



Strategic Innovation – the Healthy Living project

In the spring of 2008, Health Partners hosted an Obesity Summit to bring various community partner organizations together and jointly seek solutions to the developing obesity crisis in our community. The Department of Health facilitated a collaborative City / County government workshop of local leaders focusing on reducing obesity later that same year. One frustration expressed at both of these sessions was that organizational responses to obesity were so varied and complex, it was very challenging for any group trying to have an impact to actually stay connected to all of the different initiatives. The Obesity Summit participants called for some kind of understanding of what all the obesity prevention resources were. Organizational representatives sought some sort of connection to other groups so that they could create innovative partnerships, reduce duplication, and enhance their impact. These two obesity workshops in 2008 laid the groundwork for what became the Healthy Living Strategy Team in 2009 and the Healthy Living Network in 2010.

In October 2009, the Buncombe County Department of Health began to look closely at a strategy that might bring together the many obesity reduction efforts in the County around a shared plan. The purpose was to maximize the resources and energy necessary to achieve short and long-term health impact.

Strategy Team

From fall 2009 to spring 2010, a small group of volunteers invested significant time and energy learning and testing out a different way of conducting long-term problem solving. The Department of Health and Health Partners engaged Doc Klein, founder and CEO of Uncharted Territories, a national systems analysis consulting firm based in Asheville, to lead this work. Klein led the Strategy Team through a six month interactive process to identify all of the key pieces or systems that play a role in whether or not community members became overweight or obese. The group took a holistic approach by using a discipline called systems thinking to step back and see the whole system and test assumptions about what combination of interventions were necessary to achieve results. An organizational development grant was secured from the Community Foundation of Western North Carolina in late 2009 that enabled Klein to transition from a volunteer to a paid consultant. See Attachment A for a listing of Strategy Team members.

A number of key points emerged from this work based on both experience and the current the evidence-base:

- (1) Throughout American, our current approaches to weight loss management have had minimal impact in sustaining weight loss beyond the initial program time period



- (2) The focus on relieving obesity as a problem often creates shame and self-loathing for those whom were labeled obese, thus minimizing the desired actions
- (3) All populations can benefit from the behaviors that promote healthy weights
- (4) Healthy weights are influenced directly by caloric balance, which focused on type and quantity of calories into the body (inputs), how calories were burned (outputs) and the physiology of body.
- (5) A wide range of drivers or root causes influence caloric balance, such as the cultural choices around food and physical activity, the built environment, food production and costs, the amount of physical activity in the workplace/school environments, life stage, etc.

It should be noted that our surveillance system is not currently designed to measure all the things we feel are important to measure, but it was critical to create the story that we wished to grow into versus simply measure the things that were easy to measure as our goals.

The Healthy Living Strategy Team dedicated six months in 2009 and 2010 to understanding all of the pieces of Buncombe County life that impact a person's opportunities to make healthy choices. The Strategy Team turned away from the common tasks of identifying problems and looking for relatively quick solutions. Instead, the Healthy Living project focused on using health systems analysis to really understand why people make the decisions they do about activity and food. Only after the team could "see the whole system" would the Network begin the strategic work of changing the context of our community so that more people would have health choices available and would be able to take advantage of those opportunities.

Midway through the process, the group made an intentional decision to shift from **organizing their efforts to react to the problem** (obesity) to **focusing their attention on creating the good health they were striving towards**. In addition, based on input from wellness coaches and nutritionists, the Strategy Team changed to a process that would strive to create a community where all residents could live a healthy life – and not to simply focus on weight. The effort was re-named the Healthy Living project.

These insights emerged from our systems thinking approaches and were eventually translated into a map that allowed our stakeholders to see the bigger picture before diving into action. In addition to healthy weights, the map includes the outcomes of emotional and physical wellbeing, productivity, and body-fat to muscle ratios. The map also includes a visual of all the key drivers or root causes that influence the inputs and outputs of caloric balance and eventually the health outcomes. Many of these drivers already have various organizations engaged in finding solutions. The map is available on the Department of Health website at www.buncombecounty.org



The Healthy Living Network

Once the Strategy Team had identified all of the key actors in the system that enable community members to make healthy choices about being active and eating well, the Department of Health and Health Partners sought to engage partners and community members in the longer-term work of making system changes a reality. The Strategy Team conceived of creating a network that would serve to:

- Create new opportunities or expand existing ones so that residents could eat smart, move more, and live better.
- Connect partners and community members in creative ways to take action that improves physical activity and healthy eating.
- Keep us all connected to the “big picture” of how our various activities can collectively move us toward a more healthy community.
- Break down silos that stifle innovation, keep us focused on our own turf, and lead to duplication of efforts and services.
- Measure health and well-being outcomes for decades to come. Celebrate our successes and make changes when needed.

The Healthy Living Network is essentially an experiment in trying to create a healthy living movement by focusing efforts in the community in a concerted way, while still allowing those who have diverse interests to be involved.

It is also clear that duplication of services sometimes creates a competitive atmosphere concerning funding and resources. The Healthy Living Network will hopefully direct stakeholders to thinking deeply about what contributions are needed and foster a spirit of cooperation towards our desired health goals.

Lastly, any new networks that emerge to address specific areas of need must coordinate their efforts in order to succeed. The Healthy Living Network is a starting place for building Buncombe County’s public health capacity and tapping into the many diverse gifts and talents of its residents and organizations.

The Healthy Living Network was launched at a Healthy Living Summit in April of 2010. Over 90 participants spent the day learning about health systems analysis, coming to understand the map of the Healthy Living System that the Strategy Team had created, and identifying which piece of the system each of them wanted to focus on improving. The Summit was designed to harness the energy organizational partners already had around addressing and improving different pieces of the system. By the end of the day, seven specific system issues had been identified and small group brainstorming had begun. Groups were charged with continuing to gather, defining what specific system change innovations they would promote, and beginning to align their work so that these innovations could be implemented and succeed.



Defining leverage

The key task of the Healthy Living Network is find ways to achieve systems changes that will enable more Buncombe County residents to lead healthy, high-quality lives. It is NOT to create more programs and services. One key learning of health systems analysis is to identify and focus on leverage points. Points of leverage are those specific actions, policies, or experiments that offer an opportunity to create system changes that will have broad impact. One of the Healthy Living Network teams took on the task of creating a set of criteria to define “leverage” in the Buncombe County Healthy Living context. Five criteria to use when considering which actions to be taken were identified. The criteria are:

- Is the action doable?
- What is the scope and scale of impact?
- Is it equitable?
- Is there ripeness of opportunity?
- Do local assets exist to make this action materialize?

See Appendix D to review the Leverage Equation that all teams in the Network now use when selecting a specific system change to focus on. If the proposed action does not address each and every one of these questions, it will not be selected to move forward.

Healthy Living Network Teams

Seven teams were created at the Healthy Living Summit in April 2010 to address causes or “drivers” of healthy living in Buncombe County. We are fortunate in Buncombe County to have many talented individuals and organizations working to address health and wellness. However, these efforts are often fragmented and duplication of effort is common. The goal of the Healthy Living Network is help make connections so that across the community, we can work smarter, reduce duplication of effort, identify key partners and better address critical gaps.

To date, the seven teams created the day of the Healthy Living Summit have had varying levels of success. A key lesson learned is that fostering the work and impact of the teams requires on-going staffing and cultivation.

The Physical Activity Team

The Healthy Living Network Physical Activity Team was formed to develop a strategy to increase physical activity in Buncombe County. The team has chosen to do this by creating a communication and encouragement strategy that will roll out in one neighborhood as a pilot project in 2011. Key goals are:

- To increase the awareness in communities of the many existing parks, open spaces and greenways nearby for physical activity and
- To provide support to engage community members and encourage them to use these spaces.

Initially, a single neighborhood or area will be identified and will receive focused attention. We then hope this approach can be replicated across the county in both rural and urban areas.

The Opportunities for Physical Activity – Built Environment Team

The Healthy Living Network Built Environment Team was formed to develop a strategy to create opportunities for physical activity through policy and environmental change strategies. Streets designed



solely for the automobile deny people the opportunity to choose more active ways to get around, such as walking and biking. *Complete streets policies* ensure that transportation planners and engineers consider all users in transportation design - including bicyclists, pedestrians of all ages and abilities as well as public transportation users. This team has chosen to address this by providing support to Buncombe County municipalities to enact *Complete Streets Policies*.

Access to Whole, Healthy Foods Team

This team was created to develop a strategy to improve community-wide nutrition by increasing access to whole, healthy foods. The team was challenged with multiple scheduling issues after the April Summit. Several strategies are currently being explored with individual organizations and we anticipate forming a team in early 2011.

Nutrition Team

This team was created to develop a strategy that would encourage Buncombe County residents to consider altering the way they eat and to include more fresh, whole foods in their diet. To date, team members have been exploring strategies for supporting gardening as an activity that allows community members to grown their own healthy food.

Health Systems Team

This team was formed to develop a strategy that would promote a systemic integration of encouragement of physical activity and good nutrition into clinical medical encounters. A number of health care providers have joined the team and team members are focusing on developing strategies that will:

- 1. Ensure that local child and adult focused medical practices include age-appropriate Body Mass Index calculations as a part of clinical visits, and
- 2. That health care providers actually consider the BMI when making recommendations to the patient.

Social and Economic Factors Team

After creating the leverage equation, members of this team have been unable to devote the time to continue their efforts.

Personal Motivation Team

This team was designed to focus on creating a strategy to offer standard best-practices concerning how to motivate and support community members, clients and patients to adopt health lifestyle behaviors. Due to scheduling challenges, this team is not far along in its deliberations.

Network Directory

A clear need emerged in the development of the Healthy Living Network to create a mechanism that would foster partnerships, enable community organizations to work together more efficiently, and to prevent duplication. The Healthy Living Network Directory being created will be an on-line tool that will address this need. It is important to note that this is not a directory of services, but a tool to enhance networking and strategic partnerships. The Directory is currently under development with an anticipated launch date in early 2011. This user-friendly electronic directory will be housed on the Buncombe County Department of Health website.



Data collection for the directory began with the Healthy Living Summit in April 2010 and has been promoted and circulated to organizations throughout the county. Currently, 74 organizations have created network profiles to be included in the directory. Organizations, volunteer groups, and institutions are able to create a profile and identify which of the topics and key words below relate to issues they are already working to address and/or would like to create new partnerships around.

The Directory will include the following focus areas with related key word search capability that will enable identification of more detailed information on the practice or service areas each organizations' addresses:

- **Nutrition / healthy food.** Keywords: Cost of Food, Amount of Food, Quality/Safety of Food, Food Production/Distribution, Healthy Eating Experience, Knowledge, and Skills
- **Opportunities to be physically active.** Keywords: Amount of Leisure Time, Access to Safe/Quality Places to Exercise, Parks and Green Spaces, Workplace Activity, Physical Activity Experience, Knowledge, and Skills
- **Individual behavior.** Keywords: Mindsets, Goal Setting/Assessment, Cultural Traditions, Stress/Sleep, Mental Health, Independent Living Skills
- **Health systems.** Keywords: Outpatient Education and Support, Health Promotion, Health Care and Prevention Capacity, Access and Coordination of Care, Costs and Quality of Care
- **Community context / social and economic factors.** Keywords: Graduation Levels, Educational Attainment, Built Environment, Family/Community Support, Housing, Livable Wage, Income Stability, Equal Opportunity, Networks

Organizations also use their profile to further clarify the types of activities they are engaged in including:

- Education of individuals
- Community education and/or organizing
- Direct advocacy with leaders
- Teaching / coordinating advocacy efforts among community members/ clients
- Policy development
- Assistance to organizations
- Assistance to families
- Assistance to individuals
- Strategic partnership development
- Clinical services

When the Healthy Living Network Directory is created, it will be a tool that organizations as well as individual community members will be able to use to seek out new partners or organizations with similar interests. The Directory will allow a wide variety of groups and organizations to easily connect with each other and will bypass the current need for knowledgeable people to connect those they happen to know about who might like to try working together.



Healthy living opportunities web map

Though Buncombe County and its communities offer a wealth of opportunities to be active and to eat well, few residents or organizations are aware of all the supports for healthy living that already exist. The Department of Health and Health Partners brought together a team of GIS experts and health volunteers to create an on-line map application that could be used to connect residents with opportunities for being physically active and eating well. This team met for nine-months to create a prototype of the Buncombe County Healthy Living Opportunities Map.

The Map team brought together GIS experts, medical professionals, neighborhood advocates, and community volunteers. Together, this diverse group created an inventory of local resources that could be co-located in one web application. The map will be launched to the community in early 2011.

Current resources available on the map are:

- Sidewalks
- County and City Parks and all of the amenities in each park (so a resident can search only by tennis courts, or example or only by basketball courts)
- Greenways and trail networks
- Bike routes
- Full Service grocery stores and discount stores – provided through a research project of the UNC Asheville Department of Health and Wellness. Students and interns surveyed over 50 local grocery stores using the Nutritional Environments Monitoring Survey, a tool available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The survey instrument provides a score for grocery stores based on the fruits and vegetables they have available and also assesses the availability of low fat or healthier options to common items such as milk, hot dogs, soda, and bread.
- Farmers markets and tailgate markets
- Bus routes and Mountain Mobility routes

Additional layers to be added include:

- Food bank food distribution sites
- Community Gardens
- If volunteer labor can be identified, UNC Asheville is interested in implementing the Convenience Store version of the Nutritional Environments Monitoring Survey in 2011 or 2012.

A training session will be developed and offered to local medical practices, non-profit organization, and employers so they can engage their patients, clients and employees in using the map to link to local resources for being active and eating well.