designed for each of the identified topics, Grebel will oversee a project that will translate the new materials into Guatemalan Spanish, Mexican Spanish, Hmong, Laotian and sign language.

“A lot of people belong to these backgrounds,” said Grebel. “This will help them deal with health information easier. When people have a hard time understanding, they often just give up and don’t go to the doctor or take their medications. This is due to the communication gap.”

In order to translate the new materials into the six identified languages, Grebel plans to contact community members who often work with individuals from these cultures to obtain recommendations for translators.

“These individuals will attend principles of clear communication training at Missouri State University’s Area Health Education Center to help them translate the material, so that it is useful to the identified populations,” said Grebel.

Over the next year, Grebel plans to develop the half dozen health literacy topics for the project. Next year, the newly developed modules will be tested by the 16 southwest Missouri counties involved in the project.

“I think the most challenging aspect of this project will be deciding which topics to develop,” said Grebel. “I will be relying on people who are more familiar with community health to help make some of the decisions.

“Community health services get materials all the time from different organizations,” said Grebel. “I don’t want to make something that lays on a shelf. I want to make sure it is useful.”

Although HELP is a pilot program, if the project is successful, it could be used in health departments across the state or country.

Grebel lives in Springfield with her yellow tabby cat, Dagwood.

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