

Home Grown Coalitions Advocate for Health in Jackson and Lawrence Counties

by: Lindley McDavid

SUMMARY

The health of residents in Jackson and Lawrence County suffers due to high obesity rates and citizens have limited opportunities to mobilize local resources to promote health. Home grown coalitions give citizens a voice to promote change and, in the last five months, coalitions in both counties reported unparalleled growth in membership (more than doubled), productivity (multiple ongoing healthy initiatives), and reach (initiatives span across each county). This success is all due to the outstanding work of county citizens!



CHALLENGE

In 2012, Jackson and Lawrence Counties had the highest rates of adult obesity across the state of Indiana (> 40%). Obesity is linked to negative health outcomes like diabetes, heart disease and some cancers. Regular physical activity and healthy eating can help reduce these risks but, citizens of rural areas and from low-income backgrounds are less likely to have access to recreation opportunities, and fresh and healthy food retail. The seclusion of rural communities restricts the reach of health interventions available in nearby urban centers. Therefore, amenities and services that promote healthy behaviors tend to be primarily available to residents in particular geographic areas. Rural communities often have limited resources (e.g., capital, leadership) which may fuel negative perceptions that there is little support to improve health outcomes or improve health promotion efforts.

YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY

Everyone benefits from a community focused on health and increased community investment in our well-being. Get involved – your voice matters and everyone can help! Look for coalition updates and meetings on Facebook (search Healthy Jackson County and Live Well Lawrence).

Each coalition is led by county citizens eager for your input: Jackson County residents email Molly Marshall (marsh119@purdue.edu); Lawrence County residents email Karin Dubois (dubois4@purdue.edu).

"We are proud to partner with HJC to offer concession choices that support the health of athletes and families. We cut the price of water and added fruit, yogurt and more to make game night healthier."

- Robin Ramp, Seymour Middle School, Language Arts Teacher and Head of Concessions

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SOLUTION

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) invested in the health of Jackson and Lawrence County citizens by supporting two, home grown coalitions. Healthy Jackson County (HJC, est. 2011) and Live Well Lawrence County (LWLC, est. 2012), are community-based coalitions focused on improving the health of their neighbors by increasing healthy food access and consumption, increasing physical activity opportunities, and offering education and promotional support to improve health. By partnering with Purdue University Extension, these coalitions will be positioned to lead sustainable, community-driven efforts that leverage existing resources to improve health in their counties.

RESULTS

As of July 2017, only five months into the project, great strides have been made to meet coalition goals. In Jackson County, partnerships with schools, food pantries, and the parks and recreation department will improve access to healthier foods for approximately 38,000 young people and their families. In Lawrence County, the coalition is advocating for new walking trails, active transportation to school, and a farmer's market. In both counties, interactive maps will highlight physical activity opportunities across the county, and community gardens will offer healthy food and education opportunities. Residents in both counties should also look for new coalition logos that indicate coalition support at community events. With more than a year to go, this initial momentum bodes well for the long-term success of the coalition.

SUSTAINING SUCCESS

The partnership between the CDC, Purdue Extension, and the Jackson and Lawrence County Coalitions have laid the groundwork for a long-lasting, community-driven effort that promotes health. By the end of the funding opportunity, each coalition will have successfully implemented health interventions, established strong leadership, become a recognized and respected community health organization, and built robust community ties. Since their inception, the coalitions focused on low-cost, community supported and initiated interventions that meet the needs of their citizens. As indicated by initial, successful partnerships with local schools, government agencies, and non-profits, the coalitions are positioned for lasting success.