

# Healthier Together Stewart 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 Stewart (HTS) community coalition was formed in 2018. The goals of the HTS coalition are to increase physical activity opportunities and healthy food access within Stewart county.

## Goal of the Evaluation

The goal of this evaluation was to gain an understanding of the direct and indirect community impacts of the HTS coalition work through phone interviews with HTS 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 HTS progress in Year 2. One-on-one phone interviews with six HTS 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 HTS coalition efforts;
- Changes in community physical activity, nutrition policy, and healthy food consumption resulting from HTS efforts;
- Community acceptance of HTS initiatives; and
- Future visioning and support for the HTS.

## 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 HTS 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:



*Figure 1: Richland community garden.*

**Food access** covered the development and maintenance of a *Grab-n-Go cooler*. Two *community gardens* were established and community members showed more interest in eating healthy food from the garden.

Within **physical activity**, participants described developing a *walking trail plan*, the creation and posting of *wayfinding signs*, and *park additions*. There are plans for more changes in the parks next year, but some plans were delayed due to COVID-19.

For the **overall impact** of the project, interview participants described how it *brought the community together*, increased *healthy food access* within the community, increased *walking*, and general *community acceptance* of these projects, despite the slow progress due to various obstacles and challenges, including COVID-19. **Obstacles** included limited success working with stores for GGCs, difficulty recruiting volunteers, and separations between White and Black community groups.

For **future impact and visioning**, participants expressed a desire to *diversify coalition membership*, continue *bringing the community together*, and for an overall *healthier community*.



Figure 2: Lumpkin walkability signage.

## Recommendations

1. Continue working on the desired goals of the community. There are a few projects that were delayed due to COVID-19 and project momentum has suffered, delaying the already slow process of systematic change. This includes implementing the walking trail plans and signage, more additions to the park, and expanding community gardens.
2. Strategize how to further work with stores and create partnerships to increase the success of the GGCs.
  - a. Why do store owners not want to implement the GGCs?
  - b. What would make them more interested in putting GGCs in the stores?
3. Consider finding a way to link the community gardens to the larger food system of the county or communities they are in.
  - a. Can excess produce from a garden be sold at the GGCs?
  - b. Could any of these profits fund plants and soil for next season's garden?
4. Based on the hesitancy of some community members taking garden produce if they had not volunteered, it is recommended that HTS more clearly advertise their process for distributing food into the community. These communication messages should include the following content:
  - a. Who is eligible to receive or take produce from the garden?

- b. How can they access this produce?
  - c. What produce is available in the garden?
- 5. Expand beyond the current communication efforts to bring both new community leaders and younger community members to the coalition. By increasing communications to the public, the coalition can share progress, updates, and requests, as well as garner interest in the program from residents of Stewart County.
- 6. Recruitment efforts should focus on building partnerships and relationships with other leaders from non-involved communities within the county. This extended recruitment could encourage more involvement by these groups within the community. Strategic partnerships are critical for increasing involvement and engagement with HTS.
  - i. Representation is key to buy-in for non-involved communities. To increase non-involved membership, especially with younger community members, it is important to determine who are the influential leaders within these communities.
    - 1. Who are the leaders with influence within this community? Not all influential people within the community are traditional or typical leaders.
    - 2. Finding these influencers will be crucial to attract younger members of the community to become involved with HTS.