2012-2017
Catalyst for Healthy Eating and Active Living

Advancing changes for healthier communities

ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND LESSONS LEARNED
Building partnerships, leveraging resources, and shaping policies, environments, and systems to empower communities to make healthy foods and safe places to be active accessible for everyone.

Since 2012, the Catalyst for Healthy Eating and Active Living (Catalyst) has worked with several rural communities across the state to make healthy living easier. We proudly partner with local organizations and champions who are improving access to healthy foods and safe places to be active in their neighborhoods, schools, faith communities, and beyond.

The Catalyst was created in partnership between the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust and the North Carolina Division of Public Health to support communities in realizing their visions for health. Through this partnership, the Catalyst aligns with statewide and regional public health efforts to support our communities. Additionally, the Catalyst is unique in that we place coordinators right in the communities we serve.

We have learned much in working with community partners for the past five years. This report showcases progress in the communities and highlights the Catalyst’s role as well as our reflections on working effectively with communities. We hope these examples and insights encourage you in your efforts to make healthy living easier.

As we set our sights on the path ahead, our work will include gaining a deeper understanding of practices to increase health equity and striving for improvements for health that benefit everyone in our communities.

We look forward to working together to make our communities healthier for years to come.

Sincerely,
Jamie Cousins
Jamie Cousins, Director
Catalyst for Healthy Eating and Active Living
Aligning Partners and Initiatives

The Catalyst learns about its communities by talking with a variety of partners about their initiatives, insights, and aspirations. These conversations extend beyond the usual health partners, providing the Catalyst with a broader view of the local assets and opportunities for healthy eating and active living. With this perspective, the Catalyst is able to bring local partners together and help them align their efforts for more impact. In addition, our relationships with regional and statewide health partners allows the Catalyst to stay aware of emerging opportunities and make connections to support our communities.

- **Facilitated** 291 introductions between people and organizations who were unlikely to have met without the Catalyst
- **Developed** 105 action plans involving 373 partners

The Catalyst has been able to gather those who appear to have different missions and align efforts to accomplish multiple goals. The Catalyst collaborates effectively with existing networks in the county and develops key partnerships that may seem untraditional.

—Rockingham County Partner

Expanding Resources

The Catalyst links communities with opportunities to increase local resources to advance healthy eating and active living. We identify grant opportunities and assist local partners with applications. We advise local partners on potential collaborations, opportunities for community engagement, and evaluation measures to strengthen their work. The Catalyst pitches in to secure in-kind resources such as volunteers and donated items to augment healthy eating and active living projects. The Catalyst also invests funds in local efforts to fill critical resource gaps, leverage additional commitments, and energize community champions.

- **Secured nearly $237,000** in donated items and money to support community partners’ work, including **283 meeting spaces** secured free of charge, valued at nearly $21,000
- **Invested about $131,530** in Catalyst funds into local efforts across 8 counties
- **Assisted partners with 57 grant applications** seeking more than $1.2 million for healthy eating and active living efforts—$398,860 has been awarded

When talking to another county about how to get the work done around improving health outcomes, one of my first questions to the individual was, “Who is your Catalyst Coordinator?” because I knew that with the things she was trying to accomplish the Catalyst would be a very valuable resource to help provide the support needed.

—Halifax County Partner

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—Halifax County Partner

Equipping Communities for Lasting Change

The Catalyst equips communities with new knowledge and skills so that they remain empowered to create healthy places for years to come. We research best practices and advise local partners on proven strategies for healthy eating and active living. We support communities in adapting strategies to work within their context. This includes assisting partners in piloting new policies and programs to refine innovative ideas before fully adopting them. We provide technical assistance and training, and we also collaborate with regional and statewide organizations to bring additional expertise to the communities we serve.

- **Co-facilitated 34 trainings for 744 people and 210 organizations,** 93% of which serve or represent populations more likely to experience health inequities
- **Provided technical assistance to 455 organizations,** 90% of which serve or represent populations more likely to experience health inequities
- **Empowered 55 people** to champion healthy eating and active living efforts

I have witnessed walking trails be developed, an amazing farmers’ market, and programs for children to increase exercise, learn about safety, and increase their opportunity to retrieve natural, healthy food at a discounted price. I have seen numerous programs and education reach our local school systems because of the Catalyst.

—Cleveland County Partner

Engaging and Energizing Communities

The Catalyst works alongside community partners to brainstorm creative ways of involving the community and elevating the community’s voice in programs, policies, and projects for healthy eating and active living. Catalyst coordinators live and work in the communities we serve, which allows us to show up regularly, listen, and support activities for community engagement. By building trust within communities, we are able to look deeper into issues of health equity and work with a variety of partners to support changes to improve health and wellbeing for everyone.

- **Assisted with 123 community forums, events, and meetings attended by 2,908 people and 486 organizations**
- **Co-developed and distributed 69 surveys and assessments**
- **Recruited 618 volunteers for 3,131 volunteer hours valued at $67,985**

With the Catalyst, we are working to create areas for people to exercise, but more importantly, there is a sense of community responsibility about these areas.

—Burke County Partner

Catalyst Contributions: Highlighted Activities by County

**Burke (since 2015)**
- Provided leadership and logistical support to establish and run the Burke County Healthy Eating and Active Living Collaborative.
- Assisted the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association (CFSA) in assessing needs and interest for increasing access to healthy foods in remote parts of the county. Supported CFSA by recruiting community members to participate in a series of meetings focused on the local food environment.
- Organized a site visit for Duke University’s World Food Policy Center to meet with local partners such as Conetoe Family Life Center to discuss food-related challenges and opportunities in Edgecombe County.
- Developed processes for Foothills Farmers’ Market to accept debit and SNAP/EBT payment. This paved the way for a policy requiring all vendors to accept SNAP/EBT payment.
- Convened partners and contributed funds to design an adaptive playground and purchase select equipment for children with exceptional needs at G.W. Bulluck Elementary School in Edgecombe County.
- Supported the West Marion Healthy Eating and Active Living Collaborative.
- Participated in a pilot project to reimburse farmers’ market vendors for SNAP/EBT sales on the same day as the market. This paved the way for a policy requiring all vendors to accept SNAP/EBT payment.
- Collaborated with 15 organizations to develop a comprehensive plan for sidewalks to connect three neighborhoods with spaces for physical activity at area schools.
- Supported the Town of Boiling Springs, ActiveRoutes to School, and the NC Department of Transportation in partnering to secure funding and plan for sidewalks to connect three neighborhoods.
- Assisted in establishing the West Rockingham Farmers’ Market as they developed their plan to accept SNAP/EBT payment.
- Supported the West Marion Healthy Eating and Active Living Collaborative.
- Developed processes for Foothills Farmers’ Market to accept debit and SNAP/EBT payment. This paved the way for a policy requiring all vendors to accept SNAP/EBT payment.
- Convened Weldon City Schools and the Town of Weldon to form a shared-use arrangement for a video to promote safe biking on greenways.

**Beaufort (since 2012)**
- Provided leadership and logistical support to establish and run the Beaufort County Healthy Eating and Active Living Collaborative.
- Connected youth mission groups from local faith communities to the Enola Community Trail Collaborative to help build the trail and maintain it in the future.
- Supported Bradberry’s Corner Store to earn the Healthy Food Retail Designation, including connecting store owners to the NC Division of Public Health’s Obesity, Diabetes, Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention team for assessment and marketing materials.
- Worked with the market to increase its long-term viability and expand its evaluation capacity.
- Convoked partners and contributed funds to design an adaptive playground and purchase select equipment for children with exceptional needs at G.W. Bulluck Elementary School in Edgecombe County.
- Supported the West Marion Healthy Eating and Active Living Collaborative.
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**Halifax (since 2012)**
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**Twin Counties (since 2015)**
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**Edgecombe**
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The Catalyst plays a vital role in activities that support healthy eating and active living. This graphic highlights successes from our work in each county.
Sustainable community changes can take years of effort. Along the way, maintain energy and optimism by celebrating the small wins. “Wins” may be as simple as receiving an invitation to an important meeting, gaining commitment from a new partner, or successfully piloting a new project or policy. Celebrating these wins can help people see that there is progress and that their effort is paying off. It also keeps the larger mission on the radar, strengthens relationships, and fosters a genuine sense of accomplishment.

### Five Things to Know about Working with Communities

In our five years supporting community changes for healthy eating and active living, we have learned valuable lessons from our inspiring community partners. Here are a few insights from our collective experiences.

1. **Follow the Community’s Lead**
   Listen closely to the community’s voice to understand and support their vision for health. Listening and engaging a variety of perspectives builds trust with diverse partners and community members who have a stake in creating a healthier community. Noting and sharing back the common themes and aspirations you hear can help the community develop a clear, collective voice for their vision. This can help the community advocate for their vision and needs.

   As you support communities, set practical expectations about roles, responsibilities, and boundaries. Provide support to the community leaders and members, and be mindful to encourage them to step into leadership roles as they are ready, able, and willing.

2. **Focus on Mission Before Money**
   While funding is incredibly helpful in rallying action for community change, too often, efforts stall when funding becomes the focal point. Communities that focus on a common mission (what they want to accomplish together) are better able to articulate their vision and plans. These communities often attract partners who are willing to begin working collaboratively to move forward, which also positions them well to secure funding.

   Supporting communities in clarifying their mission—what it is that they want to make happen through their collective effort—is very helpful. Keep the mission at the center while discussing what partners, actions, and resources will be needed. Identify the steps that can be taken early to build momentum. Often communities with a clear mission discover existing resources to get started, and their early progress opens the door for funding and further successes.

3. **Be Patient, Persistent, and Prepared**
   Communities are very dynamic. They are affected by changes in people (e.g., newly elected officials or agency leaders), economics (e.g., business and investments entering or leaving), shifting social norms, and more. Priorities rise and fall. Momentum can quickly fade, and new opportunities can emerge suddenly.

   Patience is helpful as you plant seeds and support a variety of partners in coming together to move their work forward. Things do not always happen when you would want them to, but rushing an action can undermine both trust and progress. Persistence (without pushiness) is vital to keeping various partners committed and moving forward. It is helpful to stay prepared and poised to support partners when they are ready to advance a community change for healthy eating and active living.

4. **Adapt Strategies to the Local Context**
   Stay in tune with best practices and strategies, and engage others to thoughtfully put the strategies into practice. Even “proven strategies” can fall short when they are carried out without adjusting for the community. Local history, social norms, and even current events can influence the success of strategies for healthy eating and active living.

   Learn about the history, values, and assets of a community as you get started. Engage organizations and community members as you adapt strategies. People who know the local history and strengths can offer creative ideas to improve healthy eating and active living strategies to fit the community, and these approaches are more likely to support lasting change.

5. **Celebrate Small Wins as You Work for Long-Term Change**
   Sustainable community changes can take years of effort. Along the way, maintain energy and optimism by celebrating the small wins. “Wins” may be as simple as receiving an invitation to an important meeting, gaining commitment from a new partner, or successfully piloting a new project or policy. Celebrating these wins can help people see that there is progress and that their effort is paying off. It also keeps the larger mission on the radar, strengthens relationships, and fosters a genuine sense of accomplishment.

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**Community Changes Supported by the Catalyst**

Catalyst contributions have been critical to at least 50 policy and environmental changes, 3 new sustainable programs, and 7 countywide inventories or maps to support healthy eating and active living.

- **29 healthy eating** changes that increase and support access to healthy foods through farmers’ markets, community gardens, small food stores, and countywide food inventories
- **21 active living** changes that increase and support access to safe places to be active at schools and faith facilities, at parks and playgrounds, on sidewalks and trails, and through countywide active living inventories
- **10 healthy eating and active living** changes that increase access to healthy foods and safe places to be active through community-wide campaigns, maps, inventories, and a new local coalition

Left to right, top to bottom: Cleveland County children enjoy a healthy lunch; biking on the greenway in McDowell County; Catalyst resource table at the Conservation Fund Resourceful Communities Western HEAL Convening; corner store fruit display in the Twin Counties; Quankey Swimming Program in Halifax County; community garden sign in McDowell County; playground signage at a Rockingham County school.
The Catalyst envisions empowered rural communities that acknowledge health inequities and advance change to improve health and wellbeing for everyone.

Catalyst for Healthy Eating and Active Living
a program of the Foundation for Health Leadership & Innovation

The Catalyst is a program of the Foundation for Health Leadership & Innovation in partnership with the North Carolina Division of Public Health, Chronic Disease and Injury Section, Community and Clinical Connections for Prevention and Health Branch. Funding is provided by the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust.

Contact Us:
foundationhli.org/programs/catalyst-healthy-eating-active-living

Left to right, top to bottom: Baskets of fresh food prepared by Cleveland County Math Academy students; Safe Kids of Cleveland County Bicycle Safety Trailer; planning a walking trail at Cedar Grove Elementary School in the Twin Counties; community gardening workshop in the Twin Counties; building raised beds with the Williford Elementary School’s Garden Club in the Twin Counties; Halifax County box garden; bike safety education event in Cleveland County.