

A SWEET COLLABORATION: Enhancing Breastfeeding and Increasing Access to Healthy Foods Through Community Partnerships in Tattnall County, GA.



Mommy and Me Healthy As Can Be | Southeast Health District | Tattnall County| Presented By: Denise Thompson, B.S., Nutritionist, Claire Cooper, RD,LD,CLC, Elaine Rehm, RN.

Introduction

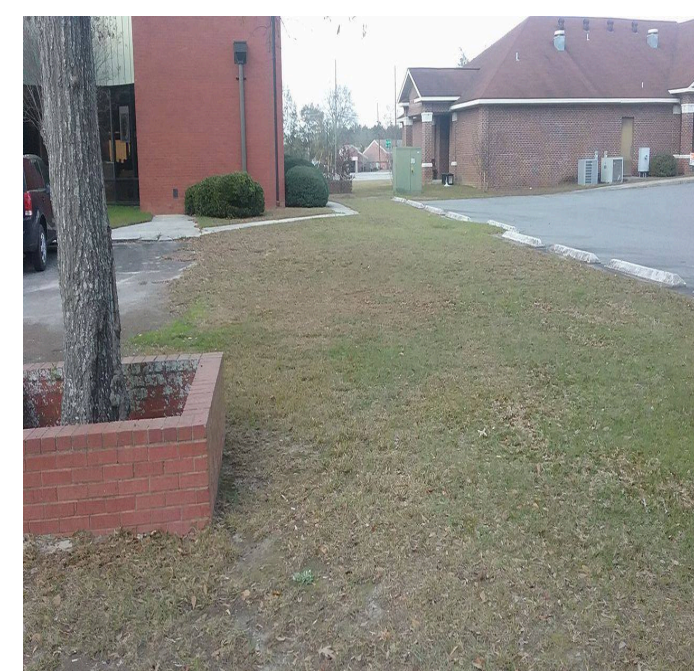
Preventing chronic disease is a challenging task in rural America. Easy commutes? An abundance of healthcare resources? Not here. Tattnall County could be the poster child for health adversity in rural USA. One-third of Tattnall's residents live in poverty, a statistic that doubles the national average. Poverty is a key driver of health status so it is no surprise that rates of obesity, infant mortality, & low birth-weight in babies all exceed national levels. Furthermore, only 20 people per 100k in Tattnall have a primary care physician. The rest of the USA averages 75 per 100k. Mommy and Me are on a mission to improve the health of our community by providing access to healthy, fresh foods.

Rural areas do have their advantages and one is that there is typically empty space available to use for resources. We used this to our advantage when creating a strategy to increase access to healthy foods. A welcomed addition was making breastfeeding apart of the to-do list to help decrease disparities in the heart of Southeast, Georgia.

Project Overview

Increasing the number of people in Tattnall County with access to healthy, fresh foods and increasing the amount of breastfeeding friendly businesses was top on the Mommy and Me list.

Partnering with the local library system granted the coalition permission to use a vacant lot on the property. This lot allowed a community garden to be built for citizens to pick their own local, fresh foods. A homerun was made when this same library system jumped on board to be one of the first businesses to become breastfeeding friendly in Tattnall county.



Activities

- ✓ Building rapport with local businesses
- ✓ Being active in the community by visiting local businesses and participating in special events
- ✓ Word of mouth and linking with other organizations with similar interest/goals
- ✓ Connecting Healthcare Resources
- ✓ Encouraging facilities to have a lactation room, if resources are available.
- ✓ Participating in local festivals to handout educational information on breastfeeding, healthy eating, and resources available in the community.



Outcomes

Georgia continues to lag behind the national averages on infant breastfeeding rates. Cultural norms, awareness, and lack of support are taken into consideration when trying to improve these rates. Due to the stigmas that are tied to breastfeeding in the rural South, we gained support slowly from our community in the beginning. One of the major challenges we faced was normalizing breastfeeding and overcoming issues with red tape to break these barriers. Building rapport with local businesses has opened up an opportunity to discuss the health benefits and many other advantages of breastfeeding.

In our small community, it has now become "normal" to be a breastfeeding friendly businesses. We now have 49 businesses that have pledged to be breastfeeding friendly and the list continues to grow. Tattnall County commissioners declared August as Breastfeeding Promoting Awareness month.

Developing relationships with local businesses was crucial and has opened the opportunity for a partnership with two local libraries. These libraries gained a passion to help the community as well and will soon house two community gardens to help increase access to healthy, fresh foods.



Next Steps

Our coalition meetings has given the opportunity to partner with other organizations to continue the success of the coalition. Partnering with Meadows Regional Medical Center (MRMC), Reidsville Gardening Club, and Family Connections participation program has given the coalition confidence that this project will continue to be a contribution in our county far beyond our funding cycle.



Lessons Learned

- When considering your objectives, consider sustainability. The goals you complete should be used as a seed to continue to produce after the grant funding cycle has ended.
- If you don't have more than two topics to discuss during your coalition meeting, it would be best to cancel the meeting and send an email. This shows respect and consideration to coalition members valuable time.
- Schedule coalition meetings 3 months in advance to allow for schedule changes to be made if necessary.
- Be aware of the culture in the targeted area.
- Typically local businesses have a quicker response time compared to corporate businesses due to rules and formalities.



Best Practices

- ✓ Increase Breastfeeding Awareness by community engagement.
- ✓ Collaborate with local hospital, medical offices, agencies, societies, and local businesses to gain support and rapport in the community to get them on board to help improve the health outcomes in the community.
- ✓ Encourage breastfeeding as the norm through education, familiarity (breastfeeding clings), and acceptance from the community.
- ✓ Implement a community garden to increase access to fresh, healthy foods.
- ✓ Participate in local festivals with coalition members to establish a sense of purpose and raise awareness. Also a great opportunity for the community to become familiar with the coalition.