Geary County Health Department Increases Food Access & Breastfeeding Support

Community Partnerships for Healthy Mothers & Children

Live Well Geary County & Geary County Breastfeeding Coalition

Introduction

Geary County (GC), Kansas is made up of a diverse population with unique characteristics, such as close proximity to a military post, rural areas, & a highly transient population. The county covers 404 mi² with a population of 37,000; the majority of residents live in one town.

Food Access: Nearly 1 in 4 children in GC suffer from food insecurity (Feeding America, 2015). Although almost 70% of GC residents are eligible to receive SNAP, only 45% participate. The majority of GC is designated as a “food desert,” despite three grocery stores serving the county. Results of a 2012 Community Health Assessment indicated that the community felt there was a lack of available & affordable healthy foods. GC responded to these issues with a multi-pronged approach founded upon coalitions & partnerships.

Maternal & Infant Health: In 2010, statistics revealed the infant mortality was 10.4 per 1000 live births (national rate=6.1/1000) & increased rates of SIDS, smoking, & obesity rates (KDHE, 2010). Additionally, about 75% of GC women initiated breastfeeding (BF) (KDHE, 2010). This met national standards, but sharply declined in the following weeks.

Project Overview

With a one-year, multi-pronged approach, GC aimed to increase access to healthy foods & prevent chronic disease through community linkages. It was initially estimated that almost 90% & 45% of the population would be reached by the food access & community linkage initiatives, respectively. There were two primary project goals:

1. Increase Access to Healthy Foods
   - Initiate farmer’s market electronic benefit transfer (EBT) system
   - Develop coalition & partnerships to improve access to healthy foods
   - Create & distribute local food resource guides through multiple avenues
   - Increase local food insecurity awareness

2. Improve Local BF Education & Support
   - Promote & signup local businesses for state BF campaigns—Business Case for BF & BF Welcome Here
   - 2016 BF Summit featured Drs. Jack Newman & Nils Bergman

Outcomes

As a result of the Community Partnerships for Healthy Mothers & Children project, healthy foods in GC have become more accessible & available via the farmer’s market EBT system for SNAP recipients. Additionally, GC has improved BF support through environmental changes & educational opportunities. This project reached 100% of GC residents, surpassing the reach estimates of 90% & 45% for food access & community linkages; this was accomplished by obtaining support from the county & city commission for Live Well Geary County & its initiatives.

Next Steps

Access to Healthy Foods
- Develop system to process EBT cards, distribute coins, & pay vendors.
- Train farmer’s market vendors on the EBT system.
- Promote EBT system county-wide through various outlets including radio, print, & social media.
- Implement EBT system at one farmer’s market during 2016 season.
- Pilot Summer Picnic Parties child feeding program at six sites.
- Partner with community garden group to align efforts.

BF Education & Support
- Continue to promote the Business Case for BF & BF Welcome Here campaigns to business owners in collaboration with the GC Breastfeeding Coalition.
- Pursue funding & collaboration opportunities to ensure the breastfeeding summit becomes an annual event.

Lessons Learned

This project has served as a platform for policy, systems, & environmental (PSE) changes in GC. Live Well Geary County, the paramount PSE result, was organized for the purpose of inspiring & advancing PSE changes that make it easier for GC residents to lead healthy lives. Live Well Geary County is developing dynamic, community-based strategies to sustain this project’s food access efforts & improve the health of GC residents.

In addition to increasing access to healthy foods for low-income individuals, the EBT system at the farmer’s market has opened up additional opportunities. Live Well Geary County & its partners will be able to provide nutrition education, cooking demonstrations, & promote locally grown fresh produce for all.

Through a collaborative effort with Kansas Food Bank, Live Well Geary County has been presented with an unexpected opportunity to organize a child summer feeding program. Free to children up to age 18, Summer Picnic Parties will be held in six parks throughout the community.

GC relied heavily on collaboration to successfully accomplish its objectives. The Breastfeeding Summit was executed with assistance & support from Delivering Change: Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies & Geary County BF Coalition.

Live Well Geary County collaboration is illustrated below.

Best Practices

Step outside of your comfort zone. You may find an untapped talent or passion.

Find a community champion. Someone has the wherewithal & connections.

Cultivate community relations. Existing groups are pivotal for support & knowledge.

Small steps to achieve big goals. Do not be intimidated by big dreams & high aspirations.

Made possible with funding from the National WIC Association and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) & does not necessarily represent the views of CDC.