



The Koa Family Study

Wholehearted living touches every aspect of life, from eating nourishing foods, to enjoying enough physical activity, to cultivating relationships that support healthy choices, to joining with neighbors to stand up for positive changes, and more. Unfortunately, for many Californians with low income, the idea of wholehearted living is an aspiration and not a reality. The Koa Family Program was designed to make wholehearted living available for all.

The Approach

The Koa Family Program was delivered as a 17-week journey to establish “micro-communities” of women supporting one another – mind, body, and spirit. The foundation of this approach was a new, custom-designed, on-line Whole Health Program (WHP) that addressed healthy eating, physical activity, and weight management within the context of wholehearted living. Women with low income, led by a health coach, met weekly via Zoom to learn, experience, grow, and thrive to address their diet, physical activity, and weight management goals.

Participants in the WHP received additional encouragement and access to local resources through a private Facebook group. The group provided a place for women to continue their wholehearted health journeys beyond the weekly meetings. Koa Family participants were also invited to take part in a neighborhood tree planting campaign to foster empowerment through improving the physical environment.

The Koa Family Program, with the WHP at its core, was the product of extensive formative research that we conducted within communities with low income, as well as our reviews of published research.

The Study

The evaluation of the program was conducted as a randomized controlled trial with two primary aims: (1) Determine the effect of the Koa Family Program (KFP) on reducing overweight/obesity among women with low income; and (2) Examine the impact of the KFP on improving weight-related health indicators among women with low income.

The study began in February 2021. Seventy women with low income (SNAP-Ed eligible), age 21-45 years, from the Sacramento area were randomized into either an intervention group that received the KFP for 17 weeks or a control group, which did not. At Week 18, the intervention group had an 8-pound weight loss (approximately 4% of baseline weight) attributable to the KFP. In addition, relative to the control group, the intervention group showed



improved diet, physical activity, self-efficacy, and Stages of Change related to lifestyle. The weight loss and positive lifestyle changes seen at Week 18 were sustained when assessed at Week 25 of the study.

The Potential

The KFP was developed by the Prevention Policy & Practice Group within the UC Davis, Center for Healthcare Policy and Research. Funding was provided by the United States Department of Agriculture Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – Education (SNAP-Ed) and CALFIRE.

Based on findings from the KFS, we believe that a whole health program has the potential to improve health and well-being through lifestyle change for other populations and communities. The Prevention Policy & Practice Group is seeking to disseminate whole health programs more broadly while conducting ongoing evaluation to guide further program development.

