

Summary of Nutrition/Physical Activity Assessment in Hinesburg

Connecting Youth teamed up with the Hinesburg Community Resource Center in the spring of 2012, to explore ways to expand the opportunities for low income families to have access to healthy foods during the summer months in Hinesburg and St. George. These families are receiving free and reduced breakfast and lunch throughout the school year. Through the application process of the Department of Health grant, our mission was further expanded to help low income families eat right and be physically active during the summer months.

Hinesburg School Assessment

The Community Healthy Living Index was used as the assessment tool to measure the opportunities for physical activity and healthy eating for the community at large. The assessment first focused on healthy activity and routine physical activity at the Hinesburg Community School. Administrators, parents, the school nurse, physical education teachers, health teacher, and head of the school cafeteria participated. The assessment showed that the school has created an environment where, more often than not, there are opportunities to eat healthy foods and be active. Health education, physical education, physical activities in the classroom and after-school, scored high. School meals meet all USDA school meal standards, providing whole grains, three choices of vegetables and fruits and limited fats. Farm to School programs provide local produce, and a school-wide vegetable garden provides spring and fall vegetables. The school does not have good walkability because of the safety concerns of being situated on a state highway. Classes have the opportunity to walk each day either within or outside the building, depending on the weather.

A Wellness Committee of parents and teachers meets regularly to work on maintaining this positive index. Parents monitor the cafeteria to encourage children to select items at the fruit and vegetable bar, the Family and Consumer Science teacher will be visiting classes to have students taste test newer nutritional offerings at the cafeteria. A committee of parents has procured a grant to continue the school gardens and develop a full tool shed.

One concern that has come up is the decline in children using their free and reduced lunch card. A Learning Kitchen program successfully involved 12 middle school students in this category to learn about healthy eating, cook and bake healthy foods and take foods home to make on their own. More work will be done on this issue in the future.

Hinesburg Community At Large Assessment

The Community at Large assessment was conducted with the participation of the town administrator, the Chief of Police, physician at the community health center, a representative from Visiting Nurse, town recreation department and the director of the local food shelf and Hinesburg Community Resource Center. The findings showed many ways that Hinesburg incorporates general practices that support healthy living. The advisory board of the Recreation Department serves as a strong support for physical activity programs and facilities in the town and works closely with the town departments. A part-time Recreation Director provides physical activity programs throughout the year, as does the Champlain Valley Union Adult Continuing Education Programs (ACCESS). Although there are scholarships available for persons wanting to participate who cannot pay the nominal fees, it was agreed that these were rarely asked for and it was felt, low income residents rarely used these services.

There is a plethora of outdoor space available for physical activity. The town Trails Committee has developed a system of walking trails, there are several town park areas and Lake Iroquois provides sidewalks so that residents are able to walk completely around and through the village area.

There is no coalition that promotes healthy eating in Hinesburg. There is a full service grocery store in the center of town, and a farmer's market that meets weekly throughout the summer, and monthly during the winter months. The Hinesburg Food Shelf is stationed weekly at the Farmer's Market to collect donations and buy local produce which is given to over 100 families each month.

Hinesburg Community at Large Discussion and Improvement Planning

A meeting was held on February 7, 2013 to discuss the findings of the Community Health Index and focus on the healthy eating and physical activity needs of low income families in the summer.

Representatives from the three local churches, town administrator, police chief, recreation department, Hinesburg Community Resource Center coordinator, Food Shelf director, a child care center director and school social worker attended.

There was agreement that there are many ways that Hinesburg supports wellness through the schools and town programs. For those working with low income folks, there was agreement that this population does not use these services. Discussion prioritized these areas to support healthier eating and physical activity for low income families in Hinesburg:

1. Develop a system to make sure all residents needing assistance with food security and/or income emergencies throughout the year, are aware of programs available to them. This includes providing written materials to all people in town who work with these families so they are aware of resources.
2. Include low income parents and youth in the planning process for a summer program. The goal of this summer program is to get fresh foods to food insecure families over the summer months and provide activities to promote physical outdoor activity.
3. Promote activities that use the current facilities in and near Hinesburg to develop low income participation over time.
4. Work with the Hinesburg Food Shelf to increase participation in the Farm to Family Program and continue the support of the Farmer's Market/Food Shelf Program. Develop policy regarding the products distributed at the food Shelf to insure healthy eating offerings and other programming.
5. Organize a group of low income families that take part in summer programming to create and participate in other programs throughout the year.
6. Members of this meeting will meet throughout the year to monitor and support their work with low income families in Hinesburg.