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For immediate release

For Girl Scouts, photos are a first step to boosting physical activity

SAN ANTONIO (Feb. 15, 2010) — In coming weeks, dozens of Girl Scouts will fan out across the city's West Side to take photographs that answer the question, "What makes it easy and what makes it hard to be physically active in your neighborhood?"

Their photos will be invaluable to researchers from The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, who are devising new ways to get girls moving.

Today, Girl Scouts from the San Antonio and Edgewood independent school districts received an introduction to the Photovoice project. By afternoon, the girls split up into small groups and took their first photo walk outside the Avenida Guadalupe Girl Scout Center. They will go on several more excursions before presenting their photos to the community.

The girls, ages 11 to 14, will be accompanied by adults on photo walks. Each group will be given a camera, a global positioning system device and journals that will allow them to tell the story of what a particular photo represented.

Photovoice is just one piece of a larger project undertaken by the Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHDR) at the UT Health Science Center.

Deborah M. Parra-Medina, Ph.D., M.P.H., professor of epidemiology and biostatistics, and Laura Esparza, M.S., project coordinator, plan to use Photovoice and other feedback from the girls, their parents and the community to design an intervention that increases moderate to vigorous physical activity among adolescent – and particularly Hispanic – girls.

"It's not a top-down research project – it's a community collaboration," Dr. Parra-Medina said. "They will be owners of the outcome as well."

Because researchers want a strategy that incorporates low-cost mobile and wireless technology, like text-messaging, the Girl Scouts also will be surveyed on their technology use.

Nearly one in 10 Hispanics is diagnosed with diabetes, and Hispanic women are more vulnerable than Hispanic men, according to the federal Office on Women's Health. Maintaining a healthy weight is important to preventing and controlling type 2 diabetes, but 73 percent of

Mexican-American women are overweight or obese, compared with 62 percent of the general female population. More than half of Mexican-American women report no leisure exercise at all.

Physical activity behaviors are formed early in life, so reaching Hispanic girls is an important first step to reversing these trends.

“What we want to know is why? What would it take to help girls be more active? Also, what can we as a community do to support girls’ desires to be physically active?” Esparza said.

IHPR researchers teamed up with Girl Scouts of Southwest Texas, which brings deep relationships within the community and a longstanding focus on healthy development for girls.

“Girl Scouts advocates for all girls, wherever they live and whatever their circumstance,” said Anna Maria Chávez, CEO of Girl Scouts of Southwest Texas. “We are thrilled to be part of this important study that will impact the healthy development of girls and the communities they live in. Fifty-six percent of our girl members are Hispanic, and research on their needs is vital. The objective of this study is a perfect fit with Girl Scouting’s long tradition of teaching girls the skills necessary to lead healthy lives.”

Other partners include the Edgewood Family Network and the departments of Health & Kinesiology and Electrical & Computer Engineering at The University of Texas at San Antonio. The project received funding through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

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Girl Scouts of Southwest Texas (GSSWT): In partnership with more than 8,000 adult volunteers, Girl Scouts of Southwest Texas serves 18,000 girls in its 21-county jurisdiction. Girl Scouting helps girls ages 5-17 develop the *courage* to experience new adventures, the *confidence* to defy self-doubt, and the *character* to impact a community. Volunteers are needed to help today’s girls make the world a better place. *Change a Life. It’s forever. Volunteer.* For more information, visit www.girlscouts-swtx.org.

The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, one of the country’s leading health sciences universities, ranks in the top 2 percent of all U.S. institutions receiving federal funding. Research and other sponsored program activity totaled a record \$259 million in fiscal year 2009. The university’s schools of medicine, nursing, dentistry, health professions and graduate biomedical sciences have produced 27,000 graduates. The \$753 million operating budget supports six campuses in San Antonio, Laredo, Harlingen and Edinburg. For more information on the many ways “*We make lives better*®,” visit www.uthscsa.edu.

The Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHPR) investigates the causes and solutions to the unequal impact of cancer and chronic disease among certain populations, including Latinos, in San Antonio, South Texas and the nation. The IHPR, founded in 2006, is based at The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio with a satellite office in Harlingen, Texas. The IHPR uses evidence-guided research, training and community outreach to improve the health of those at a disadvantage due to race/ethnicity or social determinants, such as education or income. Visit the IHPR online at <http://ihpr.uthscsa.edu> or e-mail ihpr@uthscsa.edu. The IHPR also operates an online Latino health forum, SaludToday, which features a blog (www.saludtoday.com/blog) and pages on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube.