

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

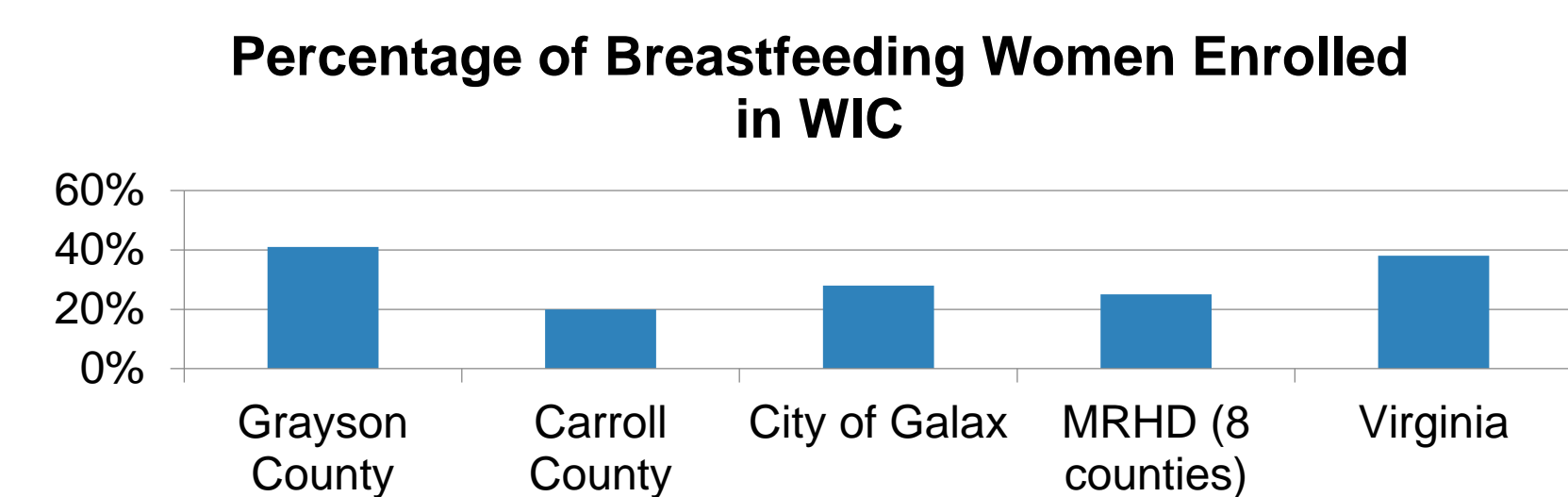


Health Access and Nutrition Development Services (H.A.N.D.S.) | Mount Rogers Health District | Galax, VA | Presented By: Lakesha Butler, Public Health Educator

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 (CPHMC) project. MRHD used a multisector approach to address nutrition disparities in rural communities 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 children within the Twin Counties region (Carroll County, Grayson County, and the City of Galax) are at increased risk for poor nutrition and health conditions associated with obesity. Based on the 2013 County Health Rankings report Carroll County ranked 89th healthiest county in VA, Grayson and Galax tied at 94 out of 133 counties. Virginia is ranked 26th healthiest state in the nation. Many residents in the region face health challenges such as early onset of chronic diseases related to obesity, poor nutrition, and lack of physical activity. Poor health-related behaviors are further exacerbated by socioeconomic factors such as poverty, limited access to healthy food and beverages, availability of transportation, as well as travel distance to local markets, healthcare facilities, and community resources. The city of Galax exceeds the poverty level of its neighboring counties and the state of Virginia at 32.3%, with 36% of children living below the poverty line. It is also residence to the largest Hispanic population in the district. Studies showed the most prevalent nutrition risk in the WIC population to be the decline of initiation and duration rates of breastfeeding in the area.



Health reports indicated a tremendous need for social and environmental changes that address poor nutrition as a result of lack of access for the population at large and breastfeeding support for women of childbearing age. H.A.N.D.S. works to address nutrition disparities through community partnerships, expansion of clinical linkages, and direct marketing that encourages healthier choices and the allocation of resources that optimize infant, child, and adult health and development.

Project Overview

The H.A.N.D.S. task force consists of a diverse group of collaborators with various backgrounds and expertise. The task force consists of representatives from the following: county health departments, WIC agencies, Twin County Regional Hospital, La Leche League, Twin County Prevention Coalition, Mount Rogers Community Service Board, Social Services, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Tech Office of Economic Development, farmers' market managers, the Hillsville Town Manager, and several small business owners.

In building capacity, MRHD sought to establish a group of key stakeholders that would stand as a representation of the community at large and resources available. Tools used to identify members included advertisement using media outlets, electronic mailing lists, and networking within existing partnerships. During the 15-month project period, the group used a hands on approach to effectively identify the needs of the community, assess and strengthen existing resources, initiate agency partnerships/collaborations, and implement a comprehensive plan that addressed nutrition disparities and resource gaps in areas of need.



- Interventions addressed:
- Expand corner stores' inventory of "healthy" food options that are nutritious and minimally processed.
 - Increase the number of businesses that publically promote and welcome breastfeeding
 - Increase the number of community partners trained in providing basic nutrition education using the Cooking Matters at the Store curriculum
 - Strengthen the stability of existing farmers' markets

Activities



H.A.N.D.S. multifaceted 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 stores' capacity 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.

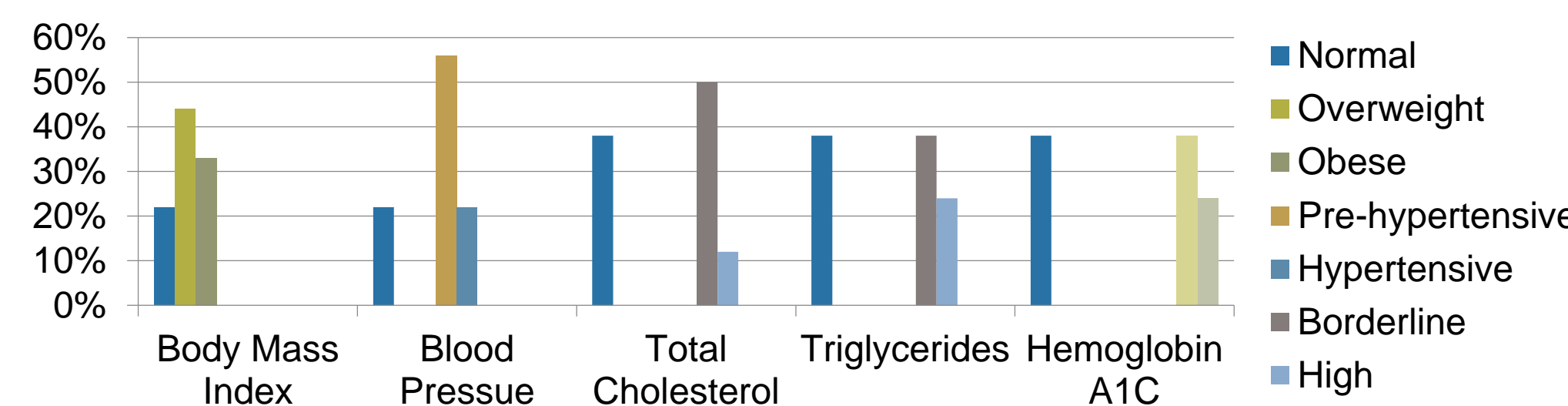
H.A.N.D.S. on Farmers' Markets: an initiative that improves access and increases awareness of fresh locally grown foods in the Twin Counties.

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

Outcomes

H.A.N.D.S. on Convenience

- Healthy Corner Store Pilot Business Plan produced 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, local growers, and fresh food distributors in the region.
- 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 Wellness Team to provide health screenings to store owners and their employees. Of the 9 people tested, 75% had low Vitamin D levels, 3 had osteopenia, 2 men over 40 years old were referred to their physicians for high PSA levels, and 2 had abnormal thyroid levels. 6 out of 9 of the participants received referrals to the doctor for various medical reasons. Wellness screenings are the first of three offered to those enrolled in the Healthy Corner Store Network.



H.A.N.D.S. on Breastfeeding

- 4 lactation rooms sponsored by Twin County Prevention Coalition and Twin County Regional Hospital implemented in the local pediatric office and three school systems.
- 4 festivals sponsored mobile breastfeeding stations potentially reaching over 3,000 women of childbearing age during 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 offices, social services, sponsored lactation rooms, and to community partners.
- Collaboration established with Mount Rogers' WIC agency, La Leche League, and the Twin County Regional Hospital, as they complete their baby-friendly accreditation, to develop support services for women of childbearing age choosing to breastfeed.

H.A.N.D.S. on Farmers Market

- Collaborated with VA Tech OED, Hillsville Town Manager, local extension agents, and farmers' market managers to develop a feasibility study of the regions farmers' markets, best practices, and funding resources to strengthen farmers' markets in the area.
- 3 Market Managers attended the Farmers Market Manager meeting to discuss best practices and ways to strengthen market.
- 6 local growers trained in Food Safety Best Practices for Market Growers, offered through Virginia Cooperative Extension.
- Linked farmers' market managers with community partners to establish clinical linkages and nutrition programming at the market.
- Collaborated 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 approximately 71,505 people.

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 Counselor trainings, and the implementation of additional lactation rooms in worksites, 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 healthy food items. H.A.N.D.S. partners will continue to engage populations less likely to frequent the farmers' market through direct marketing and education resources that highlight the benefits of shopping and eating locally grown fresh produce.

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 publically promoted breastfeeding, educated businesses and employers on the benefits of providing supportive atmospheres, trained health providers in lactation education, and established breastfeeding resources such as lactation spaces and policies that support nursing mothers where they work, learn, play, and socialize.

MRHD experienced challenges in funding of lactation rooms. Initially, the H.A.N.D.S. task force set out to establish 30 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 rack with breastfeeding pamphlets and resource guides. Prior to receiving equipment business owners/employers were required to designate a private space, attend a business case for breastfeeding and employee training workshop, provide a plan/policy for scheduling break times for nursing mothers, and sign a memorandum of agreement outlining the terms of use.



Unable to fund the purchase of lactation room equipment through the CPHMC grant, MRHD turned to community members to sponsor lactation rooms, giving priority 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 equipment has been donated by community organizations. As H.A.N.D.S. furthers our mission, we'll continue to advocate for environmental changes and assist employers in developing supportive resources for nursing mothers and their children.



Best Practices



- A diverse coalition representing a broad cross-section of individuals builds capacity, maximizes efforts and investments made into the community, and fosters new partnerships/collaborations, while strengthening public trust.
- Actively engage partners through push communication, collaboration, and the linkage of available resources to increase public awareness, fill gaps in service, and maximize potential outreach.
- 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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