

Healthy Active Arkansas Case Study: Southern Arkansas University Mule Rides

CASE STUDY

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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 El Dorado, Carey Baker, dean of students at Southern Arkansas University (SAU), discussed Mule Rides, a bicycle sharing program for students and the community. The HAA priority areas addressed through this program include:

- Priority 1: Physical and built environment;
- Priority 3: Nutritional standards in schools — early child care through college;
- Priority 4: Physical education and activity in schools — early child care through college; and
- Priority 9: Marketing program.

Mule Rides

In January 2018, the Mule Rides bicycle share program launched on the SAU campus in Magnolia after months of development by Baker, colleagues, and the Student Government Association. Mule Rides, a component of SAU's HealthyU initiative to promote healthy habits inside and outside of the classroom, provides students an alternative mode of transportation that supports an active lifestyle and improves the student experience. "Timing was really fortuitous for us because the city of Magnolia had just established bike lanes on two of the biggest north-south arteries from campus to downtown ... and so it timed up well for us to start this program," said Baker. Along with offering students another option for engaging in activities outside of their rooms, the program resonates with its international students who come from countries where biking is commonplace.

The program is open to all students, faculty, staff, and members of the public. Thirty bikes stationed at four hubs around the SAU campus are available for use. The bikes have GPS capability and



SAU officials launch Mule Rides.

can be reserved and found using the Social Bicycles mobile app. The first two hours of riding are free and a \$2 per hour user fee applies after.

From the start of Mule Rides through November 2018, 1,357 members have signed up to participate in the program. Of these, 1,329 members are active users. “We have a walking-running track that goes all the way around the farm on campus. It’s about two miles,” Baker said. “One of the things we can do is pull up a heat map of campus, and that farm road is just dark, dark blue from them riding over and over again.”



SAU students ride the bikes.

Members have made 6,644 trips covering 9,870 miles — totaling 2,654 hours and 32 minutes of riding time. Compared to driving, members have burned 394,818 calories and saved \$5,724 in fuel costs. Carbon emissions have also been reduced by 8,703 pounds.

Due to the success and high usage of Mule Rides among students and the public, Baker expects the program to stay. “It’s been a great program for us. It’s a little different from what we expected,” Baker said. “They [students] don’t ride the bikes to classes as much as we would like. The number one time they ride the bikes is 9 o’clock at night, generally on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. But the fact that they use them for recreation and exercise, that’s great, too.”

SAU

SAU is a comprehensive public university in Magnolia with a mission to “educate students for productive and fulfilling lives in a global environment by providing opportunities for intellectual growth, individual enrichment, skill development, and meaningful career preparation.” The university is committed to the overall health of its on-campus and surrounding communities and offers various opportunities for enhancing health through its HealthyU initiative. The initiative highlights programs and opportunities available for students, faculty, and staff to adapt healthy, active lifestyles on campus. In addition to the Mule Rides bicycle share program, on-campus activities include intramural sports, fitness classes, and SAU Fit Club, a free semester-long course for students, faculty, and staff to unite and commit to healthy living and regular physical activity. Facilities including renovated tennis courts, a lit running and walking path around the university farm, a disc golf course, an aquatic center, sand volleyball courts, and the Mulerider Activity Center provide additional avenues for physical activity. The surrounding community members have access to programs and facilities, such as the Mule Ride bicycle share program and the tennis courts.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Healthy Active Arkansas: <https://healthyactive.org/>
- Southern Arkansas University: <https://web.saumag.edu/>

Note: This case study includes information provided by Carey Baker, Dean of Students at Southern Arkansas University. ACHI received written permission to use this information. Additional information was gathered from the Southern Arkansas University website.