

Healthier Together Calhoun Annual Evaluation Report 2019-2020 Executive Summary



Purpose

The primary goal for the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) High Obesity Program is to increase access to healthy foods and physical activity in communities with adult obesity rates over 40%. The Healthier Together Calhoun (HTC) community coalition was formed in 2018. The goals of the HTC coalition are to increase physical activity opportunities and healthy food access within Calhoun county.

Goal of the Evaluation

The goal of this evaluation was to gain an understanding of the direct and indirect community impacts of the HTC coalition work through phone interviews with HTC coalition members. A review of interview responses and a detailed results section can be found in the full report.

Methods Used

The evaluation team conducted evaluation assessments using an appreciative approach to determine HTC progress in Year 2. One-on-one phone interviews with 13 of the 32 HTC coalition members were conducted and analyzed using qualitative content analysis to determine:

- Each member's personal role in the coalition;
- The impact of COVID-19 on HTC coalition efforts;
- Changes in community physical activity, nutrition policy, and healthy food consumption resulting from HTC efforts;
- Community acceptance of HTC initiatives; and
- Future visioning and support for the HTC.

Results

It is important to acknowledge COVID-19 has impacted planned project implementation and evaluation procedures. However, despite the obstacles presented by COVID-19, the HTC coalition and evaluation team continues to make progress consistent with the original proposed timeline.

Four topic areas were addressed specifically in the interview process: food access, physical activity, overall impact, and future impact and visioning. Themes emerged based on interview participant responses within these four overarching topics:

Food access covered the development and maintenance of *community gardens* and *Grab-n-Go coolers*. Both project components were viewed positively by participants.



Figure 1: Arlington Community Garden.

Within **physical activity**, participants described the successful installation and use of *walking trails*, exercise equipment, and *destinations* for physical activity (walking, playing, etc.). For the **overall impact** of the project, interview participants described its *positive impact*, how HTC *brings the community together*, the *personal impact* of HTC on coalition members, general *community acceptance*, and the *ripple effects* of HTC on other counties and communities.

For **future impact and visioning**, participants expressed the desire for a *healthier community*, a *hope to continue the work* of HTC, an *expansion of current projects*, and a *greater sense of community* resulting from HTC.

Recommendations

1. **Increase targeted efforts** with community members in most need but least involved with HTC's work. To assist in this effort, emphasis should be placed on:
 - a. Increasing communication strategies beyond social media and local papers.
 - b. Including more activities within the school, churches, and other neighborhood groups.
2. **Plan for sustained sources of funding** beyond the CDC cooperative agreement with the Healthier Together project. Increased communication and outreach to local officials and county and state agencies could increase opportunities for community partners.
3. **Expand the community gardens** installed and create more within the county to increase healthy food access in the communities. These efforts would benefit from targeting community groups not currently involved with HTC.
4. **Increase the number and quality of walking trails** in the community to further increase physical activity within the county. Community feedback has been overwhelmingly positive.
5. **Build on strengths revealed through COVID-19:**
 - a. Community gardens offered an alternative source of food during the early months of the pandemic. Thus, increasing community garden production could enhance community resilience in preparation for future public health crises.
 - b. HTC coalition members could use COVID-19 social distancing as an opportunity to advertise outdoor exercise opportunities provided by the walking trails as a way to increase safe, socially distanced community activity and exercise.
 - c. Using the sense of togetherness enhanced by COVID-19, established in part by the work of HTC, HTC can act on this momentum and positive impact of the project to reach into new sectors of the community which may not have been motivated to participate in HTC projects prior.