

Elaine Russell, MS, RD, LD, Kentucky Obesity Prevention Program Coordinator
Kentucky's Early Care and Education Nutrition and Physical Activity Strategic Plan

About Kentucky's Initiative

This project is a collaborative effort of the Kentucky Nutrition and Physical Activity in Early Care and Education Coalition. Through this project, the Coalition is working to develop and implement a strategic plan to improve nutrition and physical activity in childcare, Head Start, and pre-K throughout the state. Specifically, the plan will outline the state's strategies for promoting healthy eating, physical activity, breastfeeding support and less screen time in the state's early care and education (ECE) centers.

The Coalition brings together a broad range of state agencies and programs, including the MCH Pediatric Branch, Division of Childcare, the Governor's Office on Early Childhood, Child and Adult Care Food Program, Department of Education, Head Start, SNAP-Ed and WIC as well as the Child Care Health Consultant Program, Kentucky Youth Advocates, American Heart Association and the YMCA.

Kentucky's project was funded by a Blueprint Collaborative mini-grant from the Association of State Public Health Nutritionists (ASPHN). This mini-grant allowed the Coalition to continue the work that it had started in 2010 with its CPPW grant. ASPHN member Elaine Russell, MS, RD, LD, coordinated the project. Elaine is the Obesity Prevention Program Coordinator with the Kentucky Department for Public Health.

In this project, Coalition members first reviewed their work under the CPPW grant, which included developing healthy eating and physical activity trainings for providers and trainers, promoting 5-2-1-0 Healthy Numbers for the Kentucky Families Campaign, and conducting a Nutrition And Physical Activity Self Assessment for Child Care (NAP SACC) pilot project with 28 ECE centers. The coalition members then identified additional nutrition and physical activity initiatives. They also reassessed early care and education center providers' needs and interests. The team then drafted a plan to address early care and education training, expand the 5-2-1-0 campaign, and outline policy recommendations. The Coalition plans to complete its strategic plan by mid-2014.

Outcomes and Successes

The Coalition accomplished a tremendous amount! Members met regularly. In their early meetings, they brainstormed ideas and options for important initiatives to include in the strategic plan. State stakeholders were excited to participate in a project to develop such a visionary and broad-based plan. In their



Pictured: Elaine Russell, MS, RD, LD

About Elaine

Elaine joined the Kentucky Department for Public Health's Obesity Prevention Division in 2004 as the nutrition coordinator. She is now the Obesity Prevention Program Coordinator. In the past, Elaine worked in WIC and SNAP-Ed programs in Kentucky, Indiana and Ohio. She is a Louisville, Kentucky native. When she's not hard at work, Elaine enjoys being outside hiking and walking her dog!

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discussions, the participants recognized that their input was moving the project toward meaningful change!

From their assessments of early care and education centers around the state, coalition members learned that these providers had three over-arching needs to enable them to improve their nutrition and physical activity practices:

- Early Care and Education providers need training and technical assistance on best practices.
- Families need to hear clear and consistent messages to understand why best practices are being implemented from those who care for their children – ECE providers, WIC and pediatricians.
- Systemic changes such as regulations or QRIS are more likely to be considered once the needs of the providers and families are met.

The Coalition used these three points to focus their plan.

Kentucky's project had great support and buy-in from all the Coalition partners. In addition, Elaine brought new, non-traditional partners into the project, expanding participation beyond early care and education stakeholders. Elaine recruited a chef as well as farm-to-school, faith-based and advocacy groups. The new partners offered fresh perspectives and strengthened the plan.

As a result of its work, the Coalition secured a \$275,000 grant from Nemours to further the project. Nemours was asking for exactly what the coalition was doing! Elaine said, "I believe that having completed this process of convening partners, discussing best practices and identifying priorities strengthened our application."

With the Nemours grant, the Coalition will hire a coordinator who will recruit early care and education center providers to attend the trainings. The new coordinator will be in charge of outreach and messaging to give the state's ECE providers the tools that they need. Elaine will switch her focus to moving forward on the action steps outlined in the strategic plan.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Elaine says, "There are always challenges!" She said that she was not familiar with the child care world, and she had to learn their programs and systems. She found CDC's resources tremendously helpful.

Elaine said a key lesson learned was how important it was to listen to her stakeholders and what they want and need. She sat down one-on-one with the new partners she brought in to learn about them. She listened and asked questions.



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The Important Role of the Public Health Nutritionist

Elaine played a critical role in the project as convener, communicator and coordinator. She kept in regular communication with the coalition partners between meetings. She kept them informed with updates and new resources. She said that the Coalition members now "recognize me as a resource" on nutrition and physical activity issues.

As a public health nutritionist, Elaine has a strong understanding and working knowledge of all the federal food programs. That knowledge proved to be a big advantage in her work on this project. She also has a strong understanding of and commitment to promoting family-style meals, breastfeeding, and much more.

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. Funding from our Association's Blueprint Collaborative mini-grant program helped Elaine, an ASPHN member, strengthen Kentucky's Nutrition and Physical Activity in Early Care and Education Coalition.

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