Choose to Change: Communities Collaborate for Healthy Weights

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Abstract
Two “Choose to Change” communities are creating healthier environments for children. This project, led by a broad university collaborative, examines behavioral and environmental contributors to childhood obesity. Family, school, and community-level interventions are assessed to inform, implement, and reassess obesity prevention strategies designed to empower communities and participants to adopt healthy lifestyle patterns.

Objectives
1. Identify environmental and behavioral factors that act as barriers to: (a) adopting a high quality diet and (b) recommended physical activity levels in childhood
2. Increase community knowledge and awareness of healthy food and physical environments
3. Develop, implement, evaluate community, school-, and home-based obesity prevention strategies

Partners
- West Virginia University
- Pre-K and Head Start programs in public schools and childcare centers
- Choosy Kids, LLC
- Advisory Board Members (e.g., Health Departments, Farmers’ Markets, Family Resource Networks, Girls on the Run, YMCA, parents)
- Community Mini-grant Recipients (e.g., community centers, housing complexes, churches, afterschool programs)

Family
Three family cohorts will be enrolled; two cohorts with 300+ total participants have been enrolled to date

School
Assessments: Environment and Policy Assessment and Observation Instrument, Healthy Habit System
Interventions: Quarterly Family Fun Events educate and model family-style meals and parent/child physical activities, develop skills in targeted behaviors, and showcase local resources

Community
Assessments: Audits of 1,000 food outlets, GIS walkability audits, eight focus groups with 31 parents and 32 school staff, and interviews with 31 key community leaders
Interventions: Community Kick-off Events (attended by 111 persons), Organization of Community Advisory Boards and action plans, and engagement of community organizations in 15 mini-grant projects to promote active, healthy environments for young children and families projects (up to $4,000 each) to promote active, healthy environments

Conclusions
Community Engagement
- Many sectors of influence do not view child obesity as an issue relevant to their work
- Learning from each other builds capacity for promoting healthier environments and need funding and mentoring to do this

Focus Groups and Stakeholder Interviews
- Perception of childhood obesity does not reflect current prevalence
- Inactivity was viewed as an important factor in childhood obesity
- School meals were identified as contributors to obesity

Community Food Audits
- Rural areas lack access to supermarkets
- Supermarkets had a greater variety of “healthy options” at a lower cost
- Fast Food Restaurants scored consistently higher than other types due to:
  - Greater availability of nutrition information
  - More healthy options
  - Fewer “barriers” to consuming a healthy diet

References

Food outlet audits

Food outlet audits

Family Fun Events introduce local partners

GIS Maps of Food Outlets

Learning from and Sharing Research with Communities

Perceptions of Childhood Obesity
- Source: Institute of Medicine (2012).
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