



ONE GOOD IDEA!

By Lisa Rapple M.Ed, RRT

John Roberts had an idea. It was a good idea born out of a research study he conducted in the late 1980s when he was working as an engineer for the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency. The study found that indoor air quality levels were worse than outdoor air quality. John decided to act. He approached the American Lung Association of Washington state to develop an innovative program to address this problem. What came out of this was the Master Home Environmentalist® (MHE) Program. The program uses the power of education and the talents of trained volunteers to improve the indoor air quality for families in the Seattle area. John feels the program works well because nearly everyone has a "personal interest" - a concern for their own health and the health of their children.

The 35 hour training program provides the comprehensive skills needed to teach within a community. The program blends key topics of indoor air pollution with communication skills and community outreach. (Topics include second hand smoke; moisture and

biological contaminants; asthma and allergies; communication and behavior changes; natural lawn and garden care; lead; toxicology; indoor ventilation; household chemicals; cultural diversity and tenants rights.) The trained volunteer then commits to perform 35 hours

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of outreach services in their own local community.

The program has had far reaching effects. The Wash. State program is being duplicated regionally and nationally through a variety of organizations including; other local American Lung Associations, the United Way's "Clean Air For Kids" Program (<http://volunteer.united-e-way.org/uwcmd/org/1475836.html>) and others such as Breathe California (www.lungsrus.org). As of 2006 there were a total of 19 programs across the country. A total list can be found at: <http://www.alaw.org/pdfs/MHE-Locations-2006.pdf>

In 2001, when the American Lung Association of Oregon launched the Master Home Environmentalist Program in Portland, EPA Administrator Christie Whitman punctuated the importance it plays in pediatric asthma, saying "Because children have unique vulnerabilities – they account for a disproportionate share of asthma sufferers – we must use greater caution in protecting them from environmental threats to their health." She described the additional benefit of the program being "simple – and inexpensive". The Master Home Environmentalist Program has received support from the EPA Lead Program, Indoor Air Program, Environmental Justice Program and Children's Environmental Health Program.

People with asthma or allergies that seem worse at home, families with young children who may be exposed to household chemicals, lead, pesticides, dust mites and other allergens, and people who have recently moved into new apartments or houses and are experiencing headaches or respiratory problems, are the target audience for the program. Trained MHE volunteers use a Home Environmental Assessment List, also called a HEAL™ to help identify health hazards in the home. The HEAL™ can also be obtained by individuals in an abbreviated form - a Do It Yourself HEAL™ which is available in English, Spanish, Japanese, and large print English for the seeing impaired.

Once at the home page for the MHE Program on the Washington State ALA website (see link below under contacts) you will see a column on the left. Here you can access separate sections related to Master Health Environmentalists. First is an overview of the Free Home Health Assessment. The DIY HEAL is in this section. Next is information about the Training Program, describing what is involved with becoming a volunteer and how to apply. A list of FAQ's is included. Next is information for institutions that would like to create their own MHE. Here you will find out that follow-up surveys have proven an 87% improvement in individual behaviors following a Home Assessment. There is a link to the supporting article in "Environmental Health Perspectives". Continuing down the left-hand column the MHE Resources and Referrals link takes you to a list of topics linked to extended lists of resources. Even without an MHE Program this list would be helpful for addressing environmental pollutants, as well as acquiring local community resources. Topics include: Useful MHE Contacts, Air Cleaners and Purifiers, Asthma and Allergy Information, Books of Interest, Chemical Database, Chemical Pollutants, Dry Cleaning, Environmental Health Publications or Database, General Medical Information, General Tips on House Cleaning and Maintenance, Government Resources, Indoor Air Quality (IAQ), Indoor Pests and Biological Pollutants, Information on Healthy and Safe Buildings, Local Organizations, Low Income Resources, Mold, Outdoor Air Quality Monitoring: Pollution and Pollen, Schools, Smoking, Shopping Guide to Environment (Allergy-Friendly Products), Tenant Law, Yard and Gardening

The Master Home Environmentalist Program has been recognized as an American Lung Association Best Practice and EPA Best Practice. More information can be obtained by contacting the American Lung Association of Washington at their website: www.alaw.org/air_quality/master_home_environmentalist , or by calling (206) 441-5100, or by e-mailing the Team Coordinator Casey Coulombe at casey@alaw.org .