

STATEWIDE HEALTH IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM: PREVENTION IN COMMUNITIES

Progress in Meeker, McLeod and Sibley Counties



The Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP) is a community-based initiative funded by the Minnesota Department of Health. It works to prevent disease by helping create healthier communities that support individuals seeking to make healthy choices in their daily lives. SHIP community-based initiatives target the leading chronic disease risk factors and health care cost drivers: poor nutrition, lack of physical activity and tobacco use and exposure.



Meeker, McLeod, Sibley
Healthy Communities
www.mmshealthycommunities.org

Highlights from 2009–2013

GOAL: Improve access to nutritious food

Accomplishments

- Three restaurants added healthier food items and labeling to their menus. For example, Country Drive-In added healthy options such as applesauce as a side for kids' meals and added labels indicating low-salt, low-calorie and low-fat menu items.
- Ridgewater Summer Camp incorporated healthy food taste tests and healthy local foods into lunch menus. Eighty-one percent of the staff and volunteers preferred the new food choices over the ones from the previous year.
- Winsted opened a new farmers market in 2013.
- Good Samaritan Society in Arlington and Winthrop started growing produce to be used in its cafeteria and Meeker Memorial Hospital incorporated fresh, healthy foods into its cafeteria.
- Now in its third year, One Vegetable One Community (OVOC) was launched in Litchfield to encourage people to grow, eat and learn together while building a stronger local food system, increasing access to healthy food and nurturing a healthy community. In the first two years, over 1200 tomato plants were grown for the community by the Litchfield High School Youth Energy Summit team. Also, five restaurants added healthy menu items incorporating the selected vegetable of each year.
- Gaylord, Henderson, Litchfield and Hutchinson farmers markets are working to promote and improve access:
 - > Gaylord Farmers Market created a frequent buyer program.



Gaylord Farmers Market

- > Henderson changed the day of the farmers market to coincide with a weekly town event.
- > Hutchinson added taste testing, food demonstrations and electronic benefit transfer (EBT) machines for customers who receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits.
- > As of August 2013, Litchfield farmers market recognized the new hours of 2:30–5:30pm (changed from 7:00am–4:30pm) due to survey results and overwhelming public support. This change allows local residents to shop after work hours and has resulted in increased patronage and increased profits for local growers.

GOAL: Implement policies and practices that support physical activity and healthy eating in licensed child care and pre-school settings

Accomplishments

- Three Head Start sites with more than 300 children began offering more fruits and vegetables.



- > Tri-Valley Migrant Head Start added a school garden and incorporated more healthy choices into lunch.
- > Heartland Head Start is using a curriculum to encourage kids to try new fruits and vegetables and added a new school garden, orchards and raspberry patch.
- > Minnesota Valley Action Council added healthy choices at three child care sites and to its home visit program.

- In the first two years of SHIP, 49 day-care and pre-school sites with more than 2,000 students incorporated more physical activity and movement into their daily routine using an evidence-based curriculum. This included adding daily organized activity, scheduling more outside playtime, beginning the day with physical activity, providing opportunities for parents and children to engage in physical activity together and limiting television time. Thirty-five sites also passed and implemented policies formalizing these changes.
- Many sites also instituted environmental/physical changes such as adding age-appropriate equipment and expanding indoor and outdoor play areas.

GOAL: Implement policies and environmental changes that create active communities by increasing opportunities for non-motorized transportation

Accomplishments

The cities of Arlington, Gaylord and Litchfield and the counties of Meeker, McLeod and Sibley, with a total of 74,776 residents, made 25 environmental changes designed to increase opportunities for walking and biking, including:

- Litchfield and the Trail Route Association in Litchfield (T.R.A.I.L.) Project established bike routes in the city.
- Meeker County and McLeod County each created trail maps highlighting bike routes. The maps also were enhanced to include county parks and the activities available in each location.



McLeod County residents have access to many new resources because of SHIP. New signage highlighting trail systems has been posted in county parks as well as some city parks in Hutchinson and Silver Lake.

- McLeod County partnered with the City of Winsted to connect the Luce Line trail to the city, primarily by developing appropriate signage to direct trail users.
- McLeod County and the cities of Silver Lake and Hutchinson created signage highlighting walking paths and bike trails, improving access to community facilities and parks.
- Three sites, including an association and two government agencies, added bike racks.
- Arlington Parks/Trails Committee created a plan to connect all of the parks in town.
- Arlington Walkable Community Workshop created a preliminary map of pedestrian thoroughfares to connect city parks.
- The City of Arlington and Sibley County are collaborating to provide the required match for a federal trail grant, which will be used for the 2014 construction of the first phase of a countywide trail system.
- Hutchinson is working on becoming a Bike Friendly Community.
- Gaylord designated city money for a required match of a federal trail grant to complete an engineering study that began in 2012. The city also constructed several new sidewalk segments and adopted a comprehensive trail and sidewalk policy.

- Arlington and Gaylord developed plans and improvements to make it easier for residents to safely walk and bike within the city.

GOAL: Promote smoke-free environments in multi-unit housing

Accomplishments

- Park Towers of Hutchinson installed signage to promote its smoke-free policies.
- Golden Hearts of Arlington added a smoke-free policy to its tenant handbook.
- Evergreen Apartments in Hutchinson adopted a smoke-free grounds policy.

GOAL: Promote active lifestyles through a number of special events

Accomplishments

- Eden Valley-Watkins School, Litchfield schools, The Litchfield Area Chamber of Commerce, Lake Ripley, Watkins and T.R.A.I.L. hosted well attended events to promote physical activity.
- Since 2011, the “Litchfield Lite” planning committee has organized an annual local weight-loss challenge and implemented ongoing local activities to support healthy lifestyles.
- Arlington was designated a Governor’s Fit City.