



**Making Gains in North Carolina Communities:
Eat Smart, Move More Community Grants
2008-2009**

In September 2008, the North Carolina Division of Public Health awarded nine *Eat Smart, Move More* Community Grants to promote healthy eating and physical activity in communities, schools and worksites across the state. Each of the nine counties or health districts (groups of counties that share health services) was awarded up to \$20,000 to implement strategies that advance the goals and objectives of *Eat Smart, Move More: North Carolina's Plan to Prevent Overweight, Obesity and Related Chronic Diseases*. These strategies emphasize policy and environmental change, which means they adjust the rules, customary practices and physical surroundings in which North Carolinians live, learn and work as a means of supporting healthy behaviors.

For 2008-09, the community grant interventions combined innovation and collaboration to achieve impressive results:

- An estimated 5,000 North Carolinians were reached.
- Partner-focused: eight of nine interventions involved three or more community partners; several featured six or more.
- More than 40% of the grant-funded counties were first-time awardees.
- Grant-funded activities occurred in communities, schools, faith/religious organizations, healthcare facilities and worksites.
- An estimated 22 new policies or practices were implemented, providing educational programs, healthy behavior incentives and even a master recreation plan.
- An estimated 30 physical changes were made to facilities or environments, including new community gardens, recreational sites/equipment and improvements to the built environment such as walking trails and sidewalks.
- Seven of the nine grant-funded projects were successful in helping community members to become more physically active.

Beyond the tangible impacts, grantees and their partners also enjoyed the benefits of bringing their communities together. In the words of some participants:

“I became involved in this effort because I wanted to help some of our Latino church members grow vegetables of their own...the rest is a love affair with the soil, plants, new friends and delicious produce.”

“We now hear individuals with disabilities commenting to their peers and staff: ‘Don’t buy soda, get water,’ ‘those potato chips are bad for you,’ ‘eat an apple,’ and ‘I want to walk.’ These comments may not sound noteworthy, but...this is a great gift for us.”

“I can do this! I have never successfully grown anything in my life; now I have tomatoes, basil and squash that I grew. I don’t usually eat them, but I will now!”

“I never knew that I could enjoy a meal without salt!”

“I didn’t realize that I was going to be sore after working in a garden—I might have to use this as my regular exercise.”

Organizers around the state describe the grants as an opportunity for strengthening partnerships and inspiring community members. The time and dedication of the grantees and their partners resulted in a variety of activities and accomplishments, summarized below by county.



Buncombe

Buncombe Safe Routes, Safe Rides (“BSR2”) expanded its Safe Routes to Schools efforts in West Asheville schools this year in addition to helping develop after-school programs and the Erwin Middle School Bicycle Club. Organizers focused on providing resources and infrastructure for k-8 bicycle and pedestrian education, emphasizing skill development, safety and a lifelong passion for bicycling. More than 170 students participated in BSR2 activities and 158 students took part in one of the five community and/or school bike-safety training events. Trainers at these sessions verified that the vast majority of students had proficiency in bicycle safety and developed improved bicycle skills.

Carteret

The Carteret County Health Department, in collaboration with County Parks and Recreation and other community partners, is constructing a 1.5 mile walking trail equipped with outdoor fitness stations. This completed trail will be located at Newport Middle School, as part of a dual-use, community/school park project.

Chatham

Chatham County’s program, “Playground Kids Growing Healthy in Goldston,” is an intervention to prevent overweight and obesity in children ages zero to five. Grant recipients constructed an age-appropriate playground area for children and organized healthy eating classes. The playground, located in Goldston, offers families a permanent community resource for physical activity, while the classes sought to help parents improve their healthy eating habits. Grant organizers



estimate that the playground reaches about 150 children ages 0-5 now and another 40 children each additional year.

Davidson

Davidson County Health Department and Thomasville Parks and Recreation Department collaborated to construct three walking paths and enhance several existing paths and sidewalks in the city of Thomasville. This project encourages physical activity and better cardiovascular health through environmental change: offering and promoting safe, accessible walking trails for Thomasville residents. To advertize the walking trails and related programs, grant organizers participated in two community events that drew more than 1,500 people and where they distributed several hundred goody bags and wristbands.

Durham

Durham County's Seasons Project worked with existing African American faith-based partner organizations to improve nutrition and increase physical activity through gardening. In addition, Operation Frontline offered six food preparation and nutrition classes and the County Horticulturist and SEEDS Program assisted participants with developing and maintaining container gardens. More than 370 people signed up and are expected to extend the program's impact to twice as many family and friends by sharing knowledge. Additionally, grant organizers received five requests from other faith groups for help with starting their own garden projects.



Granville and Vance

The Granville and Vance Counties WoW! Coalition offered mini-grants to community partners to promote environmental and policy change in support of physical activity and nutrition. The variety of programs that were created impacted elementary and high school students and staff, seniors, physically and mentally handicapped individuals, staff and residents of a psychiatric hospital, and members of three African American churches. The resulting policy and environmental changes covered a broad array of initiatives, including allowing employees to exercise during work time, eliminating vending machines and paving/enhancing walking trails. The total program will likely impact more than 1,000 people.



Lee

The Lee County Health Department and North Carolina Cooperative Extension collaborated with the Lee County School System to provide Growing Children and Healthy Families: "Fit for Life in Lee County." The program was administered to 650 fifth grade students and promoted healthy eating, physical activity, growing vegetables in container gardens and participating in a Community Garden project. Ten families were also selected to participate in the Community Garden component: Each family received two raised-bed plots, which reached about 50 individuals. The 650 fifth graders all signed statements pledging to live a healthy lifestyle and 90-95% of participating families increased their consumption of fruits and vegetables, levels of physical activity and their frequency of eating home-cooked meals on a weekly basis.

Wake

Wake County Human Services has partnered with Raleigh Parks and Recreation to construct a playground for children with disabilities. The Eat Smart, Move More, Let's Play Project will increase physical activity levels of children with disabilities and educate families about the importance of healthy behaviors.

Warren

Warren County's Eat Smart, Move More Nurturing Parenting Program partnered with the Warren Family Institute (WFI) and other organizations to encourage local parents to increase healthy eating and physical activity in their homes. This initiative offered healthy cooking classes with child nurturing sessions through the Warren Family Institute, which offers a broad variety of activities to support individual families and larger-scale community development. WFI also implemented a healthy foods policy for all its events. Participant survey results showed an increase in knowledge about reading food labels and selecting healthy food choices. Likewise, participants reported consuming less daily soda and salt and more fruits and vegetables.



Community grantees are helping to create a North Carolina where healthy eating and active living are the norm rather than the exception. Although a great deal of success is already evident, it may take a few more years to gauge the full impact of the 2008-2009 community grants. The *Eat Smart, Move More* Community Grant Program is funded by the North Carolina Division of Public Health in support of the *Eat Smart, Move More NC* movement. Information on grant recipients both past and present is available online at www.EatSmartMoveMoreNC.com. Many of the curricula and program materials used by the grantees are available for free download to support healthy changes in the places where North Carolinians live, learn, work, pray and play.