

# Sierra County Project Summary Report



*Photo provided by Phyllis Mecca*

The University of New Mexico Prevention Research Center, VIVA Connects

June 30, 2021



## PARTNERS



*The mission of the Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable disease, injury, disability, and premature death; assuring access to affordable, quality health care; promoting healthy lifestyles; and documenting and monitoring health events. [www.nmhealth.org](http://www.nmhealth.org).*



*The Prevention Research Center at The University of New Mexico addresses the health promotion and disease prevention needs of New Mexico communities through participatory, science-based, health promotion, and disease prevention research. It fulfills this mission through collaboration, training, dissemination, and evaluation activities*

*[hsc.unm.edu/medicine/departments/pediatrics/divisions/pps/initiatives/viva/](http://hsc.unm.edu/medicine/departments/pediatrics/divisions/pps/initiatives/viva/)*



*Sierra County Health Council is the local health council which promotes physical activity, health education, and community health care through awareness and organization promotion. Many community wide campaigns have benefitted the health of community members in Sierra County, and the Health Council is promoting COVID relief bags for adults and elders in the community. They hope to continue to support community members by forming outdoor physical activity groups for adults, elders, and families in Sierra County.*

## ADDITIONAL PARTNERS

- *Ambercare*
- *Addus*
- *Sierra Vista Hospital*
- *Sierra Joint Office on Aging*
- *Sierra County Senior Center*
- *Sierra County Senior Housing*

## TEAM MEMBERS

**Phyllis Mecca** – *Sierra County Health Council.*

**Jackie Muncy** – *Health Promotion Specialist.*

**Elizabeth Leininger**- *Sierra County Health Council.*

**Sally Davis** - *Director, the Prevention Research Center.*

**Laurel Fimbel** – *Professional Intern, the Prevention Research Center.*

**Joseph O'Dell** - *Comprehensive Cancer Center: Department of Health.*



*COVID Relief bags ready for distribution*

*Photos provided by Phyllis Mecca*



This report was supported by Cooperative Agreement Number 5-U48-DP-005034 from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The findings and conclusions of this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the CDC. This report was completed June 30, 2021. Design, editing, and photography by Laurel Fimbel, with some previous formatting and information from Jason Schaub, Copyright 2021. Phyllis Mecca from Sierra County reviewed and approved of this report on July 14, 2021.

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

As part of ongoing technical assistance, VIVA Connects has provided this report to assess not only the status of their current grant, but overall sustainability and successful previous projects in the community of Sierra County. Importantly, all of the recommendations by VIVA Connects are rooted in the evidence-based science promoted by the Community Guide.

The Sierra County Community Outreach/Support during COVID-19 Pandemic project was focused on providing care packets for individuals in the community that have been affected by the COVID 19 crisis, especially the elderly. The care package bags had a folder of resources and information (how to use QR codes, stretchy bands, physical activity exercises, educational pamphlet about the benefits of exercise, and health informational brochures). They also had Pedometers, hand sanitizer, stretchy bands, reusable water bottles, activity books, coloring supplies, stress balls, and hygiene supplies.

The first round of 150 care bags were distributed to community members all around Sierra County and the surrounding area in January, 2021. In early May, 2021 an additional 150 care bags for seniors were distributed to the following: Sierra Vista Hospital, Ambercare (which is a home health program), Department of Health, The Senior Center. The rural communities of Hillsboro and Kingston also received a total of 30 care bags.

### Project Highlights:

- 300 Senior Citizens in Sierra County received care bags during COVID -19 to help reduce anxiety and stress.
- Each Senior Citizen received a Water bottle, stress ball, stretchy band with directions, personal hygiene items donated by SVH, Activity books, colored pencils, brochures, local resource numbers, hand sanitizer, and playing cards.
- Volunteers put together the bags and provided distribution to local service providers in Sierra County.
- Service providers then distributed the care bags to their clients.

*COVID Relief bags ready for distribution  
by Charis in Hillsboro and Kingston*

*Photo provided by Phyllis Mecca*



## COMMUNITY GUIDELINES

Established by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in 1996 and supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Community Guide offers the latest, evidence-based recommendations for implementing health-improvement initiatives in local governments, communities, schools, and other populations.

There are five intervention elements to increase physical activity as such:

- *Community-Wide Campaign*
- *Creating or Improving Places for Physical Activity*
- *Individually Adapted Programs*
- *Built Environment Approaches*
- *Social Support Interventions*

Utilizing the Guide as a framework for program development ensures that all health initiatives, campaigns, or other recommendations are embedded in evidence-based practice, enhancing the potential impact of a given intervention while ensuring that local funding sources are used efficiently.

I asked Phyllis in an email to explain how her work aligned with some of the community guidelines. Below is my posed question, and her response:

*Question: What did you do to accomplish behavior change in adults who received your bag? Did you follow up (formally or informally) with individuals to see if they were doing the exercises from the information in the bags? Did you see an increase of social support from the community while creating and handing out the activity bags?*

*Response by Phyllis Mecca: Based on follow up conversations with program managers the care bags for seniors were a successful project. The Department Of Health reports seniors were working on their crossword puzzles while waiting at the office to get their COVID -19 vaccinations. Ambercare reports seniors were using their stretchy bands and caregivers were encouraging physical exercise. Sierra Vista Hospital reports many seniors did not know how to properly dispose of medication, so staff educated them on that process.*

Based on Phyllis's response, *Community-Wide Campaign*, *Individually Adapted Programs*, and *Social Support Interventions* are all being met through this project. The entire community is helping support and educate adults and elders in the community during the time of COVID. By following recommendations from the Guide, the overall impact of the project is successful in promoting and sustaining health of individuals in Sierra County.

## PROJECT FACILITATORS AND BARRIERS

In order for Team VIVA to better understand the Sierra County Bag project, we asked Phyllis to reflect on her work and highlight the facilitators and barriers that presented themselves during the project.

*Question: What were some things that helped (facilitated) your project's success?*

*Response by Phyllis Mecca: Partnering with other agencies helped this project succeed. Partners provided other useful resources and activities that were also included in the care bags. Such as playing cards donated by Addus home health, Sierra Vista Hospital donated personal hygiene bags.*

Based on this response by Phyllis, we can better understand that when an organization is able to partner with additional organizations, it can strengthen the project. This answer is similar to other communities who have also emphasized the importance of collaboration between multiple entities. We are impressed with the multiple partnerships that Sierra County was able to work with in order to create and distribute bags to community individuals.

*COVID Relief bags ready for distribution*

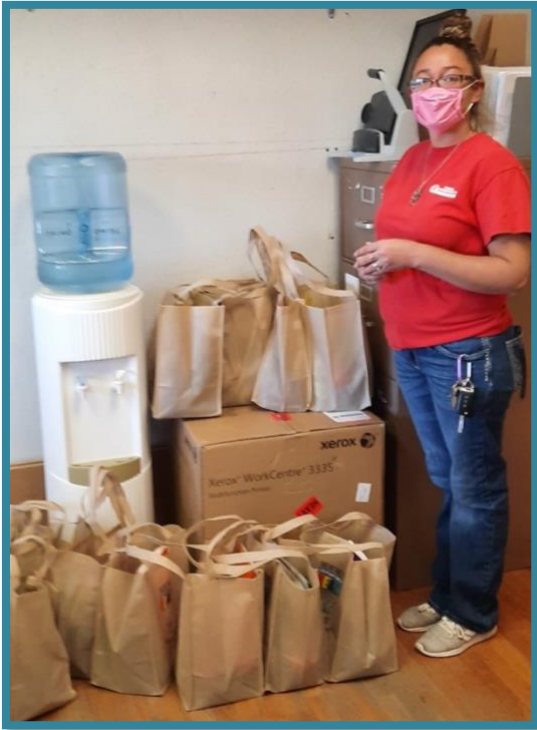
*Photos provided by Phyllis Mecca*



*Question: What were some things that slowed or made it more challenging (barriers) to accomplish your project?*

*Response by Phyllis Mecca: A change in Health Care Coordinators slowed the process to some degree and delayed getting the second round of bags out until the first part of May. Also, take into consideration that many people were working from home and needed permission to go to the office to accept the bags which caused a few unexpected delays.*

Based on this response by Phyllis, we can better understand that a project barrier was the turnover rates of Health Care Coordinators. This is often a struggle when working with social support programs, and perseverance and determination to continue to reach out to that service is critical. Phyllis does acknowledge that the quarantine regulations also inflated this issue which is a valid consideration. Overall, we are glad that Phyllis and her team did continue to work hard to overcome delays and communication issues with their partner organizations in order to distribute bags.



*Volunteers and members working hard to distribute bags to community members*

*Photos provided by Phyllis Mecca*

## LESSONS LEARNED & FUTURE GOALS

I asked Phyllis to reflect on the project and describe some lessons that were learned during this meaningful community project. This helps both the VIVA team, as well as the Sierra County Health Council better understand the true impact and importance of the project, and spur ideas and energy for future work.

*Question: What are some lessons learned from this project?*

*Response by Phyllis Mecca: Several lessons were learned from the care bag for senior projects. First, recruiting volunteers to assist in putting the 300 bags together was an easy task as many volunteers were looking for ways to help others during Covid-19. Second, the smiles and comments by the senior receiving the bags was a very memorable time. One lady stated, "Oh my, I thought I was forgotten about". Several commented they were happy face masks were in the bag because they could not afford to buy disposable masks, but the donated masks could be washed after every use. This made them feel safer and allowed them to be more independent in the community.*

This COVID relief bag project has helped so many community members feel cared for during this past year of isolation and quarantine, and the Sierra County Health Council hopes to continue to support their community by increasing social support and physical activity for adults and elderly in the community. This upcoming year, they are creating a *Happy Heart Club* focused on creating and hosting small exercise groups for adults and elders in the community.

*"Many of the recipients were brought to tears due to our collaborating partners for being there for those in our county in these unfortunate times."*

*-Elizabeth Leininger*

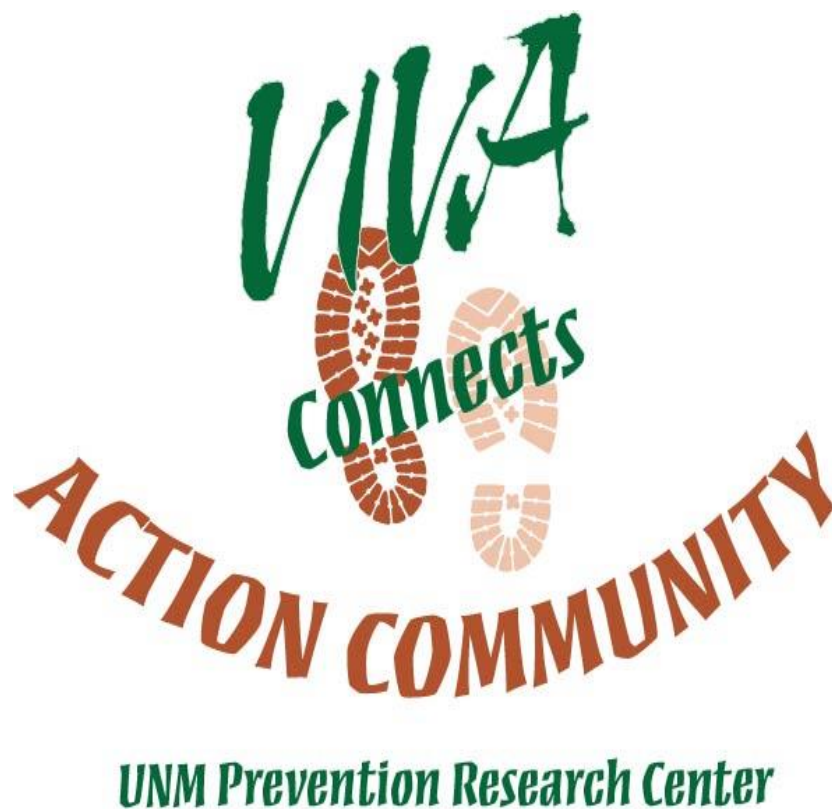


*Volunteers and members working hard to create the bags for community members*

*Photo provided by Elizabeth Leininger*



Special thanks to everyone involved for promoting health and physical activity in communities around New Mexico.



2703 Frontier, NE | RIB Suite 120, Albuquerque, New Mexico 87131 Ph: 505-272-4462 | Website: [hsc.unm.edu](http://hsc.unm.edu)