



# SEAHEC

*Southeast Arizona Area Health Education Center*

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*Our mission is to improve the recruitment, placement and retention of culturally competent health professionals in rural and under-served communities of Southeast Arizona*

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Tuesday, August 31, 2021

## **For Immediate Release:**

SEAHEC has just published an inspirational documentary that chronicles our work over the past decade to develop a community health worker driven rural development model. This model led to a safer, more unified and healthy community for families in Winchester Heights, a low-income, rural farmworker community in Cochise County, Arizona. SEAHEC has received local and national recognition for our work with the Winchester Heights community. We hope that our model can and will be adapted by other rural communities that lack public health supporting infrastructure, inspiring them to envision and collaborate to enable their families to live healthier lives as well!

## **THE PROBLEM**

Public health outcomes are closely linked to infrastructure. People who live in substandard housing with old plumbing are likely to face health risks, such as contaminated drinking water, or life threatening fires. If communities have no space for assembly, and lack a mechanism for managing resources, the likelihood of developing public health supporting infrastructure is slim.

Over a million people live in un-regulated “colonias” along the US/Mexico border. The lack of regulation ensures that community residents, many of whom are immigrants, live in third-world conditions, unless they can individually cover the cost of installing separate sewer, water, street lighting and safety services for each property.

The federal government has designated these neighborhoods as colonias: communities within 150 miles of the US/Mexico border that lack basic public health supporting infrastructure. There is funding directed at small rural communities for development, the communities most in need can't meet the eligibility requirements, due to lack of local infrastructure and organizational capacity to manage funding.

## **OUR SOLUTION**

By helping people establish key infrastructure that fosters civic engagement, communities can gain the momentum they need overcome long standing barriers to health and safety.

SEAHEC has received local and national recognition for our work with the Winchester Heights community in northern Cochise County, Arizona. In 2019 the Arizona Rural Health Association (ARHA) recognized SEAHEC with their "Inspiring Rural Health Program Award," for our work in Winchester Heights. The purpose of the award is to "recognize a program within a community, at the local or state level, that involves one or more health professionals or entities, and promotes or facilitates the development of rural health delivery systems."

In 2020, the National AHEC Organization (NAO) awarded SEAHEC with the Center of Excellence for Community Programs. NAO recognized SEAHEC for our unique model of community development that incorporates training for health professions students with our community health worker driven model for improving rural health and safety in marginalized communities.

SEAHEC's Healthy Farms program hosts health professions students and helps them conduct health related community service projects alongside community residents and our Healthy Farms community health workers. This strategy provides much needed expertise to community health workers and their neighbors who are trying to solve persistent public health issues, often with no funding or infrastructure.

The Legacy Foundation of Southeast Arizona provided generous financial support for construction of the Winchester Heights Community Center, as well as support for recruitment and training of community members to form a governing board for the center. This resulted in the 2020 launch of the Winchester Heights Health Organization, Inc. Which manages the community center and provides leadership for local development projects. The Legacy Foundation of Southeast Arizona is an Arizona charitable organization whose philanthropic mission is to promote population health and community wellness throughout Southeast Arizona.

The US Environmental Protection Agency provided funding and technical assistance for a community-wide health assessment and community education which resulted in a significant improvement of residents' capacity building and organizing efforts. The Vitalyst Foundation of Southern Arizona provided funding for the playground.

This documentary is dedicated to the memory of Josefina Salazar, a founding member of Winchester Heights and our community health worker team, who we lost to complications from COVID-19 last year, in 2020.

Links to the video can be accessed from our website at:

<https://www.seahec.org/seahec-publishes-new-documentary-on-winchester-heights/9554/>

For more information contact SEAHEC Executive Director, Gail Emrick, MPH.

1171 W Target Range Road • Nogales AZ 85621

Tel: (520) 287-4722

[info@seahec.org](mailto:info@seahec.org) or [gemrick@seahec.org](mailto:gemrick@seahec.org)