The H.A.N.D.S on Approach to Tackling Nutrition through Environmental Changes and Community Partnerships.

Health Access and Nutrition Development Services (H.A.N.D.S.) | Mount Rogers Health District | Galax, VA | Presented By: Lakesha Butler, Public Health Educator

Introduction

The Mount Rogers Health District (MRHD) in Southwest Virginia is one of 17 local WIC agencies across the nation to be a part of the Community Partnerships for Healthy Mothers and Children (CPNHM) project. MRHD was a multi-sector approach to tackling nutrition through the Health Access and Nutrition Development Services (H.A.N.D.S.) task force, a subgroup to the Twin County Prevention Coalition in Galax, VA.

Thousands of residents within the Two Counties region (Carroll County, Grayson County, and the City of Galax) are at risk for nutritional deficiencies. According to the 2014 WIC Report Carroll County ranked 12th healthiest county in VA. Grayson and City of Galax tied for 94th out of 135 counties. Virginia is ranked 3rd healthiest state in the nation. The report lists several health challenges such as an early mean age, 30% of our population is over 65 years old, obesity and overweight rates are increasing, and poverty rate is 26%. Overall, the health of individuals is linked to access to healthy foods and income, availability of healthy foods in local areas, and the environment in which they live. The WIC program is designed to address these problems and improve the health status of participating families.

Outcomes

H.A.N.D.S. on Convenence
- Healthy Corner Store Pilot Business Plan implemented in partnership with the Office of Economic Development, Virginia Tech.
- 2 stores increased their capacity to sell and market healthy options. Partnerships established between store owners, Virginia Cooperative Extension agents, and local dental health professionals.
- Collaborations formed with extension agents, Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth, and business experts to provide in-store training and technical assistance to make healthy changes profitable and sustainable long term.
- Partnered with Mount Rogers Health District’s Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program to pilot a mobile WIC pantry on location in local businesses.
- Successful campaign to increase the number of community partners trained in breastfeeding.

H.A.N.D.S. on Breastfeeding
- 6 WIC sponsored mobile breastfeeding stations potentially reaching out to 3,000 women of childbearing age over the 3 months offered. Air-conditioned mobile units were donated by Jeff Johnson RV Dealership and MRHD Wellness Team.
- 15 agencies registered for the Building the Business Case for Breastfeeding training, held in partnership with the Twin County Prevention Coalition.
- Over 25 health professionals registered for the Certified Lactation Consultant Training held in partnership with the Healthy Children’s Center for Breastfeeding.
- Dissemination of breastfeeding resource guides in WIC clinics, OB/GYN and pediatric office, social services, sponsored lactation rooms, and community partners.
- Collaborations established with Mount Rogers WIC agency, La Lacte League, and the Twin County Regional Hospital, resulting in an increase of baby-friendly accreditation to develop support services for women of childbearing age choosing breastfeeding.

H.A.N.D.S. on Farmers Market
- Collaboration with VA Tech 202D, Tidewater Town Manager, local extension agents, and farmers market managers to develop an inventory of the region’s farmers markets, best practices, and funding resources to strengthen farmers markets in the area.
- Market Managers attended the Farmers Market Manager meeting to discuss best practices and ways to strengthen market.
- Food greener trained in Food Safety Best Practices for Market Greener, offered through Virginia Cooperative Extension.
- Labeled farmers’ market managers with community partners to establish clinical linkages and nutrition programming at the market.
- Collaboration with WIC and social services to disseminate targeted outreach and direct marketing to populations less likely to frequent market.

H.A.N.D.S. on Cooking Matters at the Store:
- 6 community organizations trained in the Cooking Matters at the Store curriculum, with the potential to reach 450-500 individuals.

Lessons Learned

The lack of public resources and social acceptance of breastfeeding was determined to be significant barriers in the Twin Counties area. In an effort to improve initiation and duration rates, H.A.N.D.S. focused on making environmental changes that potentially promoted breastfeeding support, as well as increasing breastfeeding support through support groups, health providers, and by providing educational and environmental changes.

MRHD experienced challenges in funding of lactation rooms. Initially, the H.A.N.D.S. task force set out to establish 20 lactation rooms, one in each school and several others in public locations such as town offices, libraries, and local businesses. Rooms included a rocking chair, lamp, side table, rug, small refrigerator or changing table, and an education rush with breastfeeding pamphlets and resource guides. Prior to receiving equipment and equipment/employees were required to designate a private space, santa’s business case for breastfeeding and employee training workshop, provide a plan for scheduling breaks for nursing mothers, and sign a memorandum of agreement outlining the use of space.

Unable to fund the purchase of lactation room equipment through the CPHM grant, MRHD turned to community members to sponsor lactation rooms, going prior to areas with the greatest need. To date 4 lactation rooms have been implemented, sponsored by our community partners: Twin County Regional Hospital and Twin County Prevention Coalition, and a school has been leveraging funds from the school’s budget. As H.A.N.D.S. forms our mission, we continue to advocate for environmental changes and assist employers in developing supportive resources for nursing mothers and their children.

Activities

- H.A.N.D.S. multifocused approach seeks to implement system and environmental changes that increase availability and awareness of healthy food options, while creating an atmosphere that promotes positive lifestyle choices.

- H.A.N.D.S. on Convenience: a healthy corner store pilot initiative that increases the availability of fresh produce and healthy snack options. In rural convenience stores by increasing the ability to sell healthy options, providing nutrition education and in-store training/technical assistance that makes selling healthy options profitable.

- H.A.N.D.S. on Breastfeeding: an initiative that focuses on improving breastfeeding initiation and duration rates through system and environmental changes that support women where they work, play, and live.

- H.A.N.D.S. on Farmers’ Markets: an initiative that improves access and increases awareness of fresh locally grown foods in the Twin Counties.

- H.A.N.D.S. on Cooking Matters at the Store: provides community partners with the training and tools needed to equip them with nutrition education and smart shopping skills to make healthier choices at the grocery store.

Next Steps

Moving forward H.A.N.D.S. will continue to collaborate and engage community partners, allocate resources where needed, and begin to expand on initiatives outlined. There is a sustainability plan to provide continued support and resources that promote breastfeeding friendly environments through festival sponsored mobile breastfeeding stations, building the business case for breastfeeding workshops, Certified Lactation Consultant trainings, and the implementation of additional lactation rooms in workplaces, schools, and local businesses. As more corner stores join H.A.N.D.S. on Convenience: Healthy Corner Store network, owners will be provided with training and resources to begin the first tier of a two-tier program to increase their capacity to sell and offer healthy food items.

Best Practices

- 1. A diverse coalition representing a broad cross-section of individuals builds capacity, resources, and investments into the community, creates and builds new partnerships/collaborations, while strengthening public trust.

- 2. Actively engage partners through push communication, collaboration, and the linkage of available resources to increase public awareness and get people involved in the action.

- 3. Establishing a strong community buy-in early on with local businesses, community members, and community organizations proves beneficial in spreading the mission of the project and filling voids where funds are limited.

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