



For Immediate Release

Toniann Richard/HCC of Rural Missouri
660.259.2440/Toniann@hccnetwork.org

Local Program Impacts Healthier Life Choices

Obesity, tobacco use and a lack of physical activity all play a role in premature death. Over the past three years, Lafayette County has benefited from a program that tackled these issues. The Live Healthy Live Well (LHLW) initiative, a Social Innovation for Missouri program, worked to make Lafayette County a healthier place to live, work and play. Funded in part through the Missouri Foundation for Health, program partners included the Health Care Collaborative (HCC) of Rural Missouri and University of Missouri Extension, as well as various community stakeholders. Although the program has ended, much has been accomplished.

LHLW targeted both children and adults, and emphasized physical activity, exercise, diet, nutrition, healthy food and snack choices, as well as the importance of smoke-free air. One of the program's first initiatives was tackling childhood obesity and nutrition habits among school children. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), one in three American children are overweight or obese and only one in four adolescents get the recommended 60 minutes of physical activity per day.

Active & Healthy Schools

Active and Healthy Schools (AHS) curriculum was implemented in all six public school districts. The AHS program provided physical activity and nutrition education to over 1,670 students, grades K-5. "This program is a roadmap for schools to change the environment and culture so that students, faculty and staff embrace opportunities to become more physically active and nutrition conscience," said Lynda Johnson, former nutrition and health education specialist at the University of Missouri Extension.

Studies prove that regular physical activity helps students increase concentration, focus, and boost academic performance. As a result of the program, 90 percent of faculty members increased the number of classroom short movement activities throughout the day, called brain breaks. Faculty surveys also showed that implementing playground activity zones increased student activity and reduced discipline problems.

Students in the Odessa R-VII School District were introduced to an interactive exercise system called, NEOS. The system is used in playground activity zones and as a part of the physical education curriculum. With a 360 degree circle design, it combines electronic games with exercise. "We hope to see an increase in the students' interest in physical activity and athletic ability by using the NEOS," said Kristi Bieri, physical education teacher at Odessa Upper Elementary.

In addition to brain breaks and playground activity zones, AHS encouraged healthy food choices, food tastings, positive messaging to reinforce healthy habits and hands-on learning through school-based gardens.

In Higginsville, Odessa and Lexington, students learned firsthand how vegetables grow, the importance of nutrition and were introduced to foods that some had never tried before. "Some kids think food comes from cans," said Wendy Reynolds director of Student Opportunity for Activity and Recreation

Be Active. Eat Healthy. Live Tobacco Free.

(SOAR) in Odessa. “They don’t understand that it grows in the ground. I have kids who have actually never eaten salad before.”

In another move to push healthy food choices, LHLW installed concession stand coolers at the Lexington, Odessa and Higginsville public pools. In partnership with the Eat Smart in Parks program, the park coolers provide healthier snack options such as fresh fruits, string cheese and yogurt.

Workplace Wellness

As for adults, only one in three receive the recommended amount of physical activity each week according to the CDC. A study at the University of South Carolina recently found that those who reported more than 23 hours a week of sedentary activity had a 64 percent greater risk of dying prematurely than those who reported less than 11 hours of sedentary activity.

Inherently, most workplaces foster sedentary lifestyles. To address this issue, LHLW deployed a wellness coach to workplaces in the area. Employees participated in a health risk assessment to collectively gauge their health status. Based on workplace results, a program was designed to address nutrition habits and encourage more physical activity.

In one case study, employees from the Missouri Valley Community Action Agency (MVCAA) in Marshall, MO demonstrated high stress levels, sedentary lifestyles and unhealthy nutrition habits. The employee wellness program focused on weight reduction and nutrition management. The group was asked to eliminate junk food and soda and increase water intake. They were required to chart physical activity hours and meals. The group tracked their results through scheduled weigh-ins. They shared healthy recipes, held lunchtime workouts and launched two 5K walks. Participants produced these cumulative results:

- Reduced cumulative BMI from 34% to 32.3%
- Reduced cumulative weight by 67 pounds
- Logged 455 hours on physical activity from January 2011 to mid-May 2011
- Reduced waist inches from a cumulative average of 41 inches to a cumulative average of 33.9 inches

Sidewalks and parks

LHLW also reached out to Higginsville and Lexington to help make these areas more walkable communities. Connectivity plans that detailed safe and accessible sidewalks were developed in both cities. The initiative provided funds to build sidewalks and connectivity routes.

Higginsville’s initial efforts to develop a walkable community began in 2009. The first route connected the downtown area, several residential neighborhoods, and the Walmart on Missouri Highway 13. That project included burying power lines and installing new streetlights. Sidewalk development also included part of McCord Park to Cypress Street. The city was also able to connect existing stretches of sidewalk in Fairground Park and finish the circle around the school area. LHLW contributed 3,300 feet of new sidewalks and 18 ADA access points.

“When we started back in 2009, there were naysayers,” said Donna Brown, economic development director for the City of Higginsville. “But now it is truly amazing when you go to the different areas where the new sidewalk has been completed and see the amount of walkers.”

In 2012, the City of Higginsville was the recipient of the LHLW “Healthy Lafayette Award” for these efforts. Last year, the City of Odessa was recognized with this award.

In Lexington, the Safe Routes to School Project installed sidewalks that allow school-aged children to walk to school. Four ADA access points with truncated domes were installed, including a bump-out at the Chamber of Commerce office. In addition, Crystal Lake Park now features handicap access, exercise stations, an outdoor classroom and a butterfly garden.

Community fit flyers were distributed to promote walking trails, parks, fitness centers and classes available in Lafayette County. LHLW developed fitness guides for Lexington, Higginsville, Alma and Wellington to encourage physical activity. The guides offer trail maps, level of difficulty, contact information for gym and fitness centers as well as local walking and running events.

Smoke-free Policies

LHLW also took an active role in raising awareness about the dangers of secondhand smoke and clean air policies. Students With A Goal (SWAG), a team of Lafayette County high school students, is dedicated to creating smoke-free communities. In an effort to make Missouri tobacco free, SWAG has created PSAs, learned about tobacco policy, dissected ads from big tobacco companies that target youth, and made presentations to city council members about the benefits of clean air policies.

Currently, there are only 34 communities in Missouri that have passed smoke-free ordinances. Steps are underway to add Lafayette County to the list. Although the county has no smoke-free ordinances, several restaurants and businesses have voluntarily chosen to be smoke free.

“Enacting a local, smoke-free indoor air law is the best way to protect people from secondhand smoke exposure,” said Glenda Bertz, RN, assistant administrator of the Lafayette County Health Department and founding member of Lafayette County Prevention Coalition (LCPC).

For more information, visit LiveHealthyLiveWell.org.

###

Certain projects have been underwritten by the Missouri Department of Economic Development, Neighborhood Assistance Program, Health Care Foundation of Greater KC, REACH Healthcare Foundation, Inc., Lafayette County Children's Services Fund and Health Resource Services Administration - Office of Rural Health Policy and Bureau of Primary Health Care.