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Healthier Together Taliaferro Annual Evaluation Report

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Background

Healthier Together Taliaferro (HTT) is a project funded through a cooperative agreement with the Centers for Disease Control (CDC)’s High Obesity Program, managed by the University of Georgia’s College of Public Health 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’s progress will cover activities completed in Year 3, from September 2020 through September 2021, in Taliaferro County, Georgia.

In order to gain local expertise and input, a HTT Coalition was formed with county leaders and stakeholders in Taliaferro County. Project staff and coalition members worked together to establish impactful projects that were appropriate for Taliaferro County communities. These projects included a Grab-n-Go Cooler, community gardens, partnerships with local food pantries and Faithful Families, walking trails, and walking signage.

An evaluation of the HTT project was initiated in April 2021 to assess how the project was working, to determine whether HTT 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 HTT has had on Taliaferro County.

Methods

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

Community Survey

Questions for the community survey asked participants where they purchased or consumed food, which HTT 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 Taliaferro County by project staff members in popular locations. A total of 25 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 = 25)

Demographic	F	%	
Gender	Female	16	64.0
	Male	8	32.0
	No response	1	4.0
	Prefer not to say	0	0.0
	Other	0	0.0
Ethnicity/Race	White, Non-Hispanic	15	60.0
	Black/African American	9	36.0
	Hispanic/Latino	0	0.0
	Asian/Pacific Islander	0	0.0
	American Indian/ Alaskan Native	0	0.0

	Other	0	0.0
Age	65 or older	8	32.0
	55-64	4	16.0
	25-34	3	12.0
	35-44	2	8.0
	45-54	1	4.0
	18-24	0	0.0
Marital Status	Married	12	48.0
	Single	8	32.0
	Divorced	2	8.0
	Separated	1	4.0
	Widowed	1	4.0
	No response	1	4.0
Children under 18 Living in Home	0	17	68.0
	1	2	8.0
	2	2	8.0
	4	1	4.0
	3	0	0.0
	5 or more	1	4.0
Level of Education	Some college	9	36.0
	High school or GED	6	24.0
	Bachelor's Degree	6	24.0
	Associate's Degree	2	8.0
	Graduate Degree	2	8.0
	No response	0	0.0
SNAP Benefits in Home	No	24	96.0
	Yes	1	4.0
	No response	0	0.0
WIC Benefits in Home	No	24	96.0
	Yes	1	4.0
	No response	0	0.0
Employment Status	Retired	11	44.0
	Full-time	10	40.0
	Unemployed, not looking for work	1	4.0
	Part-time	0	0.0
	Unemployed, looking for work	0	0.0
	Student	0	0.0
	No response	3	12.0

Focus Group

A focus group was conducted with members of the HTT coalition at Nick's Place in May of 2022. The evaluation team developed a moderator guide designed to explore coalition members' personal role in the coalition, 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. Two members 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 HTT coalition members in 2022.

Results

Survey Results

During 2022, the Healthier Together staff distributed community surveys throughout Taliaferro 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 Taliaferro County get food.

Table 2

Locations where Respondents' Get Food in Taliaferro County (N = 25)

Food Access Location	F	%
Grocery store (outside county)	15	60.0
Dollar Stores	11	44.0
Home Garden	10	40.0
Grocery store (inside county)	9	36.0
Farmers Market	8	32.0
Community Garden	6	24.0
Sit down/Full-service Restaurant	4	16.0
Church/Community Organization	2	8.0
Food Bank/Pantry	2	8.0
Gas Stations/Convenience Stores	2	8.0
Other	2	8.0
CSA Program	1	4.0
Online Stores	1	4.0
Senior Meal Site	1	4.0

Respondents were asked to indicate how often they used HTT project food resources over the past year. Table 3 presents the frequencies and percentages of respondents' use.

Table 3
Respondents' Use of HTT Food Resources in Taliaferro County (N = 25)

Project Food Resource	F	%
Sharon Community Garden	10	40.0
Stewart Center Community Garden	2	8.0
Springfield Community Garden	0	0.0

Respondents were also asked to describe their eating habits over the past year. A total of 10 (40%) said they eat healthier food than they did last year, 11 (44%) said they eat the same kind of food as they did last year, and one respondent (4%) said they eat less healthy food than they did last year. Three respondents (12%) did not provide a response.

When asked the same question about their family's eating habits over the past year, 9 (36%) said their family ate healthier food than they did last year, 9 (36%) said their family eats the same kind of food as they did last year, and 3 respondents (12%) said their family eats less healthy food than they did last year. Four respondents (16%) did not provide a response. Table 4 presents the frequencies of self-reported and family eating habits over the last year.

Table 4
Respondents' Self-Reported and Family Eating Habits over the Last Year (N =25)

Eating Habits	Self-Report		Family	
	F	%	F	%
Eats healthier food than last year	10	40.0	9	36.0
Eats the same	11	44.0	9	36.0
Eats less healthy	1	4.0	3	12.0
No response	3	12.0	4	16.0

Physical Activity

Respondents were asked how often they used resources implemented to increase physical activity, specifically the signs placed in Crawfordville. Seven respondents (28.0%) said they have used the signs in Crawfordville in the past year.

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 5 respondents (20.0%) said they were more physically active than they were last year, 13 (52.0%) said they did the same amount of physical activity they did last year, and 6 respondents (24.0%) said they were less physically active than they were last year. One respondent (4.0%) did not provide a response.

When asked the same question about their family, 5 respondents (20.0%) said their family was more physically active than they were last year, 14 (56.0%) said their family did the same amount of physical activity as they did last year, and 4 respondents (16.0%) said their family was less physically active than they were last year. Two respondents (8.0%) did not provide a response. Table 5 presents the frequencies of self-reported and family physical activity habits over the last year.

Table 5
Respondents' Self-Reported and Family Physical Activity Habits over the Last Year (N = 25)

Physical Activity Habits	Self-Report		Family	
	F	%	F	%
More physically active than last year	5	20.0	5	20.0
Same amount of physical activity	13	52.0	14	56.0
Less physical activity	6	24.0	4	16.0
No response	1	4.0	2	8.0

Community members were asked to describe their transportation and physical activity habits over the past year. Table 6 depicts how community members in Taliaferro County use transportation.

Table 6
Form of Transportation for Respondents in Taliaferro County (N = 25)

Form of Transportation	F	%
Drive Self	20	80.0
Driven by Someone Else	3	12.0
Bicycle	2	8.0
Other	2	8.0
Taxi/Uber/Lyft	1	4.0
Walk	1	4.0

HT Participation

Community members were asked whether they had heard of the Healthier Together program. 14 respondents (56.0%) said they had heard of HT before. Nine respondents (36.0%) said they had not heard of HT before. Two respondents (8.0%) were unsure. Table 7 presents how those who responded yes had heard of Healthier Together.

Table 7
Awareness and Modes of Learning about Healthier Together Taliaferro (N = 25)

Methods	F	%
Word of mouth	6	24.0
Newspaper	3	12.0
Extension	3	12.0
Family Connections	3	12.0
Sharon Community Garden	3	12.0
Social Media	1	4.4
Healthier Together website	1	4.0
Flyer	1	4.0
This survey	1	4.0
Other	0	0.0
Stewart Center Community Garden	0	0.0
Springfield Community Garden	0	0.0

Community members were also asked whether they consider themselves a member of the Healthier Together Taliaferro Coalition. 11 respondents (44.0%) said they do consider themselves a part of the coalition. 12 respondents (48.0%) said they do not consider themselves part of the coalition. Two respondents (8.0%) were unsure.

HT Interventions

Community members were asked if any of the HTT project food resources helped them eat healthier over the past year. 11 respondents (44.0%) reported that the Sharon Community Garden helped them eat healthier. One respondent (4.0%) reported that the Stewart Center Community Garden helped them eat healthier. No respondents reported healthier eating from the Springfield Community Garden. Responses are presented in Table 8.

Table 8
Respondents' Healthier Eating Habits from HT Interventions (N = 25)

Food Resource	F	%
Sharon Community Garden	11	44.0
Stewart Center Community Garden	1	4.0
Springfield Community Garden	0	0.0

Regarding physical activity, four respondents (16.0%) reported that the signs in Crawfordville 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

HTT has increased food access in the community through the implementation and maintenance of community gardens. HTT has partnered with several food banks/pantries as well as Faithful Families to increase the distribution of healthier food options to the community.

Community Gardens

The **Sharon Garden** was definitely a proud achievement of the HTT coalition: “Sharon garden is awesome. Sharon garden talks about their garden. They do stuff out of the ordinary.” The garden has over 26 raised beds. The Sharon Garden helped increase community awareness of HTT: “it’s big and everyone knows about it.” It was also described as a welcoming community space.

Physical Activity

To encourage community members to engage in physical activity, the HTT coalition on provided many exercise resources across the county. These projects included **walking signage** and **walking trails** in the community. Participating coalition members described increased physical activity in the community due to HTT resources: “You can go there any time of day, in the evening late, you see somebody walking around. Early in the morning, you see cars going over there. Especially in the summertime.” HTT also provided **playground equipment** and **workout stations** at local parks. The College of Environment and Design at UGA also provided plants for path connections and community activity revitalization.

Overall Impact

Coalition members were asked questions to determine the overall impact of the HTT project within their community. Coalition members described various positive impacts of HTT on the community in Taliaferro County. Several coalition members described the **increased access to healthy food** in the community, specifically from the Sharon Garden. Additionally, a salad bar was installed at the school. Over **900 pounds of produce** was harvested and distributed to the community from the Sharon Garden, and around 15 to 20 people a month visited the garden during the summer.

Overall impacts of HTT included:

- Expanded and new collaborations with schools in the county
- Increased community participation with HTT through collaborative partnerships
- Increased access to diverse, healthy food sources
- Increased knowledge in the community about nutrient-dense food and gardening
- Increased availability of fresh and local food

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.

Participating coalition members wanted **increased physical activity in the community**. Ideas for accomplishing this included more walking signs directing people to historic places in the county, as well as starting a 5K or continuing the Bike Rodeo. While coalition members felt there was a high degree of use for the physical activity resources, they wanted that use to be sustained. They wanted to build on the positive momentum already seen within the community: “That is my vision, that we’re willing to come together and work together to get things done.” Other coalition members wanted more physical activity resources in Springfield.

Another coalition member expressed a **desire for better community health**. They stated, “I don’t know if there’s any statistical evidence of improved health. That would be huge if we could actually see some.”

One of the ways they envisioned project sustainability was through **bringing in new people to continue the work**:

I think some of the project that we started out we had [inaudible] when we first started, we had a room full of people. And then some people will say, "You didn't get nothing accomplished." So we want to show them from this stuff that we're working on. And we know the signs are small, but they are showing them that something is happening.

Coalition members were concerned with the **sustainability of the project** and of resources. One example was an issue related to the inability of installing permanent structures: “The CDC will not pay for anything that is permanent. We could not use cement, we could not use pavement. It had to be that gravel.” This participant described how a walking trail in the county washed away because they had to use gravel to develop the trail, which did not withstand the weather.

Overall, participating coalition members overwhelmingly expressed positive community impacts from HTT. Most visioning revolved around building upon the positive momentum already occurring. In the following section are a few recommendations on how to achieve these visions and continue this momentum.

Recommendations

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

1. Expand current walking signs in the community.
 - a. Build upon historic signs delineating how far to walk between town resources (such as A. H. Stevens Park).
 - b. Create signs that direct walkers to other HTT resources, such as the Sharon Garden.
 - c. Implement walking trails or signs in Springfield.

2. Expand beyond the current communication efforts to bring new community leaders and younger community members to the coalition, aligning with the vision for sustaining the project.
 - a. Expand beyond the county newspaper for advertising and promotion of HTT.
 - b. Create advertising for proper harvesting techniques at the Sharon Garden, as well as what is available.
 - c. Place advertisements in church bulletins.
 - d. Consider doing giveaways through Facebook to increase followership and engagement by community members on social media.
 - e. Create communication strategies to enhance word-of-mouth/interpersonal communication within the community.
3. Build on momentum from the Sharon Garden to catalyze the development of the Springfield Garden.
4. Gather community feedback from CED plans and connect with community and regional partners.
5. Increase connections between community gardens and local food banks, as recommended by coalition members.
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 HTT and contribute to the sustainability of the project.
 - a. Representation on the HTT is key to non-involved community members' buy-in. 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. Build on current youth involvement in HTT to increase engagement.
 - b. Consider conducting a visioning session where the HTT 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 find them?
7. Though HTT has many positive impacts, coalition members did say a lack of infrastructure was a serious barrier for the development of their community. Finding partnerships and funding that can target infrastructural developments may complement the positive work being done by HTT.

Overall, HTT 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. Building on the momentum established in Y4 is the key to the long-term sustainability and success of HTT beyond the end of the project timeline.