Obesity Prevention success stories

Association of State Public Health Nutritionists

Ashley Davis, MA, RD, LD and Sarah Ginnetti, RD, LD
Creating Healthy Communities in Ohio

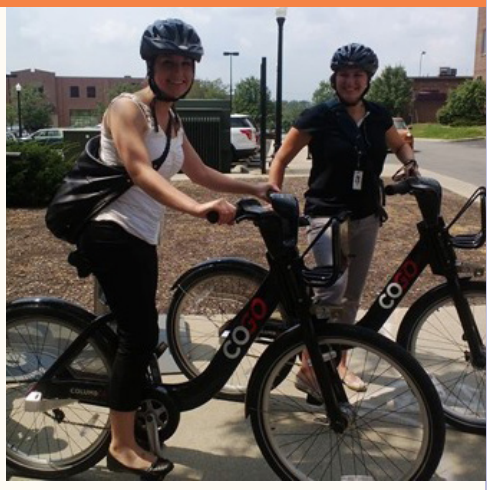
Creating Healthy Communities (CHC) is an ambitious program aimed at improving the health of all Ohioans. Launched in 2010, the program has a three-pronged focus: improving access to healthy foods, increasing opportunities for physical activity, and promoting tobacco-free living — especially in the most vulnerable areas of the state. Through this program, CHC is making the healthy choice the easier choice for everyone in Ohio, regardless of their income, education, or other societal factors.

The Ohio Department of Health initiated the Creating Healthy Communities program with the Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Here's how the project works: With the Block Grant funding, the Department awarded competitive grants to local health departments in sixteen counties across the state, in both rural and urban areas. The local health departments each hired a full time CHC coordinator. The coordinators are public health nutritionists, health educators, nurses and other health professionals.

The coordinators were tasked with bringing together local stakeholders to create a coalition of traditional and nontraditional partners. Coalitions include school district representatives, local elected officials, parks and recreation staff, extension staff, engineers and planners, hospital representatives and others interested in making their communities healthier. Coalition members met regularly to develop and implement their county's projects. The coordinators provided technical assistance and trainings to help the coalitions move forward.

For example, the Adams/Brown County coalition in southern Ohio started a school garden at Peebles Junior/Senior High School. Lucas County, in northwestern Ohio, launched a neighborhood corner stores project to increase the availability of healthier foods. The Trumbull County team, in the northeastern part of the state, partnered with an independent living facility to build 22 raised beds for the residents.

Ashley Davis, MA, RD, LD and Sarah Ginnetti, RD, LD are public health nutritionists with the Ohio Department of Health. Sarah is a program consultant and Ashley is program manager for CHC. Along with other staff members on the CHC state team, Ashley and Sarah facilitate monthly calls for local CHC coordinators and provide on-going technical assistance through site visits, quarterly feedback reports, and in-person trainings. The monthly



Pictured: Ashley Davis, MA, RD, LD and Sarah Ginnetti, RD, LD

About Ashley and Sarah

Ashley is the program manager and Sarah is a program consultant with the Ohio Department of Health's Creating Healthy Communities program. Sarah has been with the Department for two years. Coming from a clinical setting, she loves her work with CHC because she is facilitating changes on a large scale. Sarah is a member of ASPHN's Membership, Communication, and Outreach Committee, and she participated in ASPHN's Leadership Program. She enjoys running, ultimate frisbee and cooking healthy food!

Ashley has been with the Department since 2011. She is a member of the ASPHN Policy Committee and ASPHN's National Council of Fruit and Vegetable Coordinators. She has also presented at the 2013 ASPHN Annual Meeting in Kansas City, MO on successful state implementation of policies, systems, and environmental changes. Ashley enjoys spending time in her garden, quilting, and practicing yoga, and she is currently awaiting the arrival of her first baby.

conference calls include an educational or training piece and often spotlight one community's work to facilitate peer-to-peer sharing and learning. Ashley and Sarah help the coordinators troubleshoot their problems and connect them with resources and information necessary to complete grant objectives.

Successes and Major Outcomes

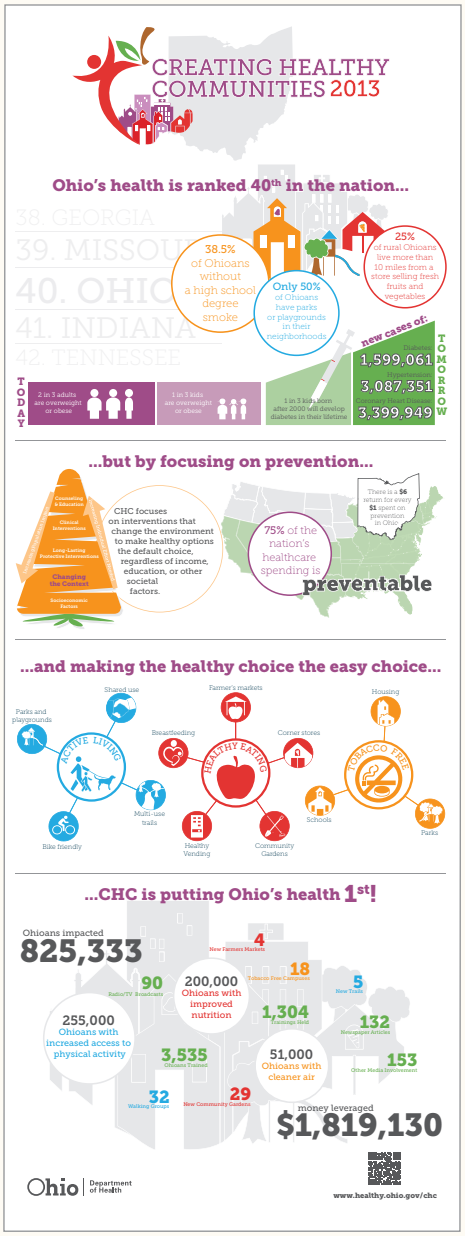
Creating Healthy Communities has chalked up many successes and advancements in the last four years. Ashley says one of her favorites is the exciting work the Lucas County coalition has done. The team there launched a corner store initiative. They worked with a store owner who operates three Save Way Markets in the Toledo area. In part with his own funds, the owner increased the amount of fresh produce he sells and attended trainings to learn about product placement and pricing as well as how to handle fresh produce. He held a kick-off event in his stores, which included cooking demonstrations.

As a result, Save Way increased its produce sales by more than 50 percent, increased the variety of produce sold, and increased sales and redemption of WIC vouchers. Customers say that being able to purchase more fresh produce is a great benefit to the neighborhood. Save Way owner Adam Aridi said, "Kids are choosing bananas instead of candy bars. I couldn't be happier." Aridi and the coalition are now expanding the project to additional Save Way stores.

Building from Save Way's success, the Lucas County CHC team partnered with STOP & GO, another local store chain, to sell fresh produce in one of its 40 neighborhood stores. Making fresh produce available to its customers was a great success. STOP & GO is expanding the initiative to seven more of its stores.

One of Sarah's favorite success stories is from Summit County. The CHC coalition there developed an easily accessible walking path in a rural area that has no sidewalks and no trails. The coalition included the local schools and park districts as well as the local government. With lots of donated time and materials, the Summit County team developed the path very quickly. Now, everyone uses the walking path! The schools use it for races and in physical education classes, and people of all ages walk and jog on it regularly — all for free. Betty Kern, Springfield School District physical education teacher, said, "We sponsored a 'turkey trot' race to kick-off the completion of the trail. More than two-thirds of the school participated!"

Just in 2013, the Creating Healthy Communities program reached nearly 1 million Ohioans and leveraged nearly $2 million to support the coalitions' projects. 200,000 Ohioans are now eating better, and 255,000 Ohioans have greater access to physical activity opportunities. And, in 2013 alone, CHC's



Creating Healthy Communities 2013 Infographic

"Kids are choosing bananas instead of candy bars. I couldn't be happier!"

– Adam Aridi, Save Way owner

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Creating Healthy Communities in Ohio

To find out more about this program, you can contact Ashley at **614 466-2192 or ashley.davis@odh.ohio.gov** or Sarah at **614 728-6937 or sarah.ginnetti@odh.ohio.gov**.

sixteen counties launched four new farmers' markets and 29 new community gardens. CHC held 1,304 trainings with 3,535 participants! CHC is now expanding to approximately 24 counties in the 2015 – 2019 grant cycle.

Findings and Lessons Learned

Without a doubt, CHC's collaborations are the keys to its successes. "Bringing into the project someone you may have never worked with before makes a huge difference and takes the project even further," Sarah said. Working with agencies and organizations that had never been involved in health-related projects before allowed CHC to leverage these partners' resources for even greater successes.

Challenges

One of the challenges that Ashley and Sarah encountered was in the nature of the CDC Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant. Other CDC grants are for very specific purposes, like the Community Transformation Grants. With those grants, CDC offered a lot of technical assistance and guidance on how to implement specific strategies. This Block Grant allows states to use their funding for a broad range of programs that meet the goals of Healthy People 2020.

To address the challenge of having less support and assistance, Ashley and Sarah did a lot of their own research into cutting edge practices, and they piloted new strategies and new approaches. They brought in national leaders in healthy eating and active living to conduct their trainings.

They also found that there are not a lot of success stories from other states' Block Grant programs. So as they have paved the way, the CHC team is getting the word out about their model successful initiative in Ohio. **Creating Healthy Communities 2013** is a beautifully-designed booklet that highlights their sixteen counties' successes and how the project is making a difference throughout Ohio. Ashley and Sarah want to produce a video as well, so stakeholders can see kids in their school's garden, families out on new walking paths, and more. Now, health departments and communities around the country are contacting the CHC team to learn how to replicate the program's successful on-the-ground projects.

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The Important Role of the Public Health Nutritionist

As public health nutritionists, Sarah and Ashley brought their knowledge of and experience with evidence-based strategies to advise and help their project communities succeed. They are skilled in bringing together diverse partners and facilitating communication and successful coalition work. They are committed to learning what works for their communities and spreading that information to partners in Ohio and beyond.

ASPHN in Action

ASPHN is a non-profit membership organization that provides state and national leadership on food and nutrition policy, programs and services aimed at improving the health of our population. Our vision is to create new environmental norms where healthy eating and active living are the easy and natural choices for all Americans.

At ASPHN, we build our members' skills as public health nutritionists by providing key resources and professional development.

To learn more about ASPHN, please visit us on the web at **www.asphn.org**.

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