

impact

of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences



Healthy, Well-Nourished Population

Walk Across Arizona-Exercise Program for Seniors

Issue

With the US population over age 65 growing rapidly, public interest in improving the quality of life for “seniors” is increasing. Many of the diseases commonly thought to accompany aging can be prevented and seniors are looking for ways to keep their remaining years healthy, active, and enjoyable. In 1997 a statewide partnership was established that combines the resources of the college of Public Health (COPH) and Cooperative Extension (CE). An essential component of the community Health Advancement Partnership (CHAPS) in Pima County is to help contain health care cost through the development and evaluation of an effective seniors lifestyle program that could be maintained in a community and replicated in other communities in Arizona.

What has been done?

In 2000 the Health and Human Services Committee (HHSC) of Green Valley Community Coordinating Council (GVCCC) formulated a set of visions for a healthy Green Valley based upon a 1998 needs assessment. One specific vision was to “Promote a Healthy Lifestyle” among residents of the community. A forum was held as part of the HHSC community meetings to focus on how to implement the vision of a healthy lifestyle. Task members

were identified, and regular meetings have been held since September of 2000 with the CHAPS acting as the lead agency. This collaborative effort with the retirement community led to the development of “Walk Across Arizona” using formats and materials similar to programs used in Michigan and Texas. The theoretical basis for the program was to use social support networks to increase physical activity levels within the community by developing and maintaining walking clubs.

The 16-week walking program is designed for teams of up to 10 people. The teams have a friendly competition to see who can get their pals, neighbors, co-workers, and family out to build a healthy habit and walk for fitness. To evaluate the success and benefits of the walking program, entry, exit, and tracking forms were developed to characterize the participants, and to track their physical activity habits, levels of energy, social interaction, and satisfaction with their community. The miles logged by teams are collected by team captains each week and recorded on Arizona maps posted at various places around the community, so everyone can see the progress. Participants pay a \$5.00 registration fee for cost recovery of materials and program incentives. Additional sponsorship from community agencies and businesses were sought to provide extra incentives

at the program kick-off and culmination.

The 2002 –2003 16-week campaign is currently underway with the expansion to 5 additional counties, Apache, Cochise, Maricopa, Santa Cruz, and Yuma. Each county has a link from the Walk Across Arizona site, where teams can register online and county leaders can update a calendar of monthly activities.

Impact

In the first year of the campaign, 34 teams of 10 individuals walked 48,872 miles with 329 registered participants; the average number of days walked by participants increased from 4.1 at entry to 4.6 upon exit, and an average of 11.4 miles per person and 91.2 miles per team were walked per week. The second year of the campaign started in mid-November 2002 with 35 teams registered, including 12 Cooperative Extension teams that were part of the Family and Consumer Science Healthy Lifestyle initiative in 6 counties: 355 individuals reported 23,287 miles walked as of December 31, 2002.

“I enjoy being part of a team because it keeps me accountable. Our captain constantly motivates us, which makes the program fun. I have more energy than I did at the start of the program and I plan on continuing even after Walk Across Arizona ends!”
–participant

Funding

Cooperative Extension - Community Health Advancement Partnership,
Participant fees
20 Community collaborators/sponsors

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