



Increasing Healthy Living in North Carolina Communities: Eat Smart, Move More Community Grants 2009-2010

In September 2009, the North Carolina Division of Public Health awarded 12 *Eat Smart, Move More* Community Grants to promote healthy eating and physical activity in communities, schools, churches and worksites across the state. Each of the 12 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 2009-2010, the community grant interventions combined innovation and collaboration to achieve impressive results:

- Bigger impact: An estimated 33,000 North Carolinians were reached.
- Partner-focused: Grantees partnered with more than 85 community organizations, including nonprofits, hospitals, childcare centers, etc.
- Programs occurred in more than 50 work sites, 30 childcare centers, 14 schools and eight churches.
- Grantees leveraged nearly \$40,000 in additional resources (funding, donated time and donated materials)
- An estimated 51 new policies or practices were implemented, providing educational programs, healthy behavior incentives and a master recreation plan.
- An estimated 43 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.

In addition to expanded reach and impact on communities, grantees also helped individuals and families adopt healthier behaviors by creating opportunities for learning, participating in health promotion programs and developing new social supports. The ability of the Community Grants

program to bring significant change to individual lives can be seen in the following feedback received by grant organizers:

“I cook alone 4-5 nights per week but I'm fixing more for myself instead of eating junk food. Thank you.”

“I have started planning meals a week at a time and my husband has started cooking with me too.”

“Youth at Union Grove Missionary Baptist Church lead physical activity breaks and provide healthy snacks during Youth Bible Study. The children are now asking for them every week and the parents notice their enthusiasm for wanting to live healthy.”

“My blood pressure has dropped to a normal level and I do not get tired when I exercise now. I lost 21 pounds by walking more, eating more fruits and vegetables, drinking more water and I also cut out sugary drinks. This was all due to my participating in the ESMM program with Jerusalem Missionary Baptist Church.”

“I'm loving this challenge, it is really pushing me to be creative in how to get the steps. It has also been an eye opener because I didn't realize how little I move throughout the day at work! Because of this challenge, I actually worked out during my lunch, and I haven't done that the whole three years I've been here.”

“The Director of Loving Hands Day Care Center wrote a letter thanking us for bringing NAP-SACC to their center. She indicated that the program has completely reformed the food served and the amount of play time the children get each day.”

“Due to the progress Moore County has made to date with faith communities, Moore County has been selected to have a Faithful Families coordinator through the NC Cooperative Extension to take this outreach further and to the next level.”

Organizers around the state describe the grants as an opportunity for strengthening partnerships and inspiring community members. Furthermore, they offer the chance to implement exciting, evidence-based strategies that the public health community is eager to explore. Below are three success stories from the 2009-2010 Eat Smart, Move More Community Grants program illustrating a few of these strategies.

Beaufort Walking Trail Helps Schools and the Community

Getting a good bang for your buck is always important for community health, a lesson Beaufort County knows by heart. So, when county school and health department officials teamed up last year on a project to improve physical activity among school students and staff, they were quick to think about how they could impact the surrounding community as well. The solution? Constructing a walking track surrounding two adjacent grade schools that *also* welcomes local residents to come walk.

Construction funds came from an *Eat Smart, Move More Community Grant* awarded to the Beaufort County Health Department, which partnered with school officials from P.S. Jones Middle School and John Small Elementary School. The schools sit side by side, so encircling the campus with a walking trail for students and staff was a natural fit. However, organizers recognized that obesity is a problem for all age groups in Beaufort County, and that most neighborhoods lack places for getting physical activity. As a result, organizers decided to open the track to community members to make it a “joint-use” facility. After consulting with the school board, who determined that proper signage would resolve legal concerns over liability, the team made reaching out to the greater community a core part of their mission.

Of course, just building a trail does not mean people will automatically come use it. Advertising, group activities and health education help raise awareness and provide support for people who are ready to move more but need some motivation. The project team therefore launched several initiatives to build excitement and encourage participation, including a school essay contest, a walking challenge for staff and students, classroom activities, and a kick-off event with local media and community members.

The resulting efforts have been a huge success! Students say they are getting more physical activity and enjoying it, and local residents are using the trail as well. Based on this experience, the Beaufort County Health Department applied for an *Eat Smart, Move More Community Grant* for 2010-2011 using a similar idea, and won funds to repeat the project. Lead agent Kelli Russell, the Health Promotion Coordinator for the Beaufort County Health Department,



described their success by saying, “This project has given our coalition so much energy! We were able to apply for another grant with full steam from our committee members, and were selected to do a similar project in another community. By completing the *Eat Smart, Move More* trail so successfully, we have shown our community the importance of physical activity.”

Planting Seeds that Grow in Davie County



Ever hear expressions like “Trial by Fire,” “Sink or Swim” or “Thrown into the Deep End”? When Brandi Patti, Health Promotion Coordinator for the Davie County Health Department, was hired in December of 2009, her experience was a combination of all three. On her first day, Brandi took the reigns of an *Eat Smart, Move More Community Grant* project awarded to Davie just a few months earlier. The project funded four childcare centers to build on-site vegetable gardens and receive training on the NAP-SACC (Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Child Care) program. NAP-SACC

helps child care centers assess their classroom rules and environment for barriers to healthy behaviors. Teachers can then make changes to increase physical activity and healthy eating in the classroom and teach important lessons for healthy living, such as avoiding sugar-sweetened beverages and being more active at home.

Fortunately, like all *Eat Smart, Move More* programs, the Davie initiative featured a team of community partners working together. NC State Cooperative Extension sent a master gardener to oversee planting the gardens and Smart Start provided onsite training on plants, food and nutrition. With their expertise, Brandi led a successful initiative enabling all four centers to plant vegetable gardens and create related classroom activities for children. Including staff and children, well over 100 people were directly impacted by the program!

According to Brandi, the grant project has really paid off. “My hope is that the kids will encourage their parents to grow their own produce and cook healthier at home... they had tons of questions about how a seed turns into a vegetable and why tomatoes are green before turning red,” she said. “I was happy to hear most of the day care workers excited about having a garden. I hope this project not only teaches the kids but the adults too!”



Schools and Neighbors Walk More in Wilkes

From: [Parent]
Sent: Wednesday, January 27, 2010 1:39 PM
To: [School Principal]
Subject: walking on the play ground

My daughter and I have been brainstorming ways we can make time in our schedules to increase our physical activity. The best idea we have had so far is to try walking before school starts in the morning. Now we need to find a good place to walk. We felt it would be very convenient if we could walk on the playground there at Mulberry School. We don't know; however, if this would be inconvenient for the school or even if it would be allowed. Can you please advise if this is an option? Thank you.

From: [Principal]
Sent: Thursday, January 28, 2010 3:21 PM
To: [Parent]
Subject: RE: walking on the play ground

*YES! This is exactly what I have been waiting to hear! I am not sure if you are aware of our Eat Smart, Move More Community Grant that we received this year, but I believe that it will be in the paper soon. Part of that grant is to encourage families to use our walking trail. There will be some improvements to the trail very soon as well. You may use the walking trail before 8 am and after 4 pm or anytime on the weekends. Just be sure to park in a space in the back where the car line will not be blocked! Good luck!
I think this is wonderful!!!!*

This email exchange between a parent and principal took place just as two Wilkes County elementary schools and the Wilkes County Health Department launched a partnership to improve the schools' walking trails. The schools added fitness stations, bike racks, point-of-decision prompts and promotional signs, all funded by an *Eat Smart, Move More Community Grant* awarded to the health department. Fortunately, officials at Mulberry Elementary and C.B. Ellis Elementary understood the needs of families and nearby residents for convenient places to be more active (as the emails above demonstrate!). This prompted them to agree to open up their facilities to the community.

Best of all, organizers, didn't just sit back and wait to see who would come—they also organized ribbon-cutting ceremonies, newspaper coverage and education programs to promote the event and support participants. Several activities targeted school staff, including a weight-loss challenge in which teams competed against each other to lose weight. At the beginning and end of the program, participants travelled to a local landfill with a scale large enough for entire teams to be weighed at once, and determined which team had once by losing the most weight overall.

Feedback from teachers, parents and community members about the programs and new facilities has been terrific:

“During my son’s baseball practice, I walk around the track and love it. I am not just sitting in the bleachers anymore.”

“I love exercising with the staff, it has brought us closer.”

“I am so thankful we have a place to bring our family to exercise that is close to our homes.”

Wilkes County’s project has been so successful that the health department applied for another grant to create similar “joint-use” agreements (serving the school and community) with the county’s other elementary schools. As in the case with Mulberry and C.B. Ellis, the health department will continue its commitment to encouraging people to walk on their grounds by educating and motivating Wilkes residents to get moving.



School staff gather at the Wilkes County Landfill for their group weigh in to see how many pounds the team lost.



Wilkes County Health Department organized a kick-off event to celebrate and promote the walking trails and health programs launched by officials at Mulberry Elementary and C.B. Ellis Elementary Schools.

Project Summaries

The stories above represent just three of the 12 counties that implemented grant programs in 2009-2012. The remaining counties and their projects, all of which focused on increasing physical activity and healthful eating by implementing policy and environmental change, are summarized below:

Appalachian District – Alleghany

Alleghany County Schools participated in a school wellness mini-grant program. This program provided specific funding to each school to promote and support sustainable environmental changes for healthy eating and physical activity. Each school site created a walking route inside and outside their school site. In addition, all schools participated and promoted group and individual wellness programs, including a school physical activity promotion entitled “The Biggest Mover.”

Caldwell

The Caldwell County Employee Wellness Committee implemented a stairwell initiative in six stairwells in the new Human Services building. The initiative enhanced the appearance of stairwells and increased their use by employees. Caldwell Memorial Hospital also established an employee Wellness Committee that sponsored activities such as Workable Wellness “lunch and learn” sessions focused on wellness topics. Sessions included healthy eating, physical activity and lessons from Eat Smart Cook Smart, a program that teaches cooking techniques to help participants prepare and eat more meals at home.

Cleveland

Cleveland County launched *Moving More in Kings Mountain*, a community intervention that developed three walking routes in Kings Mountain. The walking route increased physical activity for students, faculty, staff and parents at West Elementary School. West Elementary also formed an enhanced running club and Walk to School program.

Gaston

Eating Smart and Moving More in Reid Park aimed to improve health in the predominantly African American community of Reid Park. Efforts focused on increasing the consumption of fruits and vegetables and increasing physical activity. The community promoted healthy eating through a community garden and cooking classes, while also sponsoring a walking program for physical activity.

Granville-Vance

The Granville and Vance County WoW! Coalition awarded mini-grants to county organizations to implement sustainable policy or environmental changes supporting healthy eating and increased physical activity. Organizations in the two counties also participated in the annual ESMM Weight Loss Challenge.

Henderson

The *Healthy Teachers, Healthy Kids* program believes that teachers are role models and that changes in their nutrition and physical activity behaviors can impact the children they teach and

care for. Thanks to the new initiative, the Henderson County Health Department and partners supported child care providers by offering walking challenges and fitness and nutrition classes. Additionally, they expanded the Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Child Care (NAP-SACC) program in Henderson County by offering mini-grants to child care providers.

Hoke

HokeFit partners worked with six businesses in Hoke County to increase healthy eating or physical activity among their staff. Partners helped these businesses develop active worksite wellness committees; increase physical activity through HokeFit; and offer Eat Smart, Move More, Weigh Less classes. The six participating businesses also organized a HokeFit corporate walking challenge.

Moore

The Moore County Health Department provided mini-grants to five child care centers to address the six core elements of the NAP-SACC program. Child care centers conducted activities that included self-assessment, goal setting and action planning. The intervention also provided continuing education and skill building activities to participating centers. Mini-grant funds were used to improve food options and enhance indoor and outdoor physical activity areas.

Warren

Warren County Health Department in collaboration with the Fitness and Nutrition Committee created the *Warren County Eat Smart, Move More Nurturing Faith Project*. This project provided mini-grants to five churches to support healthy eating and physical activity for their members and surrounding community.

For more information on Eat Smart, Move More Community Grants and the organization as a whole, please visit www.EatSmartMoveMoreNC.com today!

