

Iowa Community Transformation Grant: Local Success Stories September, 2012

Black Hawk County Board of Health: *New Referral System Connects Community with Better Choices, Better Health Chronic Disease Self-Management Program*

Summary: Chronic diseases such as heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes, and arthritis are the leading cause of death and disability in the United States. Although these conditions represent the most common and costly causes of all health problems, they are also among the most preventable. Modifiable health risk behaviors are responsible for much of the burden, suffering, and early death related to chronic diseases. Prevention efforts are generally directed at health promotion activities that encourage healthy living to limit the onset of chronic disease or screening to detect at risk-populations. However, with nearly one out of two Americans suffering from a chronic illness, there is an additional need to focus on strategies for managing existing disease and complications. The evidence-based Chronic Disease Self-Management Program, also known as Better Choices, Better Health program seeks to bridge this gap. As a collaborative effort between the Black Hawk County Health Department and Hawkeye Valley Area Agency on Aging, the program helps individuals who are living with chronic conditions to find practical ways to self-manage pain and fatigue, make healthier nutrition and exercise choices, set realistic goals, understand treatment options, and communicate with family and health care providers about their condition.

Challenge: Although the *Better Choices, Better Health* program has proven to help people improve their level of exercise, symptom management, coping behaviors, and overall health status, the consumer referral system in Black Hawk County is not well developed. Prior emphasis on community promotion (via media) to encourage self-referral in the program has been unsuccessful in sustaining regular program scheduling, resulting in lower than expected participation rates and cancelled workshops.

Solution: The first of several referral systems has been developed through a partnership between the Health Department and Hawkeye Valley Area Agency on Aging's Aging and Disability Resource Center. During the information and assistance assessment phase, Option Counselors speak with consumers about their health condition, mobility and physical activity levels. If a need is identified by the consumer the consumer's readiness to address their need is assessed; and, as indicated, information and referral into Better Choices, Better Health is offered. Healthcare providers participating in the Community Diabetes Task Force from Northeast Iowa Family Practice and Greenhill Clinic (Iowa Health System) also have expressed interest in a collaboration to explore a similar referral system. The Health Promotion Program Manager (Black Hawk County Health Department) is exploring the new referral systems with office managers/referral coordinators at each of the healthcare provider offices.

Results: The new referral process is expected to identify more individuals in the community who could benefit from the *Better Choices, Better Health* program. Through this coordinated approach to care, at least one workshop will be offered per quarter.

Future Directions: In the future, collaboration is expected to occur with medical fitness and other personal training activities to deepen our reach into the community and refer more participants into the *Better Choices, Better Health* program.

Grundy County Board of Health: *Community Design Changes to Facilitate Walking and Biking*

Summary: The cities of Holland, Grundy Center and Reinbeck in Grundy County are connected by walking/biking trails except for a couple of gaps. The Grundy Center Wellness Committee/Catch Life applied to be a Blue Zones Community in 2012. Even though the city was not selected the committee is committed to the Blue Zones initiatives and has formed a planning committee based on the “Power 9”. The subcommittees are looking at strategies that mirror the CTG initiatives. The active living subcommittee would like to see the east and west trails joined through the city of Grundy Center to make the two trails more accessible and to promote walking and biking of the trails without gaps.

Challenge: The walking/biking trails begin and end away from the city street system in Grundy Center. The trail is located on the edge of the north side of town and the two trails are not joined. The west side off-street trail access is gravel and without curb cuts. There are no bike lanes on the streets and no signs that direct walkers or bikers to the trail on the east edge of town.

Solution: The subcommittee and the Grundy County Coalition will collaborate with city officials to improve and promote the walking path.

Results: The subcommittee and CTG coordinator are in the process of meeting with city public works director and city clerk to provide information on the trail connector.

Future Directions: The Blue Zones planning committee is looking at a wider, more centrally located walking path through the city of Grundy Center that would also connect to the walking trails. The goal for this is in the City of Grundy Center Strategic Plan for 2015.

Henry County Board of Health: *Healthy Communities partners with the City of Mt. Pleasant to put the finishing touches on a safer, more walkable downtown*

Summary: Washington Street is the old Highway 34 and is the main thoroughfare through Mt. Pleasant. Two major pieces have already undergone major construction and the final phase began in the spring of 2012. Since this phase goes through the downtown area and extends almost to Saunders Park and the city's Aquatic Center, the Healthy Communities walkability committee contacted the City Administrator to ensure the new design would enhance walkability between the two heavily trafficked areas. We were pleased to learn that the city was already making great strides to increase walkability by making the road narrower, adding colored concrete crosswalks, inserting curb cuts, and putting in new ADA compliant sidewalks. The Henry County CTG collaborated with the City of Mt. Pleasant to implement these positive changes including times pedestrian crossing signals.

Challenge: The current downtown pedestrian crosswalk signals are old and poorly lit, which makes it difficult to distinguish whether or not the light is blinking and therefore telling individuals it is okay to cross the street. As a result, you see many individuals bypass crosswalks and dart across the street.

Solution: To solve this issue and make it safer for individuals to cross the busy downtown streets, new LED timed pedestrian crosswalk lights for the three main intersections downtown will be installed. The city buried the conduit under the new paving to ensure this could happen.

Once the project is complete, the downtown area will encourage walking and allow individuals to walk to and from stores and restaurants without having to dart between traffic. It will also provide a safer way for kids and families to reach Saunders Park and the city's aquatic center. The intersections will be more noticeable to drivers, which will hopefully slow them down and increase their awareness of pedestrians. In addition, the pedestrian crossing lights will allow individuals to safely cross the street and provide a countdown to cross in a timely manner.

Results: Tying in with the current construction project allowed us to make an impact we otherwise could not have made. Timing and a willingness to work together allowed us all to make a lasting impact on the safety of our downtown area. We look forward to the project's completion this fall.

Future directions: Next spring we will continue to work with Mt. Pleasant's City Administrator to assess the remaining two blocks that need improvement in order to have a complete safe walking and biking route to the city's Aquatic Center. After we have that completed we will promote this new, safer route to the pool through local media.

Jefferson County Board of Health: *Improved accessibility for the residents of Jefferson County*

Summary: Jefferson County is becoming more cognizant of our community health needs. We are transforming into a society that provides environment adaptations with the goal of promoting and supporting physical activity in our daily routines. Jefferson County Public Health strives to be a place for our residents to seek education, service, and community resources.

Challenge: The original entrance was a sidewalk, which contained a 4-inch step to enter the building. For individuals unable to step up into the entrance, they encountered an access barrier. Individuals were required to go to the East edge of the building and enter through the Fire Department entrance that is adjoined to the Public Health office through a separate corridor. This became an evident problem and a barrier to our community seeking public health needs.

Solution: Jefferson County Public Health administrator met with Jefferson County Board of Supervisors to collaborate and develop a plan for what adaptations can be made to the existing entrance, to ensure access to the public and incorporate ADA guidelines. CTG and the county collaborated to adapt the entrance. **Results:** The curb cut has been completed which has resulted in a safer and easier access for our community. We are waiting to have the curb cut painted blue which makes it more obvious to the public. Patrons are able to enter with a wheelchair or other assistive devices. This transformation project was published in the local paper on July 27th, 2012 with a photograph.

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Future Directions: The goal for this project is to have a push button handicap accessible entry door installed. This will further facilitate the access of our community. We have obtained bids from contractors for this project and have met with the Jefferson County Board of Supervisors for approval of this next phase in adaptation.

Lee County Board of Health: *Live Healthy Lee County helps Motorists Watch for Bikers*

Summary: The Live Healthy Lee County coalition began seeing a need for some bike awareness and bike safety after there were several accidents involving bikers being hit. The coalition has also seen an increase of bicyclists due to several biking clubs. A coalition member and avid biker began highlighting routes along county roads he knew of that bikers took, and that motorists needed to proceed with caution.

Challenge: After some discussion, the coalition decided that to move forward we would need the help of the county secondary roads department to install the signs to improve awareness that the roads are also being used by bicyclists.

Solution: The CTG Wellness Coordinator and the Coalition member researched some “Share the Road” signs that would best fit the needs of bikers and motorists. It was decided the best county road to start with was J40 from Ft. Madison to West Point. It has several hills and curves, and if not prepared a driver could come upon a biker very quickly. The plan is to put signs about every mile, and by hills and curves. The coalition would like to continue to add signs to the county roads to help increase awareness of those that bike.

Results: A presentation was given on the need for 20 “Share the Road” signs, and potential collaboration from the county road department to the Lee County Board of Supervisors. The board approved the purchase of the signs and the help from the county roads department.

Further Direction: The Live Healthy Lee County coalition not only plans to continue to add signage to other county roads, but would like to map out some safe bike routes. These routes would be promoted through the LHLC website, local chamber of commerce, tourism offices, and camp grounds.

Wapello County Board of Health: *City buses equipped with bike racks*

In May the following article ran in the Ottumwa local newspaper:

“Bicycle racks are in the process of making their way onto Ottumwa Transit buses.” Diane Gawronski, newly appointed Executive Director of Ottumwa Transit, feels that they’re important enough of an issue to make them one of her first focuses as they promote the “green attitude” of the county, something that Ottumwa Transit is trying to move towards. However, Ottumwa Transit is trying to find a way to avoid having to charge taxpayers for the costs, and sponsorships of some of the bike racks have been discussed with local groups. Gawronski said they’re shooting for the end of 2012 as an installation date and they’d like them all installed at once rather than doing them in stages, but if funding dictates that is how things are gone about then that’s what they’ll have to do. The feeling is that most big cities already have buses with bike racks and that Ottumwa Transit needs to “get on board” with the idea.”

This idea caused much debate in the community. The Ottumwa Courier ran a poll from the community and results were almost an even split with 49 percent in favor and 51 percent opposed. The controversy was about liability and responsibility of the bus drivers for the bicycles placed on the buses. The other concern was where the funds were going to come from.

Initially the Wapello County Public Health (WCPH) CTG did not know anything about the need for bus bicycle racks until their worksite wellness meeting. After this meeting WCPH discussed having city buses equipped with a bike rack.

This progress will have a great impact on the community in the respect that there is a high poverty rate and a lot of the population does not have any other means of transportation other than the city buses or bicycles. Adding the bike racks on the buses also opens the door to both novice and avid bicyclists to have additional options to incorporate riding into their day. The WCPH has already heard people planning to use the buses to ride to the trail system, and then ride the bikes on the trails. This encourages both use of city transportation and physical activity, and in turn the city will gain revenue and there is less emissions in the air, and cost saving for vehicles.

Like with any change there will be opponents and supporters, but in this instance the change for the community is exciting, and seems it will have a great ripple effect on the well-being of Ottumwa community members. Wapello County Public Health, using the CTG funds, was thrilled to be able to make a contribution within our community and look forward to future projects that create collaboration between the community and businesses. Ridership evaluation will be addressed in the spring and summer due to time of implementation and seasons.

Summary

The CTG coordinator is active in local coalitions. While attending an Obesity Prevention Task Force monthly meeting, a collaborative relationship was formed with the focus being on Worksite Wellness. Optimae LifeServices, formerly known as ResCare, has been developing and providing community services to Iowans in Southeastern, Central and Eastern Iowa since 1987. Optimae LifeServices's provides licensed home health services in 13 southeast Iowa counties. This company has an active Wellness Coordinator who is an active participant in Washington County's Obesity Prevention Task Force. After hearing about the Community Transformation Grant at one of the coalition meetings, the Optimae LifeServices Wellness Coordinator volunteered his company to participate in a Worksite Wellness assessment.

Challenge

Optimae LifeService's have shown commitment in providing a healthy working environment for their employees through the hiring of a full time Wellness Coordinator. Each employee is offered an annual risk assessment. Through this risk assessment the Wellness Coordinator identified they have a number of employees that smoke. Information about the Quitline was provided, but the company does not have the funds to offer regular smoking cessation classes to those interested.

Solution

Optimae LifeService's volunteered to participate in the Worksite Wellness program that is offered through the Community Transformation Grant. The CHANGE tool was administered and the assessment was reviewed by the CTG coordinator and Optimae LifeService's Wellness Coordinator.

Results

Through the CHANGE tool the CTG coordinator and Wellness Coordinator for Optimae LifeServices identified a need for the company to provide additional support to their employees who were interested in quitting smoking. The Quitline is a good resource but the employees expressed interest in smoking cessation classes. The CTG coordinator worked closely with the local tobacco coordinator through MECCA to identify steps Optimae LifeServices could take to be eligible for free smoking cessation classes for their employees. MECCA has worked closely with the Wellness Coordinator and management of Optimae LifeServices, in voluntarily adopting a no smoking policy. The company has voluntarily adopted a policy that does not allow their employees to smoke. With the adoption of this policy the local tobacco coordinator is able to offer smoking cessation classes to Optimae LifeService's employees at no cost.

Future Directions

Optimae LifeService's is hopeful that employees will begin the road to a smoke free life by offering the smoking cessation classes along with the previous Quitline. If the program is found successful Optimae LifeService's hopes to partner with other county tobacco coordinators to offer similar services to employees outside of Washington County. The CTG Coordinator will meet with the Wellness Coordinator of Optimae LifeService's throughout the contract year to review the CHANGE tool which was completed and identify other areas in which change will promote wellness with all employees of the company.