

Partnership for Community Change – Whitfield/Murray Counties ACHIEVE

Public Health Issue

- The population of Whitfield and Murray Counties has high unemployment, many residents lacking health insurance, and many schools where most or all of the students are eligible for free and reduced price lunch – all indicators of the potential for poor health.
- Over 50% of children in the local school systems were obese or overweight in 2009, an increase from 2006.
- Three-fourths of local blue collar workers in manufacturing were also obese or overweight according to results of a community-based participatory research project conducted in three local manufacturing facilities by Dalton State College in 2008.

Program

- Action Communities for Health, Innovation and Environmental Change initiative, or ACHIEVE, funds communities through the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors with support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- Whitfield and Murray Counties ACHIEVE funding supports the Northwest Georgia Healthcare Partnership, a not-for-profit that brings together disparate community efforts for sustainable action to maximize policy, systems and environmental change for better health.
- The Healthcare Partnership formed its ACHIEVE team from members of its 30-member board of directors made up of high-level representatives of business and industry, providers of health care, local government, three area school superintendents and public health. The Healthcare Partnership's ACHIEVE team has a focus on youth, healthy eating, and on community-wide promotion of physical activity.

Impact

- Adoption of a 100% smoke-free policy by the school board makes all 9 schools in the Dalton Public School System completely smoke-free, including sporting events.
- Residents logged approximately 6 million miles of physical activity in the “Community In-Motion” challenge.
- A Healthy People 2020 grant for \$10,000 leveraged by ACHIEVE will help increase the reach of the “Community In-Motion” challenge.
- The *Think About What You Drink* initiative is impacting eating behaviors based on a mid-term evaluation – in one school healthy beverage choices increased by over 60% from baseline.
- *Think About What You Drink* will expand to at least 3 more schools based on interest from local schools through an “RFA-type” process. Interested schools will have a chance to explain why they want their students to learn healthy habits such as drinking more water.
- The 2011 Educational Patron Award from the Georgia Association of Elementary School Principals was awarded to the Northwest Georgia Healthcare Partnership for their health promotion efforts.
- *“Through the Partnership, I have learned that ‘environmental’ change and making sure the healthy choice is the easy choice is the best way for people to adopt and sustain changes in lifestyle,”* says superintendent of Dalton Public Schools and Healthcare Partnership board member, Dr. Jim Hawkins.

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