

Sandy Perkins, MS, RD, LD

Launching the Kansas Nutrition and Physical Activity Collaborative

In 2011, Sandy Perkins launched the Kansas Nutrition and Physical Activity Collaborative, through a Blueprint Collaborative Mini-Grant from ASTPHND. The purpose of the grant program is to help state public health nutritionists work across multiple funding streams and state agencies to improve the nutritional wellbeing of women, children and families.

Sandy is the Acting Nutrition Services Coordinator with the Kansas Department of Health and Environment's (KDHE) Nutrition and WIC Services. Her vision for this project was to bring together staff from all of the state's MCH agencies and other public health nutrition partners to develop a common nutrition message they could integrate into all of these programs. The agencies Sandy identified to participate were: KDHE's Bureau of Family Health Nutrition and WIC Services Section, its Bureau of Health Promotion and Worksite Wellness and Chronic Disease Risk Reduction Programs, as well as the Kansas Breastfeeding Coalition, the Kansas Department of Education and Kansas State University's Research and Extension Service.

As she delved into the project, Sandy quickly learned that the process needed to move slowly. She discovered that staff from agencies that are funded through different federal programs needed to first learn about the other agencies' and programs' goals and objectives before they could commit to working collaboratively and before they could develop common messages. Sandy also learned that the collaborative would be most successful if she involved all participants at the very beginning in the planning stages. And she concluded that the Collaborative needed a facilitator to coordinate the Collaborative's meetings and logistics. Pat Dunavan, a retired public health nutritionist and former ASTPHND designee, became the Collaborative's coordinator.

In 2012, the Collaborative solicited the participation of more than 40 organizations and programs representing the nutrition and physical activity community in Kansas to join the collaborative. These diverse groups included local food banks, commodity groups, La Leche League, the Kansas Nutrition Council, the Kansas Health Foundation, and the United Methodist Health Ministries along with the programs listed above. The



Pictured: Sandy (right) with Coordinator Pat Dunavan

About Sandy

As a public health nutritionist, Sandy's desire was to get all of the state's public health and community health nutritionists aware of each others' work and working together. Sandy's energy and enthusiasm has paid off. Her partners in the Collaborative are now excited to be working together and to share resources.

Sandy has been with the Kansas Department of Health and Environment for 20 years as an MCH nutrition consultant. When she's not working to improve the nutritional health of the MCH population, you'll find her out in her garden, working on a puzzle, taking photographs, or in her kitchen with an awesome Red Lion restaurant stove.

Collaborative held its first meeting in May, with sixteen participants. The gathering included a discussion of how the Collaborative could best serve its members, who should be involved, and how to focus future meetings. Participants decided to have four meetings per year, two in person and two via videoconference, with Collaborative participants making presentations about their programs.

The Collaborative held its second meeting in August. This meeting included a presentation on the USDA Core Messages on whole grains, milk and child feeding resources. The Collaborative's third meeting was in November. Grant Chesbro, with the Kansas Department of Education, presented on the CACFP Child Wellness grant and its progress. Grant presented an overview of the program, its successes and challenges and lessons learned.

The 2012 meetings were so successful that participants agreed to continue to meet in 2013. The Collaborative is planning four meetings with presenters highlighting their Kansas MCH programs. The February 2013 meeting featured a presentation on the Business Case for Breastfeeding.

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Lessons Learned

Bringing together the diverse organizations and programs that work with the MCH population or work on MCH issues in Kansas was an ambitious undertaking!

The key lessons learned in establishing the Collaborative were the need for flexibility and the need to listen to the people who are at the table. With that, another key lesson learned was that for a collaborative effort to succeed, it must meet the participants' needs and interests, so that they will give their time and their energy. And perhaps first and foremost, participants need to know about their fellow collaborators: who are they, what do they do, and where do we share common goals.

Public Health Nutritionists Are Essential

Public health nutritionists are professionals with academic training and experience in both public health **and** nutrition, who are often registered dietitians with advanced degrees. Public health nutritionists possess diverse skills and expertise ranging from nutrition science...to food systems and food environments...to finance and grant management.

More information on the role and value of public health nutritionists is available in ASPHN's briefs on **The Role of Public Health Nutrition in Obesity Prevention** and **Improving the Nutritional Well-Being of Women, Children and Families**.



Association of State Public Health Nutritionists
P.O. Box 1001 • Johnstown, PA 15907-1001
[tel] 814.255.2829 • [fax] 814.255.6514
www.asphn.org

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