

CASE STUDY

December 2018

Obesity causes or exacerbates numerous chronic diseases and conditions that can lead to death, including diabetes and hypertension. In an effort to address the obesity epidemic in Arkansas — which affects more than one-third of adults in our state — the governor-led Healthy Active Arkansas (HAA) initiative provides a 10-year framework with phased goals to increase the percentage of Arkansans who are at a healthy weight. The HAA plan is comprised of nine priority areas in which individuals and communities can take action to encourage and enable healthier lifestyles. Supported by funding from the Blue & You Foundation for a Healthier Arkansas, the Arkansas Center for Health Improvement convened 10 statewide learning network meetings beginning in 2017 to engage, recruit, and activate a network of local champions to assist in meeting these goals. This study is part of a series of case studies highlighting success stories from the HAA Statewide Learning Network. Visit achi.net for more resources, including additional case studies and a template for creating your own action plan for your community.

HEALTHY ACTIVE ARKANSAS STATEWIDE LEARNING NETWORK

During the first year of the learning network, the Arkansas Center for Health Improvement (ACHI) hosted meetings in Jonesboro, McGehee, Little Rock, Clarksville, and Magnolia. In an effort to reach other areas of the state and expand the learning network, ACHI held an additional five meetings in Springdale, Mountain Home, Hot Springs, El Dorado, and Helena-West Helena in 2018. In total, over 460 city and county officials, hospital executives, superintendents, college administrators, community advocates, and others joined the HAA Statewide Learning Network to make their communities healthier and more active places to live, work, and play. Network members developed more than 175 action plans to create change in at least one of the nine priority areas. Each action plan identified strategies and key partners necessary to reach the desired outcome, as well as potential barriers.

At the learning network meeting in Helena-West Helena, Mayor Doyle Fowler with the city of McCrory highlighted the city's health initiatives in partnership with local organizations. The HAA priority areas addressed by these health initiatives include:

- Priority 1: Physical and built environment;
- Priority 6: Access to healthy foods; and
- Priority 9: Marketing program.

CITY OF MCCRORY HEALTH INITIATIVES

Like many small towns in Arkansas, McCrory has experienced population out-migration and a steady economic decline over the past several decades. Public transportation is not available, making it difficult for rural residents with limited transportation to access goods and services. "One significant barrier affecting McCrory is the availability of fresh produce," said Leigh Ann Bullington, county extension agent at the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service (UACES) and active member of the Woodruff County Health Improvement Coalition ("Coalition"). "Families have very few options to obtain fresh produce and often eat unhealthy as a result."

As mayor of McCrory since 2003 and an enthusiastic Healthy Active Arkansas Ambassador, Mayor Doyle Fowler has made significant strides to improve the health of residents and the local economy through partnerships with local organizations. "It is so important that we get enthused about this if we're going to change our state to becoming healthier," Fowler said.

Under Fowler's leadership, the city of McCrory joined the county-wide Coalition, a community wellness initiative with 15 local partners and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The Coalition has focused efforts on comprehensively addressing nutrition and physical activity opportunities and barriers, including goals to increase access to healthy foods, increase access to physical activity, improve the local economy, and increase community engagement. Since the Coalition began, members have successfully received county- and municipal-level support

and buy-in from leadership and residents, including youth. To date, they have completed asset mapping, and the Coalition is currently working on a master plan — drafting community and economic development options — and plans to start a food pantry, cooking and meal-planning classes, and school gardens.



Cooking demonstration at The Warehouse.

In addition to the collaborative work through the Coalition, the city of McCrory joined forces with UACES, clinical partner ARcare, and local citizens to establish The Warehouse — a monthly partner-sponsored project that provides a food pantry, clinical screening services, nutrition education classes, cooking demonstrations, and prescription assistance. In the past year, more than 400 individuals have received 16,000 pounds of healthy foods. “[The] key thing is partnerships,” Fowler said. “We’ve had such great partnership with our extension service, with our school system, with our local medical group — ARcare — and with the city. We all came together and collaborated on these initiatives.”

In early 2018, the city of McCrory became a recipient of an award from Local Foods, Local Places — a collective program of the CDC, Delta Regional Authority, and Environmental Protection Agency — that provides technical assistance for “engaging with local partners to reinvest in existing neighborhoods as they develop local food.”¹ In June 2018, the city hosted a Local Places, Local Foods workshop, attended by more than 70 individuals. At the workshop, attendees developed a strategic plan to enhance access to healthy food and improve the local economy. “We’re just so honored that we were chosen,” said Fowler. “We’re actually one of 13 states to go through this program. There were so many good things that came out of this. We’re so pleased with the turnout of our community.” Local Foods, Local Places helped unite the community around the goals of the Coalition and helped establish The Market at McCrory, the city’s first farmer’s market. Community and student volunteers also prepared a farm-to-table dinner for community members on the opening night of the farmer’s market. Attendance neared 150 individuals, and the funds raised from the event went to The Warehouse, the Market at McCrory, and McCrory High School student groups.

NEXT STEPS

The Coalition plans to grow The Warehouse and continue assessing the project to find new and better ways to meet the needs of the community. The Coalition would also like to provide more educational opportunities, including skills on budgeting and improving personal well-being. “Having come together with a shared goal of turning the tide of negative health outcomes, the coalition is poised to leverage future opportunities to grow their impact in McCrory and Woodruff County,” Bullington said.

A committee formed for The Market at McCrory will assess the feasibility for participation in the double-up food bucks participation. The Coalition anticipates that The Market at McCrory will become not only a source of pride for the community, but an event that brings community members downtown and a boost to the economy for small businesses.

LEARN MORE ABOUT

- Learn more about Healthy Active Arkansas: <https://healthyactive.org/>
- The Market at McCrory: www.marketatmccrory.com and <https://www.facebook.com/mccrorymarket/>

REFERENCES

¹ United States Environmental Protection Agency. Local Foods, Local Places. Retrieved from <https://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/local-foods-local-places#2019>

Note: This case study includes information provided by Mayor Doyle Fowler with the city of McCrory and Leigh Ann Bullington, County Extension Agent at the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service. ACHI received written permission to use this information.