



# Making the **HEALTHY CHOICE** the **EASY CHOICE**

**Real-life Stories and Practical Tools  
from Change the Future WV**



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## **OVERVIEW AND APPROACH**

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Change the Future WV was launched in the Mid-Ohio Valley as part of a national initiative called Communities Putting Prevention to Work. In 2010, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention awarded two-year grants to 50 communities, both urban and rural. The goal of West Virginia's grant was to reduce obesity through improvements in nutrition and physical activity. The strategy was to change policies, systems and environments in order to make the healthy choice the easy choice.

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## **HEALTHY EATING**

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Change the Future WV spearheaded multiple interrelated initiatives aimed at improving the food environment in the Mid-Ohio Valley. Project staff partnered with schools, grocery stores, convenience stores and farmers' markets to improve access to healthy and affordable food, particularly fresh fruits and vegetables.

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## **PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND EDUCATION**

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Change the Future WV has made significant strides in changing the landscape for physical activity in the six-county region. Key initiatives focused on increasing physical education; developing safe and connected routes for walking, hiking and biking; enhancing community parks and playgrounds; and sponsoring events to create increased opportunities for Mid-Ohio Valley residents to be physically active.

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## **BUILDING A LEGACY**

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Grants like Communities Putting Prevention to Work provide a driving force for creating healthier communities. To maximize their impact, however, communities need to use such grants with an eye toward building a legacy that provides a foundation for continuing the work. Change the Future WV is continuing its work through the vision it instilled, relationships it inspired, and resources developed, as well as strengthened accountability among organizations.

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Website Map: Change the Future WV Resource Center

# 1

## OVERVIEW AND APPROACH

Online Resource Center [www.changethefuturewv.org](http://www.changethefuturewv.org)



Change the Future WV was launched in the Mid-Ohio Valley as part of a national initiative called Communities Putting Prevention to Work (CPPW). In 2010, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) awarded two-year grants to 50 communities, both urban and rural. The national goal was to reduce obesity and tobacco use, the two leading preventable causes of death and disability in this country. Over 55 million people, or one in five U.S. citizens, live in areas served by these grants.

“When this grant opportunity came about, we were really excited,” said Keri Kennedy, who worked in the Bureau for Public Health at the time and co-authored the grant. “For so long we had been handed things that worked in urban environments but didn’t make sense here. You’ve got to have a rural framework.”

The grant was awarded to the Bureau for Public Health in the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources, and focused on six counties in the Mid-Ohio Valley: Calhoun, Pleasants, Ritchie, Roane, Wirt and Wood. The Bureau contracted with the Mid-Ohio Valley Health Department to implement the project and with the West Virginia University Health Research Center to evaluate the process and outcomes.

The grant focused on preventing obesity through improved opportunities for healthy eating and active living. The goals and activities focused primarily on changing policies, systems and environments to make it easier for Mid-Ohio Valley residents to choose healthy options.

“We had been working on pieces of the puzzle when it came to policy and environmental change,” said Kristy Blower, who co-authored the grant with Kennedy. “But we’d never had the chance to try to work on fitting all of pieces together and in one geographic area – that was one of the most exciting parts of this grant.”

The earlier puzzle pieces included a collaboration between the Bureau for Public Health and the state’s Development Office to connect the work of Main Street projects to public health. Through the revitalization of Main Street’s small downtown areas, communities

considered the importance of creating spaces for residents to be active. In 2005, the state enacted the Healthy Lifestyles Act (HLA) to address obesity prevention in schools through required physical education, health education assessments, fitness assessments, body mass index assessments, and requirements for healthy vended beverages. In 2008, West Virginia became the first state in the nation to implement the nutrition standards consistent with recommendations by the Institute of Medicine.

**“From the additional physical education teacher, to fruit tastings in our elementary schools, to trail development – this grant has made things possible that for years had just been talked about.”**

*- Michelle Toman, County Coordinator, Change the Future WV*

In 2010, the CPPW grant allowed many partners to come together to initiate a targeted approach to make the healthy choice the easy choice. It provided opportunities to build on past successes and to keep learning.

“A lot of this is trailblazing,” said Karen Northrup, a Wood County school nurse and researcher who served on the management team for the grant. “You take what you know, you take some risks, you try some things, and you learn from it.”

Two years later, in April of 2012, one hundred people from the region gathered for a celebratory luncheon to reflect on their progress and lessons learned.

“It’s difficult to [speak of] just one project that came about because of Change the Future WV,” said Michelle Toman, a county coordinator from Ritchie County,

who spoke at the event. “From the additional physical education teacher, to fruit tastings in our elementary schools, to trail development – this grant has made things possible that for years had just been talked about.”

“This is not the end. This is the beginning,” said Joe Barker, a Bureau for Public Health official and principal investigator for the grant. “The success of Change the Future WV builds on earlier work and is leading us toward something that we believe can and will be sustained in the future.”

This guide provides an overview of what has been accomplished, how people worked together to achieve their goals and what lessons they learned along the way. An online resource center has been created with information and tools to supplement the guide at [www.changethefuturewv.org](http://www.changethefuturewv.org).

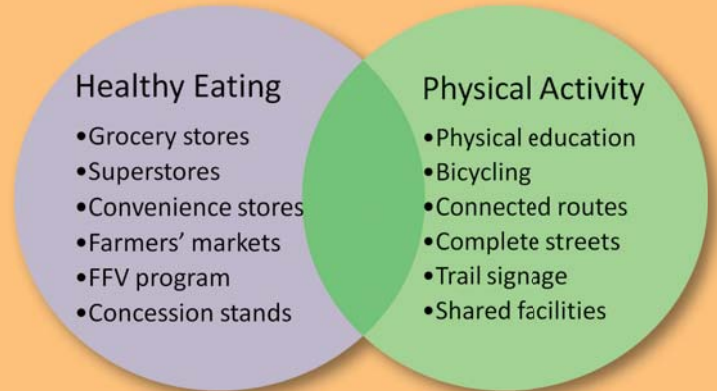
The guide is organized by the desired outcomes: healthy eating and increased physical activity. The project activities, however, did not occur in separate silos, but rather in overlapping circles. The project partners focused on their objectives with an eye toward how they connect with each other, so people working on nutrition in a school were thinking about physical activity, as well as adding healthy options at concession stands at school sports events (See Figure 1).

Across the diverse activities, partners and settings encompassed by the project, there are four key features that have contributed to progress and success: a socio-ecological framework for addressing obesity, strong teamwork, engaged communities, and clear goals and objectives.

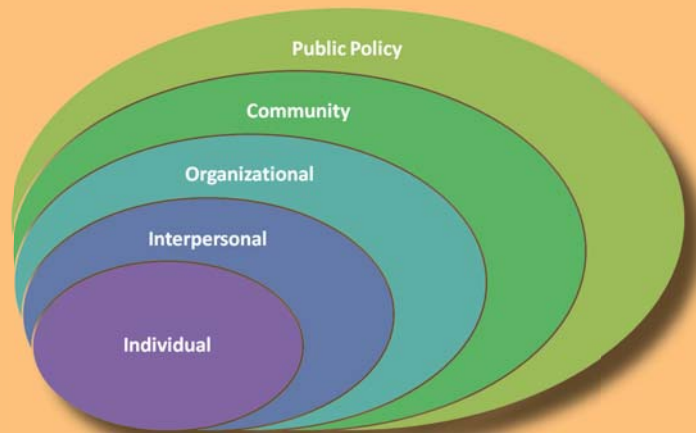
### Our Framework

For decades, in West Virginia and across the country, attempts to reverse the obesity epidemic have focused primarily on individual behavior. Although individual behavior plays a major role with regard to obesity and chronic disease, it is difficult to engage in healthy behaviors if the environments in which we live, work and play do not support such actions. With this in mind, the Change the Future WV team used the Social-Ecological Model of Health as the foundation for their work. The

**FIGURE 1: Focus of West Virginia’s grant: Preventing and Reducing Obesity**



**FIGURE 2: The Socio-Ecological Model of Health**



model illustrates the impact policy, systems and environments can have on individual behavior (See Figure 2). Policies and systems became the vehicle for bringing about positive environmental changes and healthier communities for Mid-Ohio Valley residents.

“We all have genetic traits and unique characteristics that influence our health, but we’re also influenced by our families, communities, living conditions and work environment,” said Stephanie Frost, one of the project evaluators at the Health Research Center at the WVU

School of Public Health. “Something as simple as the contents of the vending machines at work or having a playground in the neighborhood affect our ability to make healthy choices. So, if we start to look at how to change some of those environments, that can make an important difference in overall behaviors.”

Change the Future WV looks at the contexts in which people live and works to create environmental changes that will make the healthy choice, the easy choice.

A large number of studies have been conducted showing that the environments where people live can be associated with diet, physical activity, and overall weight. For example, people living in communities with greater access to supermarkets tend to have a healthier diet and are likely to be at a healthier weight. Studies have also shown that when people live in areas with many fast food restaurants and convenience stores, and few grocery stores, the diet tends to be less healthy

**“The grassroots effort was imperative to our success. The county coordinators are embedded in their communities, and they have the passion for it and the tenacity to make it work.”**

*- Carrie Brainard, Health and Wellness Coordinator, Mid-Ohio Valley Health Department*

and residents are more likely to be overweight. A similar pattern has been observed for physical activity. People living in communities with multiple opportunities to be active engage in more physical activity. What the social-ecological model and these studies tell us is that it is not only individuals who need to be healthy; we need to make our communities healthy as well. This is particularly important in rural areas such as West Virginia where opportunities to access healthy foods and

physical activity may be limited. Change the Future WV, through the Communities Putting Prevention to Work initiative, was able to work to implement strategies that made healthy living easier for Mid-Ohio Valley residents.

### **What Do We Mean by Policy, Systems or Environmental Change?**

Policy change includes public laws and ordinances that relate to the physical environment (such as disability accessibility laws) or individual behavior (such as bans on smoking in public places). They also include the policies of organizations, such as employers who provide incentives for employee fitness or a food wholesaler that negotiates with a group of convenience stores on bulk rates for fresh fruits and vegetables.

Environmental change includes the physical environment (such as enhancing sidewalks, trails and paths to encourage physical activity), the economic environment (such as competitive retail prices for fresh fruits and vegetables), and the social environment (such as building public support for healthy options).

Systems change is the alignment of multiple efforts to achieve a broad impact. This could be changing the food environment of an entire school by focusing on meals, snacks, vending machines and concession stands. Another example is a town adopting a “complete streets” policy regarding roads, traffic, sidewalks, lighting and streetscapes that make it easier, safer and more appealing to walk and bike.

“Programs that focus on helping people change their behaviors are still an integral part of this work,” said Frost. “But we’re also taking actions that are likely to be farther-reaching and longer-lasting when we look at changing policies, systems and environments to make the healthy choice the easy choice.”

### **Strong Teamwork**

The mission of Change the Future WV attracted a wide variety of people who were concerned about obesity from different angles. The enthusiasm of staff and partners when they talk about the various grant activities is palpable. Many had been working on the issue for years as part of their jobs or as community

volunteers. The grant enabled them to move forward in significant ways on existing initiatives, as well as try new approaches.

Because the issue of obesity is so multi-faceted, the greatest progress can be made by working together and developing a team of partners. Change the Future WV is a true team effort. Many levels of government, as well as the private sector, have been involved in the initiative. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provided not only funding, but also technical assistance and opportunities to network with other states, communities and organizations.

To help coordinate the entire continuum of activities was a management team that included the Mid-Ohio Valley Health Department, Wood County Schools, state departments of education and health and human resources, West Virginia University and others. The team was staffed by Amy Wentz Berner, the Change the Future WV project coordinator, and the individual tasked with ensuring the alignment of multiple activities.

“Everybody on the team wanted the project to succeed,” said Berner. “It did put a lot of pressure on everybody to perform just as highly as we could. It would have been different if people were concerned mainly with their own organization’s agenda, but I think everybody was invested in the project.”

Each county had a coordinator and a coalition that provided direction and support for community-level action. The coordinators were supervised by Carrie Brainard, the director of health and wellness at the Mid-Ohio Valley Health Department.

“The grassroots effort was imperative to our success,” said Brainard. “The county coordinators are embedded in their communities, and they have the passion for it and the tenacity to make it work. And the coordinators wouldn’t have been successful without their county coalitions bringing those passionate people from different venues, programs, and organizations to the table to work on this initiative.”

Other key players included a leadership team made of influential stakeholders in the Mid-Ohio Valley who



*Fresh fruit and vegetable display in Mid-Ohio Valley convenience store.*

helped support and further the work, as well as project partners from diverse sectors who made invaluable and sometimes unexpected contributions.

“One thing we all learned was that you don’t know unless you ask,” said Brainard. “There were things that we thought were not possible. But if you go and talk to people, you’ll be amazed.”

### **Engaged Communities**

A third critical feature of the project was the active involvement of the entire community. Tools for engagement included traditional and social media, conducting surveys, holding forums, partnering on local projects and serving on county coalitions. These efforts attracted people from nearly every walk of life – concerned citizens and volunteers, government officials, business owners and employees, health providers, extension agents, schools, senior centers, family resource networks, and civic and faith-based organizations.

“Change the Future WV is trying to create a paradigm shift in thinking about healthy eating and physical activity,” said Jean Ambrose, a Wood County resident

and project coordinator at the West Virginia Center for Civic Life. “What is it that makes people choose to do one thing rather than another, to choose a healthy snack instead of a bag of potato chips? What can we do to change the environment, rather than focusing only on changing people’s behaviors? It involves a rethinking of habitual ways of doing things on all our parts – individuals, organizations, government and policymakers.”

“Word of mouth in a small place like this is tremendous,” said Janet Heiney, the county coordinator in Calhoun County. “I went to every club, every organization – 4H, home extension, Lions Club, churches. If there were more than two people in a meeting I made contact with them. I told them about our program and what we were doing. I asked, what would you like to see done in Calhoun County? What would you be willing to help with? What do you think would be good for our people?”

“You definitely have to have the community involvement, and if we didn’t then we would not have been successful,” said Scott Eubank, a management team member and media director in the Office of Community Health Systems and Health Promotion. “It was slow starting out because of the time needed to develop relationships with people and bring them all to the table. When you do that, initially, everybody has their own wish list of what they want to happen. But as people came together and looked at the larger task, they understood what this project was about and came up with really unique and great ideas about how to go about making those changes.”

### **Clear Goals and Objectives**

A fourth element that was key to the success of Change the Future WV was the involvement of evaluation from the very beginning of the project. The CDC provided guidance regarding focus areas, but communities had to develop goals and objectives and clearly outline milestone activities. The goals and objectives became an important component for communication among team members, a way to engage partners, and an element for tracking challenges and progress.

In addition to the goals and objectives, the logic model developed at the beginning of the project was a way to set realistic expectations for the short-, intermediate-

and long-term outcomes of the project as well as the data needed to assess change. A logic model is a tool that is used to visualize what a project will do, how it will be done, how it will be assessed and the anticipated outcomes.

### **A Snapshot of Progress**

The obesity epidemic did not happen overnight, nor will it be reversed in a two-year grant period. What this intensive effort did, however, was demonstrate that policy, systems and environmental changes can be implemented in largely rural areas and be a mechanism for sustainable change.

Over the course of the grant, the county coordinators and project evaluators tracked each of the initiatives, paying particular attention to the policies adopted by public agencies and private organizations and businesses in the six-county region that furthered opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity.

“It took some time to build the momentum, but over time we saw a great surge,” said Tom Bias, a project evaluator at the Health Research Center at the WVU School of Public Health. After two years, the Change the Future WV team has documented over 100 efforts that have led to changes in the food and physical activity environment and provided increased access to fresh fruits and vegetables and opportunities for physical activity. One of the most exciting points is that the work has had reach beyond the 6 counties. “We see this work spreading beyond the Mid-Ohio Valley already,” Bias said.

The changes range from elementary schools adopting healthy snack policies, to grocers taking the “Eat Well, Play Well” pledge regarding the placement of healthy products, to towns adopting a Complete Streets policy to encourage walking and biking (See Figures 3 and 4). Other indicators of progress include the following:

- Multiple venues have come on board to increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables. These include the start-up of new farmers’ markets and existing markets that increased their days and/or hours of operation; increases in the number of convenience stores selling fresh fruits and vegetables; new healthy checkout aisles in grocery stores; and



new healthy options offered at concession stands where youth play sports.

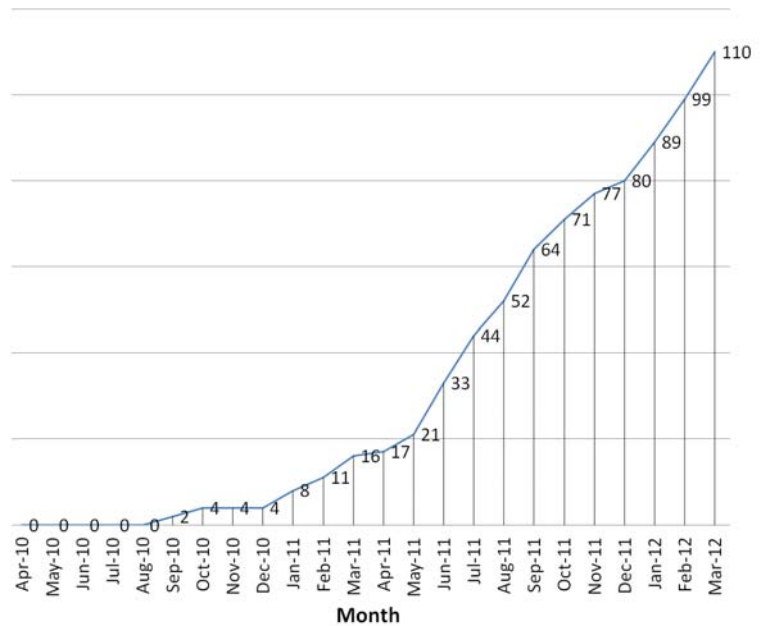
- The physical activity environment has been enhanced by schools working to expand physical education and activity and making their facilities available to the community after school hours; improving trails and signage; planning for new trails; and improving parks and playgrounds.
- The changes in communities are contributing to changes in individual behavior, such as an increase in the number of patrons at farmers' markets. Low-income adults who were surveyed reported an increase in their consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as an increase in the number who purchased these items at farmers' markets and convenience stores.

A final, recurring observation relates to the impact that the project has had on the people involved in implementing it.

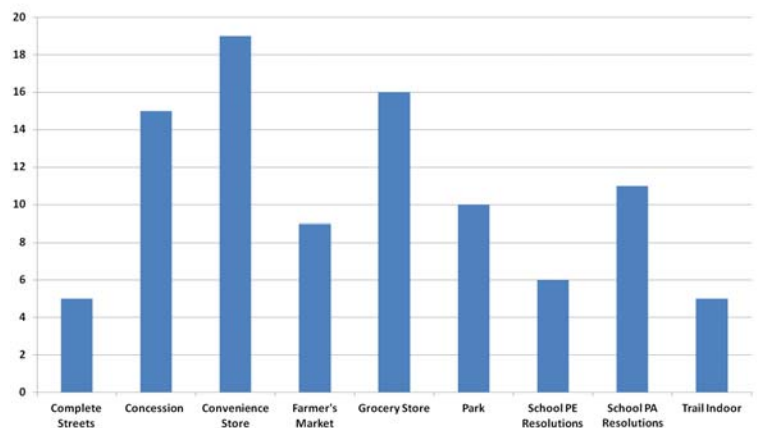
"We've looked at some [improvements] here at the health department," said Brainard. "We feel that if we're going to talk the talk we need to walk the walk. We've had some major discussions in the directors' meeting about how to go about this. How do we help change the environment in which our own employees are working? That issue is on the table, and it wasn't before."

"I really think a lot of the work is going to be sustained," said Mandy Foutty, the county coordinator from Wirt County. "It's been great to be part of this. It's changed a lot of people's lives – I know it's changed mine."

**FIGURE 3: Growth in the Number of Change the Future WV Environmental Changes**



**FIGURE 4: Environmental Changes by Type**



Change the Future WV spearheaded interrelated initiatives aimed at changing the food environment in the Mid-Ohio Valley. Project staff partnered with people in schools, grocery stores, convenience stores and farmers' markets to improve access to healthy and affordable food, particularly fresh fruits and vegetables. This chapter describes the various activities, impacts and lessons learned.

### Farmers' Markets

Change the Future WV worked with existing farmers' markets to increase advertising, hours of operation, number of vendors, variety and quality of fresh fruits and vegetables, and acceptance of electronic benefits transfer (EBT) and debit cards. The Mid-Ohio Valley Health Department also created a policy that waived the food permit fee for all farmers' market vendors. And a total of three new markets were opened: Grantsville, Parkersburg (on the grounds of the West Virginia University, Parkersburg campus), and Walton.

"When I first drove up to the Calhoun County Farmers' Market at Chloe, I didn't know what to expect," said Janet Heiney, the county coordinator. "The atmosphere was just remarkable. I fell in love with the people and the place. So I started spending a lot of time helping them promote their market because that was one of the goals of our grant. They had such a successful market, and I started thinking, hmm, it sure would be nice if we had a farmers' market on this end of the county [in Grantsville]."



Heiney took the idea to her county coalition, and the members thought a farmers' market in Grantsville, about thirty miles from Chloe, was a good idea.

"And it just snowballed," said Heiney. The county commission agreed with the idea to put a Farmers' Market in Grantsville and offered the Wayne Underwood Park as the location. "I got in touch with our [WVU] Extension agriculture agent, and we started advertising. We had an organizational meeting, where 27 people showed up. And in a small county with less than 8,000 people, that's a lot."

Bob Gregory and Tom McColley, two growers from the Chloe market, came to the meeting in Grantsville to help launch the new market.

"They were so on board," said Heiney. "Their goal is for everyone to have healthy food to eat, and they were not worried about the competition factor at all. Their expertise was invaluable to us because they've had a market for eight years."

Bob and Lynnita Gregory moved to West Virginia a few years ago to find a place to farm. They settled in Chloe in part because they noticed so many gardens in the area. They founded Berea Gardens, joined the local farmers' market, began offering agricultural workshops, and started working with the University Extension Service. They were one of four recipients of the 2012 Innovative Sustainable Producers in West Virginia Award.

*Three new farmers' markets opened in the Mid-Ohio Valley, and existing markets received help with EBT/debit machines, media and marketing. The purple reusable bags were a big hit and were used to draw customers back to the market. If shoppers had their bags signed a certain number of times by one of the vendors, they received a coupon for free fruits and vegetables.*

“We’ve got some unique challenges in West Virginia,” Bob Gregory said. “The geography makes a small market farm operation like we have pretty difficult because of the distances that we have to travel, the sparseness of the population, and that, even for our organic produce, we cannot command a premium price in this region. It simply isn’t affordable for the people that we want to get the food to.”

“We’re working in part with Change the Future WV to try to develop a means of attracting some of the growers in order to aggregate some of our efforts and find some regional distribution pathways. If I’m good at producing a specific crop and my neighbor down the road is good at producing a different crop, we can combine those products to get them into the public’s hands in more accessible ways.”

Gregory is concerned that while farmers’ markets are a valuable resource, not everybody who wants to buy produce can shop during the limited hours that farmers’ markets are open. And a challenge for growers is that when they take time away from the farm to do the marketing, the farm suffers, particularly in the summer.

“We want to organize the growers in such a way that some of the burden of marketing and distribution can be relieved from the growers,” said Gregory. “My real desire is to see someone with marketing ability and business savvy put something like that together. I believe that if a good distribution system was in place, you’d find growers coming out of the woodwork.”

Healthy food is more than a business interest for Bob and Lynnita Gregory. It’s a calling.

“When we see all the problems that we’re faced with in society today, my personal opinion is that most of those can be mitigated by a good quality diet,” said Bob Gregory, “and by participating in some way in the production of the food you’re eating, even if it’s just a few tomato plants in a couple of containers on your patio.”

The efforts of Heiney, the Gregorlys and many others paid off when the new farmers’ market in Grantsville had its grand opening in May 2011.



*Walmart, Foodland and other grocers have partnered with Change the Future WV to place fresh fruits and vegetables in strategic locations throughout their stores. Larger stores created designated healthy checkout aisles, where all of the foods meet the Office of Child Nutrition’s guidelines for sodium, fat and sugar, and all toys relate to physical activity.*

“We had between 8 and 10 vendors the first summer, and we averaged 175 customers each Friday,” said Heiney. “It was phenomenal. We did a lot of advertising and promoting. Change the Future WV bought signs. We paid for advertising on the Hur Herald (an online newspaper in the Mid-Ohio Valley region). We did radio spots and a live remote on opening day. You know, you always have a few naysayers and people who tell you it won’t work. Well, it did. It really did.”

### **Grocery Stores**

Change the Future WV worked with grocery stores in the region on favorable placement of healthy options in designated checkout aisles and other locations in the store. The initiative was so successful that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recognized Mid-Ohio Valley businessman - Jim Oppe, the owner of five Foodland stores in the region. “I’ve been doing this job for 24 years, and the first day, I was actually shocked at

the amount of products we sold in the healthy checkout aisle – the banana chips and dried fruit,” said David Worst, a Foodland store manager. “Individual prunes are a real big seller. The kids call them big raisins. People are choosing this aisle over other aisles now. It’s growing.”

A Walmart store got a phone call the day that they implemented the healthy checkout aisle from a parent saying, “Thank you so much for doing this.”

“Healthy checkout aisles were first brought to our attention by The Food Trust in Philadelphia,” said Amy Wentz Berner, Change the Future WV project coordinator. “Our grant team worked on guidelines for highly recommended items, recommended items, and accepted items, with help from the Office of Child Nutrition in the West Virginia Department of Education.”

West Virginia became the first state to implement the healthy checkout aisle concept at the multi-store chain level. The three Mid-Ohio Valley Walmart stores each had a converted aisle by March 2011, thanks to the innovation of the Market Manager, Elizabeth Nagel, and the store managers. Refrigerated coolers with healthy items and signage have also been added.

Walmart implemented other changes in their stores, such as removing sugary snacks and drinks from their toy department and replacing them with healthy snacks, beverages, and fruit; replacing toys in the cereal aisle with only toys that promote physical activity; and placing physical activity toys in the grocery section of the store. The policy was drafted with assistance from ChangeLab Solutions (formerly Public Health Law and Policy) and is titled the “Eat Well Play Well Pledge.”

“We have also experienced great success by partnering with the Mid-Ohio Valley’s locally-owned grocery store chain, Foodland,” said Berner. “In addition to designated healthy checkout aisles, Foodland is cross-marketing fresh fruits and vegetables in other areas of the stores, such as meat and dairy, to encourage customers to incorporate these products into every meal. The aisles and displays have signage with both the Foodland and Change The Future WV logos. The produce section



*Change the Future WV partnered with ParMar and other convenience stores to carry fresh fruits and vegetables, secured a discount on their retail food permit fees, and helped negotiate bulk-rate prices from the Robrecht Produce Company, a local food wholesaler.*

highlights specials on fresh fruits and vegetables every week on a large and colorful whiteboard.”

Because of the success and publicity of the initiative at Walmart and Foodland, other smaller chains and independently owned grocers have signed on. Even if they were too small to have a fully-converted healthy checkout aisle, they implemented changes such as placing fruits and vegetables closer to the register and highlighting sales on produce. Those stores include two Save-A-Lots (Wood and Roane Counties), one store in Calhoun (Grantsville Foodland), two stores in Wirt County (Dick’s Market and Foodmart), one store in Wood County (Kirk’s Market) and one store in Pleasants County (Galaxy Foodstore).

The changes are spreading. The Walmart Market Manager was promoted, and the position was filled by David Kesling. Kesling also manages seven other stores in West Virginia and is in the process of implementing the changes, including the healthy checkout aisles, in these stores.

### Convenience Stores

Working with convenience stores is a key strategy for improving access to fresh fruits and vegetables in rural areas. The Mid-Ohio Valley has approximately 85 convenience stores and 25 grocery stores in the six-county region. Considering the greater accessibility of convenience stores when compared to grocery stores, staff of Change the Future WV approached the stores about carrying fresh fruits and vegetables and provided funding for bins and coolers to help them try it out.

In addition, the Mid-Ohio Valley Health Department board of directors passed a policy based on a suggestion from Sanitarian Supervisor Liz Green to provide an incentive (versus a requirement) for convenience stores to carry fresh fruits and vegetables. The policy provides a 20 percent discount for every type of fruit or vegetable they carry. If stores carry five different varieties, they get the permit for free.

“It may not be a big deal to some people, but \$100 is a big deal to a non-chain store struggling to stay open,” said Carrie Brainard. “We also worked with the Robrecht Produce Company, a local food wholesaler, to help the stores negotiate bulk-rate prices on quality fresh vegetables and fruits.”

“Carrie and I did a lot of work with grocery and convenience stores, and one of our most important

keys to success was that we worked with our stores as partners,” said Berner. “We looked at them as real change agents in the fight against obesity and not someone that we wanted to make demands [of] or only ask things from.

“A second key is that we asked stores how they thought the changes would work in their places of business. We sought input from them, and we had a menu of options that they could choose from. All stores are not alike. We wanted them each to showcase their individuality while working with us in this fight against obesity. We wanted the stores to set their own pace and plan how they wanted to work with us. We really wanted to hear how the stores thought that they could make a difference in their communities,” Berner added.

### Public Schools

The US Department of Agriculture sponsors a fresh fruit and vegetable snack program that is free to any school that qualifies for it. Change the Future WV helped bring this healthy snack program to all 32 elementary schools in the six-county region for the first year of the grant. The goals were to demonstrate it was possible to have the fresh fruits and vegetables, to let children have the chance to try new foods, and to give them an extra snack in the afternoon. If the staff and students liked the program, it was hoped that the schools that qualified, but had not participated in the past, would then take the opportunity to apply.

“The effort succeeded,” said Brainard. “[Some of] the schools that qualify for the fresh fruit and vegetable program are now enrolled in it. We also had two counties with schools that didn’t qualify, and they added

*Elementary schools throughout the Mid-Ohio Valley now participate in the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s fresh fruit and vegetable program, and local boards of education fund it themselves for elementary schools that do not qualify. The change is a result of the partnership between Change the Future WV and county boards of education.*





*Students attending school sporting events now have more healthy choices at their concession stands, such as bananas, apple slices with low-fat caramel dip and vegetables with low-fat ranch dressing. Change the Future WV partnered with local booster organizations and school wellness councils to add the healthy options.*

it to their budget because they saw the impact that it had. They saw how important it was to the children and how well received it was by the children and the teachers. It's an ongoing project that we hope will have many years of success."

Change the Future WV also took the bold step of trying to have healthy snacks added to concession stand menus at student sports events.

"We were told, 'Leave the boosters alone. They're never going to change the way they do it. They like their hot dogs and nachos,'" said Brainard. "We challenged them to just try to think outside the box a little bit, not to take anything away from their menu, but to add other things to it, to use the nacho tray for apple slices with low-fat caramel dip or peanut butter, or vegetables and low-fat ranch dressing. We asked them just to give it a try.

"They did it, and we've had several of the schools adopt agreements with the boosters. That's great, but if the booster president changes, that can change, too. We've also had a few schools that have passed it through their school wellness council, which has a longer-lasting effect."

Change the Future WV has made significant strides in changing the landscape for physical activity in the six-county region. Key initiatives focused on increasing physical education opportunities; developing safe and connected routes for walking, hiking and biking; enhancing community parks and playgrounds; and sponsoring events to create increased opportunities for Mid-Ohio Valley residents to be physically active.

### Physical Education

“I’ve always felt that physical education is the most important subject because it helps kids physically, mentally, and emotionally,” said Sue Childers, a 33-year veteran in physical education in the Mid-Ohio Valley. “Physical education is a vehicle that helps kids learn to feel comfortable in their own bodies and with other people, how to work toward a goal, learn new skills and be part of a team.”

“Students are physically active in physical education class, and being physically active is good for health,” said Karen Northrup, a Wood County school nurse and researcher. “It’s also good from the school’s point of view for academic achievement. The evidence is building that kids who are more active and fit, do better academically.”



*Physical education contributes to better student health and school performance and sets the stage for lifelong physical activity. Change the Future WV piloted additional PE teachers in middle and high schools. The secondary students all six counties have benefited from these strategies and now have increased physical activity opportunities at school.*

The grant for Change the Future WV included a specific objective to work toward daily physical education (PE) for students. The arguments against that are usually that there’s not enough time in the gym or in teacher and student schedules. The grant tested those arguments by funding 14 additional PE teachers for middle and high schools in the six-county region for one year.

The schools were creative and found more time in the gym and other areas of the school that can be used as gym-like facilities, such as outdoor fields and paved tracks. There was also enough time in student schedules for increased PE. The initiative demonstrated principals were able to work with school schedules and the amount of space available in the school to create additional opportunities for PE.

“Change the Future WV employed a very organized, planned strategy, with five days of training for the new teachers,” said Northrup. “It involved instruction in West Virginia content standards and fitness testing. There were strategies and encouragement to work as a team with the other PE teachers in the school. There was funding for additional supplies, which were not ordered by the new PE teacher alone, but by that team of PE teachers to further supplement the base that they already had.”

“All the schools did things differently. We gave them the freedom to decide how they were going to accommodate this extra PE teacher,” said Childers. “In addition to additional PE time, a lot of schools had an intramural program that they weren’t able to do before. In some cases there were some family fun nights that involved parents and the community. Some schools opened their gyms and offered different programs when kids arrived in the morning, rather than have them just sitting in the cafeteria. Some of our teachers created activities for Let’s Move Day, including a 10-minute dance where the entire school participated.”

Knowing that the funding for the additional PE teachers was time-limited, Change the Future WV used the positive outcomes of this experience to build momentum for the establishment of daily PE in the future. Northrup and others developed a resolution supporting daily physical education if funding for extra teachers was provided. The resolution was passed in all six counties



*Through a partnership with the West Virginia Mountain Biking Association, Change the Future WV purchased bikes for several schools, supported training for teachers and introduced biking education in the PE curriculum. These efforts also contributed to the creation of local biking clubs which use the many trails in the Mid-Ohio Valley.*

and reflects the commitment of school officials to provide quality physical education and physical activity opportunities to students.

“We received help from some national partners, including BlazeSports, and pulled together evidence of all of the reasons why PE is important and why you should work towards daily PE,” said Northrup. “That became an education and awareness tool to support the advancement of PE locally and at our state level. It also became a commitment document for the counties to start tracking their efforts in physical education and physical activity and a commitment to move towards daily PE. It kept an annual focus on where we are and where we want to go.”

Schools are frequently a focal point for various interventions aimed at improving the well-being of children and youth. It’s easy for teachers and administrators to feel bombarded by requests from parents, community members and policymakers, who want schools to do new and different things without a full understanding of what that request might entail. Therefore, a key strategy for Change the Future WV was to hire an “in-house champion” for the PE initiative, someone with teaching experience who understood how to work with people and get things done within the school environment.

“I’ve said all along that my best contribution to the grant was to hire Sue as an in-house champion,” said Northrup. “She had been involved in one of the county school systems for many years and was a well-known and respected leader. She was able to take the reins and see that things happened in professional ways that advanced the programs at all of those schools.”

The leadership within each school was also key to the success of the initiative. Childers believes that “the administrator is the catalyst for how much physical activity and physical education kids get. If you have principals who are leaders and embrace this and go with it, it will change the entire atmosphere of not just the school, but also the community around it.”

The lessons learned through Change the Future WV coupled with ongoing PE and physical activity efforts in the Mid-Ohio Valley by Northrup and others, contributed to the momentum building for change at the state level. In May of 2011 State Superintendent of Schools Jorea Marple asked schools throughout the state to join the Let’s Move campaign and include an additional 15 minutes of physical activity for all students in grades Pre-K thru 8.

Physical education in schools has long-term implications for health and well-being. It provides the foundation for lifelong physical activity and all the benefits that provides, including healthier weights, lower stress, fewer health problems and more recreational and social participation.

“It’s so essential that we educate kids on what they’re going to need to do in order to stay healthy,” said Childers. “I always tell kids that I’m not going to make them physically fit in a 9-week class, but I am going to give them the skills and knowledge of different activities that are fun and that they can do throughout their lifetime, whether that’s tennis, biking, golf or bowling.”

### **Bicycling**

Change the Future WV was able to purchase bicycles for many of the middle schools in the Mid-Ohio Valley. Through a partnership with the West Virginia Mountain



Bike Association, students learned the proper way to get on and off a bicycle, adjust it for their height and use the helmets properly. City of Parkersburg police officers who ride bicycles came to a class to learn how to better implement biking in the community. From that, Change the Future WV was able to get some biking provisions incorporated into city and county connectivity plans, such as having a bike lane and having crosswalks and signage that would help make biking safer.

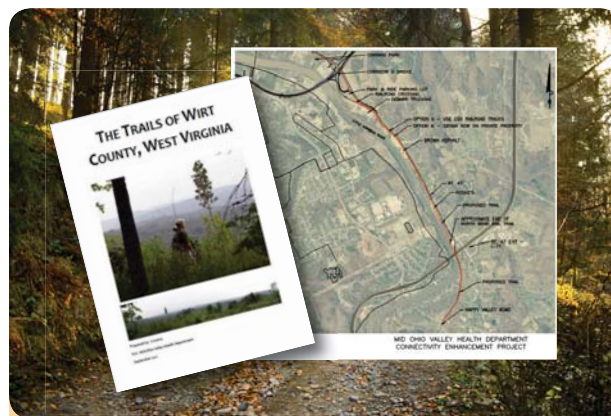
Kim Coram with the West Virginia Mountain Bike Association worked with Change the Future on trail mapping, and that expanded into biking and bikes in the schools. Calhoun County was one of the first counties to get the bikes.

“We purchased 20 bicycles for the middle-high school,” said Janet Heiney, the Calhoun County coordinator. “As a result of that, they implemented a biking club and they’ve worked that into part of the PE curriculum with bike safety. And they take the kids biking at the county park, the North Bend rail trail and other places.”

Wood County schools were also interested in putting biking into their PE curriculum. The grant provided training for the Wood County teachers, which included an online course on riding, safety and maintenance, as well as in-person training, where they actually got the teachers on the bikes.

“That was a huge piece – getting the teachers comfortable getting on and riding a bike,” said Sue Childers. “And Wood County also created a partnership with the voc-tech center. During the first year, any maintenance was provided by the bike shop where we bought the bikes, and the voc-tech center agreed to provide the maintenance after that. Somebody from the bike shop will teach the voc-tech students how to do maintenance on the bikes, how to do simple things, and even maybe a little more complicated things.”

“The bikes are a perfect example of the value of the funding from Communities Putting Prevention to Work,” said Karen Northrup. “Bicycling is a lifetime activity skill, but it’s a very expensive unit for startup. PE teachers, who generally have little to no money for supplies, received a set of 20 to 28 bicycles and the associated



*After a thorough inventory by Kim Coram of trails in the region, the engineering firm of Burgess and Niple helped each county develop connectivity plans. The plans provide specifications and cost estimates for the development of local trails that enable people to get to places in and around their communities on foot and by bike. All six county commissions agreed to include the connectivity plans in their county master plans.*

training to get that going in their schools. The financing for that is a huge barrier, and the grant was exactly what we needed to get things started.”

### **Connectivity Plans**

To embed biking, walking and hiking in everyday life, people need safe and connected routes in their communities that are attractive and functional. Change the Future WV focused on the planning and design of roads, sidewalks, trails and paths to increase their use for recreation and non-vehicular transportation.

Kim Coram was hired to inventory all the trails in the six-county region. A report was created for each county with in-depth information for each trail, including (1) type of trail (park, rail trail, etc.); (2) location; (3) description (paved/limestone, pedestrian/biking, approximate length, loop/straight line, elevations, benches, shading, open to the public or not, additional amenities); (4) permitted activities on the trail; (5) hours open; and (6) signage information.

“Using Kim’s inventory, we had planning forums where we brought community members together in each

county to talk about what they wanted to do to make their communities a safer environment for walking and biking,” said Carrie Brainard. “The goal was to build a ‘skeleton of connectivity,’ as one forum participant described it, and then fill in the flesh of it over time. And that’s what the connectivity plans actually give them.”

“We [the Mid-Ohio Valley Health Department] talked to the county commissioners, and they were very excited about the planning. Most of them showed up at those forums, and all six county commissions passed a policy to include the connectivity plans in their master plans for their counties.”

Change the Future WV contracted with Steve Staats, senior landscape architect with Burgess and Niple, to help the counties research and develop their connectivity plans.

“It was a big undertaking,” said Staats. “On the front side of it, we thought we had a pretty good idea about all the things we’d be involved with, but as we worked through the project there were some different directions we ended up taking to develop a good product. The Mid-Ohio Valley Health Department has to be commended on their insight and their willingness to do something like this. The crux of it all was to promote good health. It was neat that the Health Department thought of this project and made it happen. Typically a recreation department or municipality is the type of client envisioning a project like this.

“In all of the county forums, there were business people, school superintendents, bank people, and of course recreational people. There was a common thread across all of the groups – you could tell the people cared about the community and many had been involved in other projects. First, we developed a list of what characteristics people wanted to see in the trails and then a list of where they would like the trails to be. We reminded everyone that the goal of the project was to connect communities and enable people to get places within their communities without having to hop in a car.”

The initial report provided a mapping of the potential routes, descriptions of each proposed trail, including what kind of surfacing it could have, whether it be a shared-road or stand-alone trail, what property acquisition might be required, and other details. The reports were

presented back to the county groups to pick their three top choices. Then Staats and each local group walked or hiked all three trails, which enabled them to further evaluate the feasibility and desirability of each one.

“There were a lot of things that happened at that point,” said Staats. “There were changes that took place in several of the proposed trails. In one case, a whole trail got dropped, because once we were out there it just seemed it wasn’t going to fly, in terms of cost and crossing private property.”

Staats then created a more detailed report on each county’s top three trails and took it back to each group to pick the top one that they wanted to focus on.

**“We talked to the county commissioners, and they were very excited about the planning. Most of them showed up at those forums, and all six county commissions passed a policy to include the connectivity plans in their master plans for their counties.”**

*- Carrie Brainard, Health and Wellness Coordinator,  
Mid-Ohio Valley Health Department*

“We tried to give them as much information as they would need to write strong proposals for grants and other funding to implement their trails,” said Staats “That’s what we’re trying to do – give them some good ammunition. This will be useful information for years and years to come.”

The active participation of local residents and multiple sectors was critical to the effectiveness of the process.

“The individual county coordinators were an important piece of the puzzle,” said Staats. “I was able to spend

time with them and listen to them, and listen to the input of the people they invited to the stakeholders meetings. They were very dedicated. I don't know how much experience they've had wandering around with anybody from an engineering firm. We're all pretty technical people, sort of nuts-and-boltish, but they were all very helpful and willing to do anything to try to get people involved."

### Trail and Park Improvements

Improving walkability in the Mid-Ohio Valley has been an integral aspect the Change the Future WV initiative, including support for several demonstrations of how simple modifications to existing trails and the addition of connecting trails can vastly improve the physical activity environment.

For example, the City of Belmont and Change the Future WV collaborated on improvements to the Belmont Track. The track connects several destinations, enabling Belmont residents to travel by walking rather than driving. The county also committed to further the improvement of the track in order to increase physical activity among members of the Belmont community. The track now connects to a senior citizen home, a nearby housing development (which will allow several children to access the track to walk to school), and the local post office. Change the Future provided guidance and education about the health benefits of walkability and increased physical activity which contributed to the successful implementation of this environmental change.

A new trail leading from downtown Grantsville up the hill to the Minnie Hamilton Health Complex offers a good cardiac workout to residents. The trail is named after Ruth Looney, the Office Assistant in the Calhoun County Health Department, who suggested the connector trail as a shortcut to town so she could walk to the post office to get the mail. The trail is popular with Minnie Hamilton employees, County Health Department staff and customers, and Grantsville residents looking for a good place to exercise. The trail is maintained by the local Boy Scout troop.

Parks have been another focal point for increasing physical activity. Ellenboro Mayor Steve Lewis worked with Change the Future WV to make a 20-year dream of a community park a reality. The town was awarded



*Through partnerships with the West Virginia Recreation and Parks Association and parks in the Mid-Ohio Valley, a system of trail signs and maps has been researched, developed, purchased and installed for a select number of parks in each county. The new system is designed to make the trails more welcoming and easier to use.*

\$20,000 for a playground from Change the Future WV and secured a matching grant from the playground company. The town council contributed another \$15,000 from the town budget. The Ellenboro park will be situated along the North Bend Rail Trail and will feature a playground, benches, water fountain, stage area and eventually public restrooms.

The small community of Creston was awarded funds from Change the Future WV to enhance the playground at their park. Community volunteers gathered throughout 2011 and 2012 to enhance existing trails, including improvements to the walking trails. As a result, residents have increased access to physical activity opportunities in their community. The following year, Change the Future WV provided funds to add stone to the walking trail around the Community Building premises. The Creston Association had started the walking trail but did not have funds to add the stone. A walking club was started by Creston resident Nancy Engelke, with a kickoff celebration in March 2012.

### Trail Signage

"Build it and they will come" is a popular adage, but when it comes to trails, good signage can make all the difference as far as people actually using the trails.

That's why Change the Future WV worked with with Bruce Miller and the West Virginia Recreation and Parks Association on a trail sign and mapping program for parks in the Mid-Ohio Valley. Miller volunteered his time to work on the Mid-Ohio Valley project.

"Amy Berner contacted me to see if we could help with trail signs and trail maps to promote walking and hiking," said Miller. "If you have good signs and maps, easy to read, that tell you where you are and make you comfortable, then I do believe we'll start getting more people back into the parks and onto the trails. I said I would be very interested in helping out with this program. So a group of us met in Parkersburg and started developing signs for the six-county area."

The group looked at examples from Pennsylvania and other states. They developed a signage system that was durable, easy to install and user-friendly. They avoided wooden signs that required repainting and other options that required a lot of time and/or money to maintain. And they tailored the system to different kinds of parks.

"Parks are so important because they're a focal point, especially in small communities," said Miller. "For example, in the Sportsman Park in Elizabeth, you have pavilions, a stage, restrooms and a walking trail. The idea for that small park was to put up a kiosk [and an] information board with a map of the park and how long the trail is. It's like walking around a track. It's a quarter mile, and it lets people know it's an easy walk.

"Then you get into the more complex parks like Mountwood Park in Wood County. It's a large park,

with multiple sub-trail systems. So the objective at that particular park was to build information boards or kiosks, install them in that area of the park, and then you could go off and hike various parts of the trail system. And when you come to a trail intersection, it will have the name, direction, distance and difficulty of the new trail. Sometimes you'll have what we call a remote map because you're so far out, and some of the trail systems are so complex and the map tells you where you are."

A common issue in trail development and management is tension between the different groups that use the trails – the walkers/hikers, mountain bikers and horseback riders. Miller advises working together with the different user groups and coming up with an understanding that the trails are for everybody.

"I look at the health department, and I see some of the health issues they're dealing with," said Miller. "You can't give up, and it's the same thing with the parks. This was a very good marriage, so to speak, between the health department and the parks because they're doing it for health reasons and we're doing to get people out to enjoy and appreciate the parks. People don't understand the importance of having parks in their back yard as much as they did 20 or 30 years ago. They're getting detached from nature, and it's easier to give away nature if you don't appreciate or understand it."

### **Other Tools for Environmental Change**

Residents in three Mid-Ohio Valley counties now have access to complete streets. Complete Streets are where zoning, building and other ordinances are used to support safe, convenient and comfortable routes for



*Complete Streets make communities safer and easier to navigate for pedestrians and bicyclists. Residents in three Mid-Ohio Valley counties now have access to complete streets and increased opportunities for physical activity.*

walking and bicycling. Actions might include widening a road shoulder for bikers, improving sidewalks and walking paths, adding crosswalks on busy streets, and improving landscaping and lighting along a route to encourage its use.

Another useful tool is a joint use agreement, which is a formal agreement between two or more entities that defines the terms and conditions for shared use of property or facilities. Use of school facilities after school hours is one example.

“We had a couple of schools that had walking tracks around their schools that the community could use,” said Carrie Brainard. “But when winter came, there was no place for them to walk. So we [Mid-Ohio Valley Health Department] asked the schools if they could open up their buildings after school so that people could walk and have a safe place to be active. We had a couple of our schools that said, ‘Yes, this is a tax-payer funded building, and the tax payers should be able to use it.’ They allowed people to walk in the gym between 3:00 and 6:00 p.m. during the winter because the janitor was there anyway.”

### Events

Large, visible events can help change the social environment to support healthy choices. For example, Change the Future WV spearheaded the Step-by-Step Challenge in the Mid-Ohio Valley for two months in 2011. The Challenge registered over 1,300 individuals, with approximately 54% completing the challenge. Everyone who completed and turned in a follow-up survey received a Change the Future WV t-shirt, as well as incentives along the way such as a pedometer, water bottle, and first-aid kit.

Change the Future WV engaged numerous partners in the effort, who in turn invited their employees to participate. The partners included government agencies, all six county school districts, colleges, media, and community businesses and organizations. An employee of the Federal Bureau of the Public Debt in Parkersburg won the grand prize, a new mountain bike, for most steps accumulated - nearly 1.5 million.



*Another useful tool for improving the physical activity environment is a joint use agreement between two or more entities that defines the terms and conditions for shared use of property or facilities. Several schools in the Mid-Ohio Valley have passed policies that make their facilities available to the public for indoor walking and other opportunities for physical activity.*

A grand finale was held at Mountwood Park. Educational sessions were held, including a Zumba class, a healthy snacks and smoothies segment, a gardening class, Frisbee golf and an instructional nature hike. Children could romp in the inflatable house or complete the obstacle course. Spencer radio station WVRC set up a live remote with their spin-to-win wheel. Door prizes were drawn every hour with winners receiving items ranging from a Walmart gift card to a weekend at North Bend Park.

Grants like Communities Putting Prevention to Work provide a driving force for creating healthier communities. To maximize their impact, however, communities need to use them with an eye toward building a legacy that provides a foundation for continuing the work. Change the Future WV is continuing its work through the vision it instilled, relationships it inspired, and resources developed, as well as strengthened accountability among organizations.

### Vision and Messaging

“This grant is a game changer,” said Amy Wentz Berner, project coordinator for Change the Future WV. It challenged people throughout the Mid-Ohio Valley to look at the problem of obesity through a wider lens and to experiment with systemic approaches that help make the healthy choice the easy choice. While each county and community developed their own priorities and action plans, they were linked by a common vision and messaging that supported the vision.

“Everybody sort of wants the same thing, they’re just going about it in different ways,” said Scott Eubank, a management team member and media director in the state Office of Community Health Systems and Health Promotion. “If people can pull together and move forward together, that’s when you really create change. We started doing that with Change the Future WV, and that’s very exciting.”

“Pulling together” is key for large multi-faceted projects such as Change the Future WV. It’s important for all of the project partners to agree on the basics of the approach (focusing on policy, systems and environmental change) and the main message (making the healthy choice the easy choice). It’s equally important to respect that partners are going to implement the approach and carry the message in a variety of ways, depending on each organization’s mission and circles of influence.

“When it comes to communications, it’s important to involve people from the areas that you’re working in from the beginning,” said Eubank. “And having multiple partnerships in and outside of government allows more freedom. We have to be very careful about what we do from within state government, and a lot of times if we’re using Facebook or Twitter it’s just the



*Change the Future WV used this “Food for Thought” design for newspaper and other advertising related to healthy eating. The message and imagery place the person in the context of her environment, emphasizing that the choices people make, in large part, hinge on the options available to them.*

standard messaging that goes out. But when you start working with partners that have Facebook pages and are supportive of your cause, you can create a much richer discussion, one that’s more local and like a real conversation.”

“Early and often” were key principles in the media strategy for Change the Future WV, which involved billboards, television and radio spots and newspaper ads, all of which used common messages and branding.

“The initial media campaign helped create awareness of the project, and I think getting it out there quickly gave us an edge,” said Eubank, “because when we started working in those communities there was already some brand awareness. We started with the edgy ‘Real Threat’ message about childhood obesity rates to get peoples’ attention, but that soon evolved into more positive aspects of change, like increasing access to healthy fruits

and vegetables and areas for kids to play. We emphasized solutions rather than dwelling on the problem.”

The grant provided resources for technical assistance, branding and paid advertising, but equally important was the work that county coordinators and coalitions did to frame stories and engage local media. Although media outlets are more limited in rural areas, they’re also more accessible and willing to use local press releases and cover local events.

“It was more the earned media, versus paid pieces, that got a lot of recognition and more buy-in from the community,” said Eubank. “When somebody is featured in the local paper a lot of people know them. We contacted the press to cover stories that highlighted changes, like the healthy checkout aisles at the Foodland stores. The owner, Jim Oppe, felt so strongly about it that he did this in his stores and has seen success with it. There’s no better advertisement than that.”

Social media – like Facebook and Twitter – presented both opportunities and challenges.

“Once we got into the social media, we became aware of the limitations in the rural areas of West Virginia,” said Eubank. “Many of those areas don’t have high-speed Internet. Many of those areas don’t really have data service on their telephones. So reaching them through Facebook and Twitter was a challenge, Twitter especially. When you got into the more rural counties you had maybe seven people who even had accounts. We still tied Facebook posts to our Twitter account in case people were following it, but we focused more on the Facebook aspect of it. As time went on, people started posting more

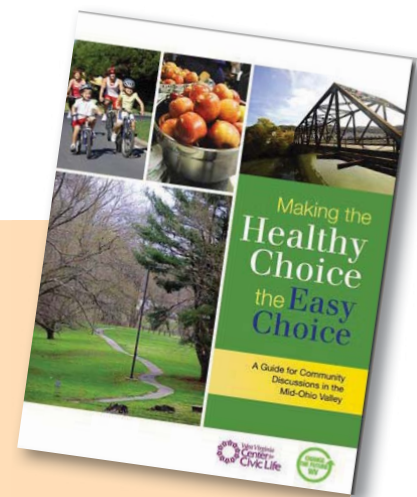
remarks on Facebook about what was going on in their communities.”

### Community Dialogues

Change the Future WV approached community engagement as much more than an ad campaign to educate or motivate people to support pre-determined activities. The staff and leadership knew they needed to engage community members as partners in the plans and actions needed to create healthier communities. These efforts included developing county coalitions and convening stakeholder forums on trail development. Change the Future WV also partnered with the West Virginia Center for Civic Life on community dialogues for the general public to talk together, propose and consider ideas for improving environments, and to help people get involved with county coalitions and other opportunities to work on the issue.

“When we’re talking about changing habitual patterns and behavior, people really need to think and talk about that with each other,” said Jean Ambrose, project coordinator with the West Virginia Center for Civic Life. “The more people understand an issue and the rationale behind proposed actions, the more likely those changes are going to be supported by the public and persist. It’s good for democratic governance, and it’s practical to bring people in early on and to keep an open process throughout to surface people’s ideas and concerns so they can be addressed.”

*Change the Future WV partnered with the West Virginia Center for Civic Life on community dialogues for the public to talk together about ways they could make the healthy choice the easy choice, collect and consider ideas for improving policies and environments, and help people get involved by linking them to county coalitions and other opportunities to work on the issue.*



In early 2011, a community discussion guide and a guide for discussion moderators were developed, and three moderator training sessions were held for the county coordinators and other volunteers. A series of fifteen community discussions were held across the region between July and September. Action planning meetings were held in each county in February 2012, which built on the many ideas that had been raised in the community discussions. During the meetings, the participants refined, prioritized, and structured plans and timelines for future work after the federal grant ended.

“In order for us to really understand each other we need to sit down and listen to each other,” said Ambrose. “We need to respect that everybody has a part of the truth, and that we can’t understand the truth unless we hear as many parts of it as we can. None of us has a monopoly on it. Over and over again I’ve seen people come together and decide they can make a difference. We don’t need to understand or agree on everything in order to find common ground and work together to improve our communities for ourselves and our kids.”

### **Setting Goals, Tracking Progress, Celebrating Success**

Change the Future WV started its work with the end clearly in mind. The management team created an overall Community Action Plan with nine measurable objectives that guided the work. These were consistent with the parameters of the federal Communities Putting Prevention to Work grant, and allowed flexibility for communities to design and implement local strategies aligned with those objectives. The project evaluators

were active members of the management team and worked with the members to identify the specific data to be tracked and how it would be tracked. They provided training to county coordinators and others who were charged with collecting the information.

Over time, the evaluators were able to compile and give the information back to communities, funders and others so people could see the progress being made, such as increases in the number and types of environments supporting healthy eating and active living.

The timeframe for the grant was short and the stakes were high, from the perspective of the management team. The members knew they needed a process to stay focused on their desired outcomes, track their progress and be accountable to each other. They decided to meet once a month for the duration of the grant. Carole Harris, one of the original evaluators, proposed an Action Registry to document and follow up on specific plans and commitments made at each meeting.

“I’ve worked in public health for a long time and funders always make you do work plans and action plans,” said Kristy Blower. “This was the first time that I realized how those plans can really make a group more successful, because we followed them, referred back to them and made sure we always stayed on target. You realize that those really can work if you use them right. But it takes a lot of work, and it takes somebody who is willing to constantly keep after it, constantly keep their eye on the ball. I give a lot of credit to Amy Berner for playing that role.”



*County coalition members participated in a debriefing held at the Parkersburg Country Club near the end of the grant, followed by a celebratory luncheon that included other community members and the media. County coordinators shared highlights and success stories and their hopes for the future.*



“One of the things that’s excited me most has been seeing the management team become more cohesive,” said John Yauch, the Bureau for Public Health’s director for the project. “There were some disagreements in the beginning, and the group didn’t mesh very well at that point. But each month, we got progressively better and more cohesive. Now, to me, it runs like a well oiled machine. I’m so proud of everyone involved in the project, the county coordinators especially.”

Changing systems is challenging, long-term work at every level. That is why it’s so important to recognize and celebrate milestones along the way, especially in communities. For example, sixty people from the six county coalitions came to a debriefing meeting held at the Parkersburg Country Club near the end of the grant, followed by a celebratory luncheon that included other community members and the media. County coordinators gave highlights and told stories of their success so far, and all expressed confidence that the work of the county coalitions would continue in some form in the future.

### **Growing and Strengthening Partnerships**

The activities of Change the Future WV involved different decision-makers at multiple levels. That made it critical for county coordinators, as well as members of the management team, to identify and foster those relationships.

Change the Future WV project coordinator, Amy Wentz Berner, acknowledged that a key component to implementation was identifying the key stakeholders with whom the team needed to work in order to make environmental improvements. “What’s the system that we have to work through here, and who are the decision-makers? Is it a store manager or is it the store owner? Does the farmers’ market have a farmers’ market board or is it an informal group of farmers that’s running it? At the concession stand level is it the food service organization, or do we actually have to go to the schools,” said Berner.

Berner also emphasized the importance of doing your research and being prepared, as well as being responsive to the other person’s perspective and ideas.

“Go into your meetings prepared with suggestions for changes, but always be ready to ask questions, listen and modify your plans to make sure that both partners are prepared to work on that same level for change,” she said. “View your partners in the fight against obesity as true partners. Everyone can help make a real difference in environmental and systems changes, even people that at the beginning we didn’t really see as partners.”

An early and obvious partner in the Mid-Ohio Valley was Sister Jane Harrington, who recently retired from her position as executive director of the Sisters of Saint Joseph Charitable Fund. She was the founding director of the regional foundation that includes the six counties served by the Communities Putting Prevention to Work grant.

“When I started at the foundation 15 years ago, the whole focus on healthy lifestyles was just getting started,” said Harrington. “One of the first people who came to us was the Wood County School Superintendent who believed that schools shared the responsibility for children’s health. I was startled – it was a new thought to me, and I’ve been in education for a long time. I also sat down with Dick Wittberg, the director of the Mid-Ohio Valley Health Department. He had great interest in this.”

Harrington agreed to serve on the leadership team for Change the Future WV and used that position to identify ways that the federal grant dovetailed with her own foundation, which has a mission of “healthy people, healthy communities.”

“I came to the [leadership] team with a strong commitment about community-based health and the role of communities, and understanding that it’s not just individual responsibility,” said Harrington. “But during the course of the grant, it took on flesh and bones, especially listening to the county coordinators who were talking about how local people were really developing a vision and a plan for their communities. You could almost close your eyes and see the map and all the little points of light that were popping up. You also saw that there was a pattern here and a way of trying to put that effort together in a way that would maximize the facilities and the resources that people had.

“During the grant we’ve used the term ‘connectivity’ to refer to linking trails, paths and roads that encourage walking, biking and hiking. The last thing you want to do is pave a bunch of things that don’t ever connect. For me, it’s also a metaphor for something bigger. It’s about more than roads. You don’t need efforts out there that are not connected.”

**“This project, over a couple years, has shown that it is possible to make a difference. We’re at a different point than we would have been without this focused effort.”**

*- Sister Jane Harrington  
Change the Future WV Leadership Team*

the grant really jump-started the whole thing. This project, over a couple years, has shown people that it is possible to make a difference. We’re at a different point than we would have been without this focused effort.

“The honest truth is we can slide down either side of the hill. We can go back or we can go forward. There are resources here that can enable people to continue, maybe not as intensively, but in a thoughtful, connected manner. These were countywide efforts, and they set a direction. Maybe some of those directions need to be tweaked. That’s fine. But, what we’ve got here is a lodestone. It’s too significant not to be a reference point for future work.”

Another important connection is the collaboration between the people involved with the Communities Putting Prevention to Work grant and the new Community Transformation Grant, both from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Some of the efforts begun under the first grant will be continued under the new grant, and the name of Change the Future WV will be retained. The Mid-Ohio Valley Health Department is one of four new grantees that, together, will cover the entire state.

At the county-level, Family Resource Networks, University Extension Offices and Boards of Education have been vital partners and will help continue this important work. In some cases, the Family Resource Networks, which facilitate collaboration among local health, human service and education agencies, have taken on the role of supporting the county Change the Future WV coalitions as one of their committees when funding for some of the coordinator positions ended. “I hope that whatever future efforts are made are built on and complementary to what’s happened in this grant,” said Harrington. “Because it was such a significant amount of funding, and because it was policy oriented,

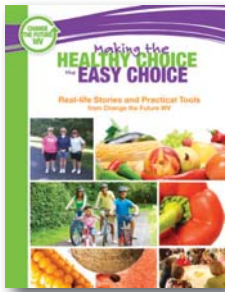


## Change the Future WV

### Additional Information from the Online Resource Center

Change the Future WV was launched in the Mid-Ohio Valley as part of a national initiative called Communities Putting Prevention to Work (CPPW). In 2010, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention awarded two-year grants to 50 communities, both urban and rural. The focus of West Virginia's grant was to reduce obesity through improvements in nutrition and physical activity. The strategy was to change policies, systems and environments in order to make the healthy choice the easy choice.

Change the Future WV continues to grow under the federal Community Transformation Grant and dovetails with many other efforts across the state. The online resource center is a portal to lessons learned from the CPPW grant, including the Making the Healthy Choice the Easy Choice resource guide, approaches and tools used in the Mid-Ohio Valley, and links to valuable information from other states and national organizations. There are a number of excellent resources available to communities who wish to create healthy environments for their residents. The resource guide provided here is meant to be a starting point.



## Making the Healthy Choice the Easy Choice:

### Real-life Stories and Practical Tools from Change the Future WV

September 2012

This 32-page guide is designed for people who want to improve opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity in their communities. It focuses on changing local environments in ways that make it easier for people to choose healthy options. The guide offers a broad range of perspectives from grassroots leaders, grocery store owners, trail designers, physical education teachers, public health officials, and health researchers.

## Additional Resources for Chapter 1

Go to: [www.changethefuturewv.org](http://www.changethefuturewv.org)

### Overview and Approach

Past attempts to reverse the obesity epidemic have focused primarily on changing individual behavior. Although individuals play a major role, it's difficult to engage in healthy behaviors if the environments in which we live, work and play don't support such actions. Change the Future WV widens the lens beyond individuals to include policy, systems and environmental change in order to make a real difference.

### Communities Putting Prevention to Work in WV and US

- Communities Putting Prevention to Work, a project of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Change the Future WV home page

### Strategies for Policy, Systems and Environmental Change

- ChangeLab Solutions (formerly Public Health Law & Policy)
- The Prevention Institute

### Building Local Coalitions (Source: Society for Public Health Education)

- Fact Sheet #1 – Before You Build Your Coalition
- Fact Sheet #2 – Coalition Formation Stage
- Fact Sheet #3 – Implementation Stage

- Fact Sheet #4 – Coalition Maintenance Stage
- Fact Sheet #5 – Coalition Institutionalization Stage

#### **Highlights of lessons learned in the Mid-Ohio Valley**

- Mid-Ohio Valley Communities Putting Prevention to Work Summary

### **Additional Resources for Chapter 2**

**Go to: [www.changethefuturewv.org](http://www.changethefuturewv.org)**

#### **Healthy Eating**

Change the Future WV spearheaded multiple and connected initiatives aimed at improving the food environment in the Mid-Ohio Valley. Project staff partnered with people in schools, grocery stores, convenience stores and farmers' markets to improve access to healthy and affordable food, particularly fresh fruits and vegetables.

#### **General Information About Changing the Food Environment**

- The Food Trust
- Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity
- *Economic Development and Redevelopment: A Toolkit for Building Healthy, Vibrant Communities* (ChangeLab Solutions)

#### **Grocery Stores and Convenience Stores**

- “Healthy Choices” promotional flyer for stores
- Sample Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between store and CTFWV
- “Eat Well, Play Well” Pledge
- Healthy Checkout Aisle Agreement
- Sample recipe card with nutrition labeling
- Sample “Thank You” ad to recognize participating stores
- *Harnessing the Power of Supermarkets to Help Reverse Childhood Obesity* (The Food Trust)
- *Delridge Healthy Corner Store Project: A Toolkit for Community Organizers & Storeowners*

#### **Farmers Markets**

- “Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) at Farmers Markets: A How-To Handbook,” a joint publication of USDA Agricultural Marketing Service, USDA Food and Nutrition Service, and Project for Public Spaces, Inc.
- Mid-Ohio Valley Board of Health Waivers for Farmers’ Markets (Permitting and Food Handling Cards)
- Interview with Bob and Lynnita Gregory, owners of Berea Gardens and recipients of a 2012 Innovative Sustainable Producers in West Virginia Award
- West Virginia Farmers Market Association
- West Virginia Food and Farm Coalition

#### **Breastfeeding**

- West Virginia Breastfeeding Alliance
- Colorado Can Do 5

#### **Healthy Schools**

- *West Virginia Standards for School Nutrition* (WV Department of Education)
- *Healthy Schools Toolkit* (The Food Trust)
- *Make a Difference at Your School!* (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
- *School Health Guidelines to Promote Healthy Eating and Physical Activity* (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

**Physical Activity and Education**

Change the Future WV has made significant strides in changing the landscape for physical activity in the six-county region. Key initiatives focused on increasing physical education; developing safe and connected routes for walking, hiking and biking; enhancing community parks and playgrounds; and sponsoring events to create momentum and encouragement for people to be more active.

**Physical Education and Activity in Schools**

- Physical Education Resolution: Template for County Boards of Education in WV
- Physical Education Resolution: Talking Points
- Physical Education Resolution: Bibliography of References
- Physical Education Resolution: Sample letter of support
- *Let's Move West Virginia – Active Schools Resource Guide*
- *Healthy Schools Toolkit* (The Food Trust)
- *Make a Difference at Your School!* (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
- *School Health Guidelines to Promote Healthy Eating and Physical Activity* (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

**Physical Activity in Communities**

- West Virginia Physical Activity Plan
- Online Physical Activity Magazine, with information on opportunities and events in West Virginia
- West Virginia Parks and Recreation Association
- National Parks and Recreation Association
- National Complete Streets Coalition
- *Fostering Physical Activity for Children and Youth: Opportunities for a Lifetime of Health* (Policy Link and Prevention Institute)
- *Increasing Active Living: A Guide for Policy-makers* (Leadership for Healthy Communities)
- KaBOOM!, a national non-profit dedicated to creating great play spaces for America's children
- BlazeSports, an national organization promoting sports and recreation opportunities for people with physical disabilities comparable to those provided non-disabled people

**Building a Legacy**

Grants like Communities Putting Prevention to Work provide a driving force for creating healthier communities. To maximize their impact, however, communities need to use such grants with an eye toward building a legacy that provides a foundation for continuing the work. Change the Future WV is continuing its work through the vision it instilled, relationships it inspired, and resources developed, as well as strengthened accountability among organizations.

**Communications Resources**

- Newspaper ads from Change the Future WV
- Sample Change the Future WV newsletter (Spring 2012)
- Facebook page
- *Making the Case for Community Prevention through Media Advocacy* (Prevention Institute)
- *Making the Case for Prevention Basic Messages for Health Departments* (Berkeley Media Studies Group)

### **Community Dialogue Resources**

- *Making the Healthy Choice the Easy Choice: A Guide for Community Discussions in the Mid-Ohio Valley* (Change the Future WV)
- West Virginia Center for Civic Life
- National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation
- *Principles of Community Engagement* (US Dept. of Health and Human Services)

### **Human Resources**

- CTFWV County Coordinator job description

### **Planning and Evaluation Resources**

- *Making the Case to Stakeholders: Linking Policy and Environmental Strategies to Health Outcomes* (YMCA of the USA)

### **Financial and Other Resources**

- *Obesity Prevention on a Budget: Low- and No-Cost Policy Options to Increase Healthy Eating and Active Living* (Leadership for Healthy Communities)



*For more information go to:*

**CHANGETHEFUTUREWV.ORG**

*or scan this QR code using your smartphone application*



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