

2021-2022



## **Healthier Together Stewart Annual Evaluation Report**

Catherine Sanders, Saher Dossani, Tatevik Markosyan, Dr. Alexa Lamm,  
& Dr. Alison Berg

## Suggested Citation

Sanders, C., Dossani, S., Markosyan, T., Lamm, A., Berg, A. (2022). Healthier Together Stewart Annual Evaluation Report. Athens, GA: University of Georgia College of Public Health, College of Family and Consumer Sciences, and College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences.

## About the Authors

**Catherine Sanders, M.S.** – Doctoral Research Assistant in the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communication in the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences.

**Tatevik Markosyan** – Doctoral Student and Evaluation Research Assistant in the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communication in the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences.

**Saher J. Dossani** – Undergraduate Research Assistant, Department of Health Promotion in the College of Public Health.

**Alexa Lamm, Ph.D.** – Professor in the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communication in the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences.

**Alison Berg, Ph.D.** – Associate Professor, Extension Nutrition and Health Specialist in the Department of Foods and Nutrition, College of Family and Consumer Sciences.

## Acknowledgments

The evaluation team would like to recognize the following people, whose support and assistance made this data collection possible.

**Hannah Southall, MPH** – Project Manager, College of Public Health

**Heather Padilla, Ph.D.** – Principle Investigator; Assistant Professor & Director, College of Public Health

**Andera Scarrow** – Southwest District Director, University of Georgia Extension

**Rachel Hubbard** – Program Development Coordinator, FACS, University of Georgia Extension Southwest District

**Christie Walton** – Healthier Together Program Assistant, University of Georgia Extension Southwest District

**Christina Garner** – FACS County Extension Coordinator, University of Georgia Stewart County Extension

**Blair Harris** – 4-H County Extension Program Assistant, University of Georgia Stewart County Extension

## Funding Acknowledgement

Funding for this project was provided through the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) High Obesity Program cooperative agreement, CDC-RFA-DP18-1809.

**Contents**

Suggested Citation .....2

About the Authors .....2

Acknowledgments.....2

Funding Acknowledgement.....2

Background.....4

Methods .....4

    Community Survey.....4

    Focus Group .....6

Results .....6

    Survey Results.....6

        Food Access and Nutrition.....6

        Physical Activity .....7

        HT Participation .....8

HT Interventions.....9

    Focus Group Results .....9

        Food Access .....9

*Community Gardens*.....9

*Grab-n-Go Cooler*.....10

        Physical Activity .....10

*Walking Signage* .....10

*Park Enhancements* .....10

Overall Impact .....10

Future Impact and Visioning .....11

Recommendations .....11

## Background

Healthier Together Stewart (HTS) is a project funded through a cooperative agreement with the Centers for Disease Control (CDC)'s High Obesity Program, and implemented by University of Georgia Cooperative Extension. The goals of the cooperative agreement include increasing access to healthy foods and physical activity in communities with adult obesity rates over 40%. The grant was awarded in September 2018 and continues through September 2023. This evaluation of the program will cover activities completed in Year 3, from September 2021 through September 2022, in Stewart County, Georgia.

In order to gain local expertise and input, a Healthier Together Stewart Coalition was formed with county leaders and stakeholders in Stewart County. Project staff and coalition members worked together to establish impactful projects that were appropriate for Stewart County communities. These projects included a Grab-n-Go Cooler, sidewalk repairs, and community gardens.

An evaluation of the HTS project was initiated in May 2022 to assess how the project was working, to determine whether HTS was achieving its intended goals, and to identify successes and opportunities for growth through an appreciative evaluation lens. Despite setbacks from COVID-19, the results presented here demonstrate the impact HTS has had on Stewart County.

## Methods

One of the evaluation goals was to gain an understanding of the direct and indirect community impacts of the HTS coalition work. To achieve this goal, the evaluation team conducted a survey with community members and a focus group with coalition members in Stewart County.

## Community Survey

Questions for the community survey asked participants where they purchased or consumed food, which HTS resources they used (including Grab-n-Go Coolers and walking trails), eating habits for themselves and their families, transportation habits, physical activity habits, and various demographic questions. The community survey was disseminated in Stewart County by project staff members in popular locations. A total of 48 paper surveys were collected. Participating community members were asked to self-identify their demographic characteristics, presented in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Demographics of Community Member Survey Respondents (N = 48)*

Demographic	F	%	
Gender	Female	32	66.7
	Male	13	27.1
	No response	3	6.3
Ethnicity/Race	Black/ African American	26	54.2
	White, Non-Hispanic	19	39.6
	Hispanic/Latino	1	2.1
	Asian/Pacific Islander	0	0.0

Age	American Indian/ Alaskan Native	0	0.0
	Other	0	0.0
	65 or older	8	16.6
	35-44	8	16.9
	55-64	7	14.6
	45-54	5	10.4
	25-34	5	10.4
	18-24	0	0.0
Marital Status	No response	15	31.2
	Married	30	62.5
	Single	10	20.8
	Widowed	3	6.3
	Divorced	1	2.1
	Living with a partner/ Not married	2	2.1
	No response	3	6.3
Number of Children under 18 Living in Home	0	22	45.8
	2	16	33.3
	1	2	4.2
	3	2	4.2
	4	1	2.1
	5 or more	1	2.1
	No response	4	8.3
	Some college	15	31.3
Level of Education	High School/ GED	15	31.3
	Bachelor's Degree	7	14.6
	Associate's Degree	6	12.5
	Less than high school	3	6.3
	Graduate Degree (Masters, Doctorate)	1	2.1
	No response	1	2.1
	SNAP Benefits in Home	No	33
Yes	14	29.2	
WIC Benefits in Home	No response	1	2.1
	No	35	72.9
	Yes	12	25.0
Employment Status	No response	1	2.1
	Full-time	23	47.9
	Retired	11	22.9
	Unemployed, not looking for work	6	12.5
	Part-time	5	10.4
	Unemployed, looking for work	1	2.1
	Student	0	0.0
No response	1	2.1	

## Focus Group

In May 2022, a focus group occurred with HTS coalition members in the Richland Garden. The evaluation team developed a moderator guide designed to explore coalition impacts member on physical activity, nutrition policy, and healthy food changes within the community, community acceptance, and future visioning and support. The focus group was audio recorded and transcribed. One member of the evaluation team then analyzed the transcripts for patterns in the interview transcript data, or dominant themes, looking for common ideas in the responses. To ensure the trustworthiness of the results, themes and direct quotations were used to develop a codebook as part of an audit trail and analyzed by an evaluation team member who had not conducted the focus group. This report describes the major themes emerging from the focus group data obtained in partnership with HTS coalition members in 2022.

## Results

### Survey Results

During 2022, the Healthier Together staff distributed community surveys throughout Stewart County. Results from the surveys are presented below.

### Food Access and Nutrition

Community members were asked to describe how they accessed food in the community and their perceptions of their eating habits over the past year. Table 2 depicts where community members in Stewart County get food.

**Table 2**

Locations where Respondents (N = 48) Get Food in	F	%
Grocery Store (outside county)	34	70.8
Grocery Store (inside county)	33	68.8
Dollar Stores	23	47.9
Farmers Market	15	31.3
Sit down/Full service restaurant	14	30.6
Home garden	13	27.1
Gas Stations/Convenience Stores	13	27.1
Online stores	6	12.5
Community Garden	6	12.5
Other	3	6.3
Food Bank/Pantry	2	4.2
Senior Meal Site	1	0.2
Church/Community Organization	1	0.2
Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Program	0	0.0

Respondents were asked to indicate if they had used the Richland Community Garden in the past year, and 13 respondents (27.1%) said they had used it. When asked how often they used the Lumpkin Teaching Garden in the past year, 14 respondents (29.2%) indicated they had used the garden. When respondents were asked if

they had used the Community Center Garden in the past year, five respondents (10.4%) expressed that they had used it. The results are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3**  
*Food Resource Use in Stewart County (N = 48)*

<b>Food Resource</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>
Richland Community Garden	13	27.1
Lumpkin Teaching Garden	14	29.2
Community Center Garden	5	10.4

Respondents were also asked to describe their eating habits over the past year. 25 (52.1%) said they eat healthier food than they did last year, 20 (41.7%) said they eat the same kind of food as they did last year, and two respondents (4.2%) said they eat less healthy food than they did last year. One person (2.1%) did not respond.

When asked the same question a past year, 23 (47.9%) said their family ate healthier food than they did last year, 22 (45.8%) said their family eats the same kind of food as they did last year, and one respondent (2.1%) said their family eats less healthy food than they did last year. Two people (4.2%) did not respond. Table 4 provides self-reported and family eating habits over the past year.

**Table 4**  
*Respondent and Family Eating Habits over the Last Year (N = 48)*

<b>Eating Habits</b>	<b>Self-Report</b>		<b>Family</b>	
	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
Eats healthier food than last year	25	52.1	23	47.9
Eats the same	20	41.7	22	45.8
Eats less healthy	2	4.2	1	2.1
No response	1	2.1	2	4.2

**Physical Activity**

There are two physical activity interventions in Stewart County: signs in Lumpkin indicating how far it takes to walk from one location to another and signs in Richland indicating how far it takes to walk from one location to another. When asked which they had used over the past year, 14 respondents (29.2%) said they used the signs in Lumpkin and 14 (29.2%) said they used the signs in Richland. Table 5 provides the responses.

**Table 5**  
*Physical Activity Resource Use in Stewart County (N = 48)*

<b>Physical Activity Resource</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>
Signs in Lumpkin	14	29.2
Signs in Richland	14	29.2

Respondents were asked to describe their physical activity habits over the past year. Activities could include walking, riding bicycles, gardening, or going to the gym, among others. A total of 18 (37.5%) participants said they were more physically active than they were last year, 23 (47.9%) said they did the same amount of physical activity they did last year, and five respondents (10.4%) said they were less physically active than they were last year. Two individuals (4.2%) did not provide a response.

When asked the same question about their family, 18 respondents (37.5%) said their family was more physically active than they were last year, 27 (56.3%) said their family did the same amount of physical activity as they did last year, and two respondents (4.2%) said their family was less physically active than they were last year. One respondent (2.1%) did not provide a response. Table 6 provides self-reported and family physical activity habits over the past year.

**Table 6**  
*Respondents' Self-Reported and Family Physical Activity Habits over the Last Year (N = 48)*

Physical Activity Habits	Self-Report		Family	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
More physically active than last year	18	37.5	18	37.5
Same amount of physical activity	23	47.9	27	56.3
Less physical activity	5	10.4	2	4.2
No response	2	4.2	1	2.1

Community members were asked to describe their transportation and physical activity habits over the past year. Table 7 depicts how community members in Stewart County use transportation.

**Table 7**  
*Form of Transportation for Respondents in Stewart County (N = 48)*

Form of Transportation	<i>F</i>	%
Drive Self	44	91.6
Walk	10	20.8
Driven by Someone Else	6	12.5
Bicycle	1	2.1
Other	1	2.1
Taxi/Uber/Lyft	0	0.0

**HT Participation**

Community members were asked whether they had heard of the Healthier Together program. 25 respondents (52.1%) said they had heard of HT before. A total of 22 respondents (45.8%) said they had not heard of HT before. One respondent (2.1%) was unsure. Table 8 presents how those who responded yes had heard of Healthier Together. Other responses were the library in Richland, [walkability] signs, and CDC Rollout.

**Table 8**  
*Awareness of Healthier Together Stewart (N = 48)*



Methods	F	%
Extension	10	20.8
Family Connections	9	18.8
Newspaper	8	16.7
Social Media	8	16.7
Word of mouth	7	14.6
Flyer in my community	6	12.5
Lumpkin Teaching Garden	6	12.5
Community Center Teaching Garden	6	12.5
This survey	6	12.5
Richland Community Garden	5	10.4
Healthier Together website	3	6.3
Other	3	6.3

Community members were also asked whether they consider themselves a member of the HTS Coalition. A total of 19 respondents (39.6%) said they did consider themselves a part of the coalition, 15 respondents (31.3%) said they did not consider themselves part of the coalition, and 13 respondents (27.1%) were unsure. One person (2.1%) did not respond.

## HT Interventions

Community members were asked if any of the HTS project food resources helped them eat healthier over the past year. The responses are presented in Table 9.

**Table 9**

*Effects of Resource Use in Stewart County (N = 48)*

Food Resource	F	%
Lumpkin Teaching Garden	18	37.5
Richland Community Garden	11	22.9
Community Center Garden	7	14.6

Regarding physical activity, 15 respondents (31.3%) reported that the signs in Lumpkin helped them engage in more physical activity, while 12 respondents (25.0%) reported that the signs in Richland helped them engage in more physical activity.

## Focus Group Results

A summary of the major themes that emerged from the focus group data is presented below.

### Food Access

HTS currently hopes to increase food access in the community through the implementation and maintenance of community gardens and Grab-n-Go Coolers to increase healthy food retail options.

### Community Gardens

There are currently three community gardens established in Stewart County: the **Richland Community Garden** and the **Lumpkin Health Center Garden**, and the **Cooperative Extension Garden**. Gardens were cited as a way to increase access to fresh vegetables in the community:

Sometimes you go in the grocery store and they're not the freshest. I've had people come up to me and just say, "They taste different. They taste better. You can taste the difference from buying it in the grocery store versus out of the garden." And to me, they do taste different.

The community garden located at the Cooperative Extension building was described as a great way to get youth involved in gardening. On the kids come to the teaching garden and play in the dirt, and pull up the plants as we put the plants in." The Richland garden also in a participant observed how "some of my neighbors, after gardens on their side yard."

One challenge, however, was described as difficulty getting garden participation by community members. Compared to 2021, there was "good participation from a group of people just do what you can when you can do it [...] I think we

### *Grab-n-Go Cooler*

The Grab-n-Go Cooler (GGC) at **Lumpkin City Hall** closed down during 2022. The cooler was used to hold ready-to-eat healthy meals and snacks.

### *Physical Activity*

The availability of exercise opportunities at the beginning of HTS was fairly limited. To encourage community members to engage in physical activity, the HTS coalition focused on providing walking signage describing the distances between everyday locations in town to encourage more walking in the community. Additionally, HTS also aimed to establish more walking trails in the community as well as enhancing local parks. The College of Environment and Design at the University of Georgia also developed plans to enhance physical activity across everyday destinations in Stewart County.

### *Walking Signage*

A main physical activity project for HTS was putting up walking signage around the county. Even though Stewart County was described by participants as a walking community due to a lack of transportation, HTS coalition members said, "people do use the walking more."

Though HTS has established the Lumpkin Park Walking trail, few people reported using the trail. Participating coalition members also reported a lack of walking trails in the county rather than impacts from those currently installed. Thus, there is a need for increased advertisement to enhance the impact of this project intervention, as well as logistical assistance to establish more walking trails:

It takes equipment to really build a good walking trail. Well, we're just little volunteers. I don't even own a push mower. But when you're dealing in a small community, rural communities, they don't even have the equipment to do this.

### *Park Enhancements*

HTS is helped enhance Oak Street Park and the park on Highway 27 through adding new basketball goals. One participant explained, "there's probably no time that you go by to hope to enhance other parks in the community to utilize green space available in the city to increase physical activity."

### *Overall Impact*

Coalition members were asked questions to determine the overall impact of the HTS project within their community. Coalition members described various positive impacts of HTS on the community in Stewart County. One coalition

member described the **increased exercise in the community**, specifically from walking signage placed by HTS. The community gardens also helped **increased access to nutritious and affordable food locally**. Currently, HTS is attempting to partner with food banks and pantries to extend the distribution of produce from the community gardens in broader county-level food systems. Faithful Families is one partnership currently being pursued and remains a key focus for the project moving into year 5.

## Future Impact and Visioning

Coalition members were asked what their ideal vision was for what the coalition has accomplished in three years, and what needed to be done to achieve that vision. All participating coalition members wanted **current success to continue**, including **new gardens throughout the community**. This concept related to the sustainability of the project, specifically through **increased youth involvement** in HTS. One method for increasing youth participation was strengthening partnerships with the school, including **nutrition education** and a **school garden**.

## Recommendations

Based on survey and focus group results, along with specific suggestions from HTS coalition members regarding next steps for the project, the evaluation team has provided several recommendations for the HTS project.

1. Brainstorm alternative methods of increasing healthy food access in Stewart County.
  - a. Continue current plans to move the Grab-n-Go Cooler to a retail space.
  - b. Consider exploring retail options for the distribution of fresh produce in the community, potentially through a farmer's market. The development and connecting with local farms and a strong organizational structure, as well as specific plans for maintaining supply to the market. A mobile market may be an alternative option.
  - c. Expand advertising of the community gardens to increase impact.
  - d. Supply future Grab-n-Go Coolers with produce from the community gardens.
2. Consider providing information signage at the community gardens. One coalition member suggested having contact information of a garden lead so garden visitors know who to reach out to for questions.
  - a. This could also capture the existing community interest in the garden that could be capitalized on for community garden growth and outreach.
  - b. Create physical signage to post at the gardens, with reusable lettering to update signage with available harvest.
3. Advertise the Lumpkin Park Trail. Use outreach efforts or events to gather community members at the trail to promote its use.
4. Assist community members with plans to enhance existing green spaces in Stewart County.
5. Expand beyond the current communication efforts to bring new community leaders and younger community members to the coalition.
  - a. Increase communication to the public in Stewart County. Share progress and updates regularly with visuals to garner interest in the availability of new physical spaces and food access points to residents of Stewart County.
  - b. Distribute advertisements to local restaurants and retail establishments, either through fliers or posters.
  - c. Ensure internal communications are clear within the coalition and project staff to ensure all coalition members are sharing a consistent message.

- d. Facebook is a great communication resource for HTS, so increasing communication messages through this channel would be an effective first step.
  - e. Consider doing giveaways through Facebook to increase followership and engagement by community members on social media.
6. Recruitment efforts should focus on building partnerships and relationships with other leaders from non-involved communities within the county. Emphasizing recruitment could encourage involvement from groups within the community that have not yet engaged in HTS.
- a. Representation on the HTS is key to non-involved community membership. To increase non-involved membership, especially with younger community members, it is important to determine who the influential leaders are within these groups and reach out to them directly.
  - b. Consider conducting a visioning session where the HTS can explore a few questions:
    - i. Who are the leaders with influence within this community?
    - ii. Not all influential people within the community are traditional or typical leaders. Who are the leaders we aren't thinking of and how do we
7. Continue seeking funding opportunities to continue project momentum and sustainability after the end of the CDC cooperative agreement.

Overall, HTS has had a positive impact on the community but there is room to grow and emphasize the amazing changes occurring as a result of the hard work. Recommendations included capitalizing on the current progress made by the coalition to expand the reach and activities being done in the communities. This would not be possible without the successful work already implemented by the coalition. Building on the momentum is the key to sustainability and success over the long-term through identifying assets within the community through which to expand success.