

Promoting Healthy Kids:

THE SERVING KANSAS COMMUNITIES CASE STUDIES



National Recreation
and Park Association



Table of Contents

About Serving Kansas Communities	2
Taking the Lead in Promoting Health and Wellness	
<i>Arkansas City, KS</i>	4
Obesity Prevention for Youth and Special Populations	
<i>Lawrence, KS</i>	5
It Takes a Village to Raise a Child	6
<i>Parsons, KS</i>	
A Growing Enthusiasm for Community Gardens	
<i>Salina, KS</i>	7
Building Sustainable Youth Fitness and Nutrition Programs	
<i>Wichita, KS</i>	8



Kansas Health Foundation

The National Recreation and Park Association thanks the Kansas Health Foundation for recognizing and supporting the critical role of park and recreation agencies in ensuring children have access to healthy meals during out-of-school times.

About Serving Kansas Communities

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) is pleased to present *Promoting Healthy Kids: The Serving Kansas Communities Case Studies*. This publication documents successful practices implemented by five park and recreation departments to improve the health of children across the state of Kansas. The communities were funded through NRPA by the Kansas Health Foundation (KHF). The Kansas Health Foundation is a private philanthropy dedicated to improving the health of all Kansans. For more information about the Kansas Health Foundation, visit www.kansashealth.org.

The purpose of the Serving Kansas Communities program was to increase the number of healthy meals served to children during summer months, as well as provide nutritional education and connect more youth to community gardens. Nutrition has a tremendous impact on child development—essential to a child’s learning, behavior, and overall wellbeing. By offering healthy meals and fun health and physical activity opportunities, the Serving Kansas Communities program provided resources and services to promote lifelong healthy behaviors among local youth.

According to the National Center for Health Statistics, in Kansas, over 12 percent of children and adolescents, age 2 to 17, are obese. In addition, a large portion of school-age children in the state lack access to nutritional meals, particularly in the summer. According to the United States Department of Agriculture, in 2011, an average of 362,152 Kansas children were served lunch and 102,402 were served breakfast daily through the USDA National School Breakfast and Lunch Programs. However, in the same year, only 20,262 Kansas children were served through the USDA Summer Food Service Program—a deficit of more than 340,000 healthy meals children did not receive in summer. The Serving Kansas Communities grant provided funding to help local park and recreation departments fill this gap during the summer months by granting funds to supplement



existing summer meal programs with the goal of increasing the number of healthy meals children received in Kansas communities.

Creating healthier communities requires the full engagement of leaders at the local level. The Serving Kansas Communities program emphasized sustainability and the need to build partnerships capable of supporting positive outcomes beyond the program timeframe. The participating park and recreation departments partnered with leaders representing local schools, non-profits, health departments, religious groups, and other key stakeholders. Collaboration proved crucial to reinforcing the program’s implementation, participation, public outreach, and total success.

THE SERVING KANSAS COMMUNITIES PROGRAM POSITIVELY IMPACTED COMMUNITIES BY:

- Serving nearly 2,300 children
- Providing approximately 93,000 healthy meals to children
- Creating 10 new community gardens
- Providing nutritional education at 18 sites across the state



Over summer 2012, NRPA awarded Serving Kansas Communities grants to five local park and recreation departments. These departments have had numerous successes in a limited period of time, such as:

- Creating community gardens;
- Establishing nutritional education through the OrganWise Guys curriculum;
- Increasing the number of sites/meals available to children in summer months; and
- Providing children transportation to meals, activities, and gardens.

This publication describes some of the successful strategies implemented by five Kansas communities. The strategies encompass a wide range of efforts, reflecting the diverse ways that communities addressed the health and wellness of children. Also discussed are lessons learned and significant challenges faced by stakeholders while working to affect change in their communities. It is our hope that other communities across Kansas and the greater United States can learn from these case studies to create positive behavior changes and improve the health of their youth populations.

For more information on Serving Kansas Communities, please visit our website at: www.nrpa.org/feeding.

ABOUT THE ORGANWISE GUYS:

- OrganWise Guys, Inc. began in 1993 with the vision to inspire youth to take charge of their health by assuming personal responsibility for their lifestyle choices.
- By bringing the human body to life via lovable organ characters, OrganWise Guys teaches kids what it means to be healthy from the inside out and helps to fight childhood obesity.
- The characters include: Hardy Heart, the Kidney Brothers, Madame Muscle, and more. Their motto: "We love who we live in, so please take care of us!"

Taking the Lead in Promoting Health and Wellness

ARKANSAS CITY, KS

The Arkansas City Recreation Commission (ACRC) does not serve meals during the school year. However, the Commission has been a significant provider of summer meals to community youth (grades K-8) enrolled in day camp for a number of years. Thanks to funds received through the Serving Kansas Communities grant, ACRC was able to increase their summer food service from summer 2011 (10,620 meals) to summer 2012 (13,635 meals) by nearly 30 percent. This counts as a success not only for the Commission, but for the entire community. During the school year, 82% of students in Arkansas City qualify for free or reduced lunches. Having dramatically increased the number of free nutritious meals provided to youth in the months outside of school is a noteworthy achievement.

Prior to Serving Kansas Communities, Arkansas City's summer camp participants were engaged in various games, activities, and swim lessons during the summer months. When awarded the Serving Kansas Communities grant in summer 2012, the City's day camp was able to incorporate nutrition instruction into their daily activities using the Organ-Wise Guys (OWG) program. With hundreds of kids having received this education in camp for the first time ever, Serving Kansas Communities helped ACRC promote health and fitness among the community's youth. In turn, feedback from campers and parents regarding the new programming has been overwhelmingly positive.

Arkansas City largely attributes their successes to improved marketing and advertising campaigns—including newspaper and radio advertisements, announcements in school newsletters, large and well-placed yard signs and banners, social media blasts—made possible through use of grant funds. ACRC observed these marketing efforts effectively

promote nutrition and health throughout the entire community. In addition, the grant monies enabled the Commission to purchase equipment and supplies that will sustain the summer food service program in future years. Already, the Commission has committed to further improving upon their summer camp and feeding program. ACRC plans to continue educating campers using the OWG materials. In addition, they plan to include a community garden on-site that the children can more actively engage with next year.

ACRC works under an understanding that now more than ever it is crucial for recreation departments to take a leadership role in their communities. As such, providing exceptional programming, services, and education is a primary responsibility. Furthermore, just as

LESSONS LEARNED FROM ARKANSAS CITY

- Admittedly, implementing the program was a huge undertaking for the Commission. However, the rewards far outweighed all the work and challenges.
- Incorporating food service and nutrition education is a great addition to the general summer camp setting. ACRC found that it generated more attraction to the program in the community.
- A well-trained staff makes a huge difference in the success of programming. ACRC recommends taking 2 to 3 full days to guarantee that staff is fully prepared. The program is only as good as the staff.

important as providing the service is getting the word out to the community. Although ACRC has had a free summer lunch program for a number of years, this year they saw a huge jump in participation. Many parents were previously unaware that there was such a program in Arkansas City, moreover, that it was free. ACRC expects that participation in summer camp, free meals, and nutrition education will continue to grow in future years.

Obesity Prevention for Youth and Special Populations

LAWRENCE, KS

This past summer, youth enrolled in Lawrence Parks and Recreation Department (LPRD) programming were introduced to an innovative, new nutrition education program. As a Serving Kansas Communities grantee, LPRD received support to their free summer lunch program and training to provide a childhood obesity-prevention curriculum for its camps. LPRD hired a local graduate student to integrate the OrganWise Guys curriculum into local summer camp programs and teach kids about health and nutrition. Essential to the success of the program was that the parks department found a way to make teaching nutrition a fun experience for the kids by making each lesson an interactive experience.

Although the Lawrence Parks and Recreation Department's summer nutrition education began with providing instruction to local kids, LPRD quickly realized that the campers were bringing their knowledge home. Parents regularly approached staff to inquire about the new programming—asking for advice on how to provide a balanced diet to their children. Some parents joked that their kids were giving them a hard time at home about junk food around the house.

In addition to making appearances in the youth camps, the OrganWise Guys program was introduced to and made a strong

impression upon Lawrence's special populations program. Over time, this group developed great interest in the nutrition education. This was a particularly important success for LPRD as children with disabilities are known to be less physically active and at greater risk for obesity. The program has drawn the Parks Department's attention to the fact that it must continually strive to provide the same lifestyle opportunities to the special populations as other populations.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM LAWRENCE

- At the close of the Serving Kansas Communities program, Lawrence Parks and Recreation Department emphasized the need to be creative in how you present educational materials. It is important to keep it interesting for all kids. Consider giving your older campers more responsibility and allowing them to help with presenting materials. This allows the older campers to become role models for the younger campers.
- LPRD attributes much of their success to a knowledgeable and motivated staff. It is crucial to find individuals that have a strong background and enthusiasm for the material.
- Trying the change habits takes more than a summer but this has proved to be a program that can help make strides in the community's overall physical activity and nutrition. Thus, LPRD will continue to promote the materials on a year-round basis and certainly in next year's summer programs.

LPRD considers their work with the OrganWise Guys program in their free lunch program, camps, and special populations program a huge success of summer 2012. LPRD increased the number of healthy, summer meals served to children in the community by nearly 35 percent. Although funded by the grant, LPRD does not see the end of summer as a stopping point but plans to integrate nutrition education into more programming. Participation in the Serving Kansas Communities program has laid a foundation for the community's continued commitment to fighting obesity and promoting an active lifestyle. In cooperation with the K-State Research and Extension Office of Douglas County, who provided food models and programming guidance over the course of the summer, Lawrence Parks and Recreation plans to use the OrganWise Guys curriculum year-round.

It Takes a Village to Raise a Child

PARSONS, KS

Parsons School District, in cooperation with the Parsons Recreation Commission, reached hundreds of children throughout last summer, and provided them with nutritious meals, health education, and physical fitness programming. Of the five 2012 Serving Kansas Communities grantees, Parsons saw the most significant increase (61.4%) in the number of healthy meals served from summer 2011 (5,550 meals) to summer 2012 (8,957 meals). In addition to increasing the number of meals served, grant funds were utilized to expand the availability of these services with more sites and exposure throughout the community. Parsons used statistics from the school district and a parent survey to identify areas of high-need and placed new feeding sites in those areas. Program funds allowed four of the community sites to offer breakfast in addition to lunch.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM PARSONS

- Parsons was able to provide transportation throughout the summer for many of their participating children. However, it can be challenging to ensure that busses are operating in a safe manner and children and parents are using the service effectively. Details should be better organized and communicated to families for future programs.
- Next summer it would be nice to build an indoor or shaded garden, as extreme temperatures can become a danger to young children. The larger gardening community would likely welcome this addition.
- At some sites, the same healthy meals served to children for free were made available to adults for a nominal fee. This increased participation, allowed families to eat together, and provided a meal to an adult who otherwise may have gone hungry.

Parsons has an active community garden, maintained by a community membership, which welcomed the School District and Recreation Commission. Members worked

with the kids, and eagerly shared their appreciation for and knowledge of gardening. Since the end of summer, many of the participating children have continued to participate in the garden and many have had family members get involved. Supplementing the Parsons Community Garden, a straw bale garden was built as a community outreach project at a local diabetes center over the summer. Over the course of the summer, children began to understand how food grows and learn about the healthy foods that come from the ground. Many children discovered that they loved vegetables they previously disliked when they came from the garden.

Parsons' summer program is an excellent example of what can be accomplished working with community partners, counting half a dozen partners cooperating to promote the summer's Serving Kansas Communities project. Many of the collaborators saw direct benefits of the partnership. For instance, the Recreation Commission observed increased participation at the pool and increased attendance at community-wide events like Fridays in the Park and the Annual Day of Play. It is no surprise that a majority of the partners have expressed an interest in continuing to support similar projects in the community.

Despite the Kansas heat, participating youth and families were more active this past summer in Parsons than they would have been without the Serving Kansas Communities program. And interest in the programming is not waning. By the end of summer, there were already plans to present the OrganWise Guys at a newly opened children's museum and make the materials available to local elementary schools during the school year. Additionally, the Parsons Community Garden has started to include a spotlight on their new youth garden members at monthly social events. With the support of the community behind them, Parsons School District and Recreation Commission fully intend to sustain their feeding, nutrition, and gardening programs into the future.

A Growing Enthusiasm for Community Gardens

SALINA, KS

The Salina Parks and Recreation Department (SPRD) was one of five Kansas communities to receive a Serving Kansas Communities grant to help support their summer food service program. In fact, Salina Parks and Recreation was able to utilize the grant to increase the number of nutritious summer meals served to community youth by 5.7 percent—up from 4,470 meals in 2011 to 4,726 meals in 2012. In addition to increasing the number of healthy meals served, the parks department was able to expose children to nutritional education and gardening during summer camp sessions.

Incorporating nutrition education into Salina summer camps was a significant achievement, as SPRD had never previously included this sort of curriculum in their youth programming.

Another valuable opportunity that the Salina Parks and Recreation Department provided local children in summer 2012 were lessons offered by a local Master Gardener. With the Master Gardener, campers learned about fundamental gardening techniques and the benefits of community gardens. Each camper was also responsible to plant, water, and care for a pepper plant. At the end of the program campers were excited to bring the plant home and share it with their family. Staff attributed the campers' enthusiasm, in part, to the pride each child took in their responsibility for the plant.

SPRD made every effort to share information about their summer meals and nutrition programming with the larger community.

Flyers and banners were posted in both English and Spanish, and articles were written in the local activity guide and newspaper, the *Salina Journal*. Staff gave presentations at the back-to-school fair, a local Old Navy, and the Salina Community Service Council. At the end of the day, the outlet that was observed as the most effective in promoting the Serving Kansas Communities program was word of mouth. SPRD is hopeful

LESSONS LEARNED FROM SALINA

- In addition to summer camp sites, the Salina Parks and Recreation Department oversaw open feeding sites and found it was more difficult to engage kids at these sites. It is important to find a way to engage children visiting open feeding sites long enough to present the nutrition education meant to supplement their meals.
- SPRD wished they had given children more opportunities to work hands-on in community gardens and considers this a major area for improvement. This will require creating safe and easy access for all children to the site.
- Salina's nutrition education programming is still in its infancy stage. Imparting lifestyle changes may not happen overnight, but encouraging healthy eating and physical activity can help to drive home the importance of good nutrition to children.

Moreover, the children appeared to really enjoy the material—they had fun eating healthy foods and learning how those foods were important to their well-being. The success of the program became clear to staff when the children's parents and families began inquiring about the new OrganWise Guys materials. The family members' curiosity demonstrated that kids were effectively absorbing the educational material and were eager to share their new knowledge.

they will see continued increased attendance at summer meals in future years. They also plan to expand their community gardens, particularly children's access to the gardens. There are already plans in the works to create an outdoor learning center, complete with a pizza garden.

Building Sustainable Youth Fitness and Nutrition Programs

WICHITA, KS

In the face of serious budget shortfalls in 2012, Wichita Parks and Recreation Department (WPRD) was forced to close three of their summer meal sites and saw an overall reduction in the number of meals served compared to summer 2011. However, WPRD was able to do a lot more with what they had left—accommodating larger capacities and building the quality of provided services at remaining sites. One major development in Wichita’s camps this last summer was the construction of community gardens or “Children’s Farms” at all six summer camp locations. Campers and parents alike were involved from the start in planning, building, tilling, and planting the gardens. Local seniors frequently volunteered their time as well.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM WICHITA

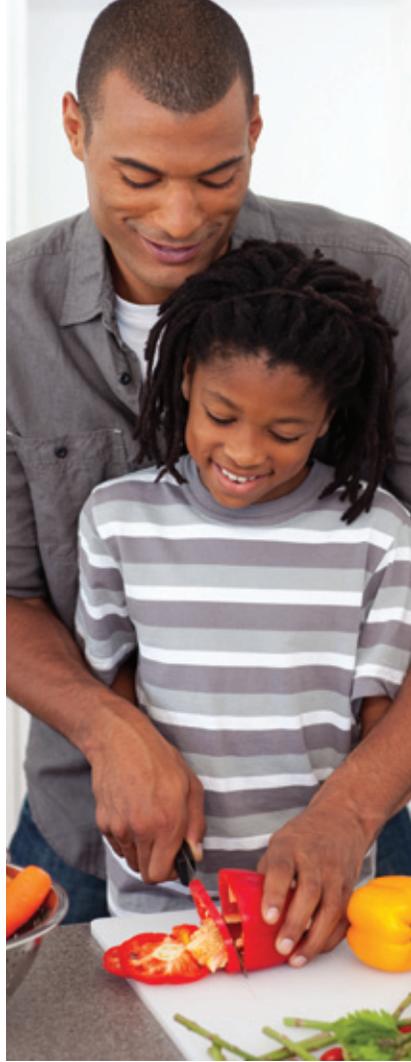
- In a state such as Kansas, known for hot and dry summers, it is necessary to plan carefully for outdoor gardening programs. In future years, Wichita Parks and Recreation Department will start working on their gardening or farming programs earlier to allow for a longer and thriving growing period.
- Wichita Parks and Recreation Department, like other grantees, emphasized the importance of a properly trained staff—“the more training, the better.” Furthermore, WPRD recognizes camp staff as role models to young campers and reinforces that staff must, at all times, model positive behaviors.

In the end, despite facing substantial challenges, WPRD counts a number of valuable successes as a grantee of the Serving Kansas Communities program. Through the children’s gardening program, young campers planted tomatoes and okra in hay bale planters, as well as flowers, herbs and peppers in smaller pots. The children were also given the opportunity to bring their new gardening skills home—given take-home

planting kits to grow watermelon, pumpkin, cucumber, and carrots with their families. WPRD was soon receiving very positive feedback from parents about the impressive new line of educational programming. Staff heard from many families that they were testing new healthy recipes that their child had brought home.

WPRD was mindful of maintaining campers’ attention throughout the day by planning hands-on nutrition education programming. In addition to learning from the OrganWise Guys curriculum, children participated in snack and cooking projects—making their own delicious trail mix, fruit smoothies and fruit skewers. Campers were kept physically active with daily rotations of fitness activities and were visited by guest fitness instructors that taught them exciting activities, such as Zumbatomic—Zumba exercises for kids. Kids overwhelmingly embraced the new programs and were excited to learn about gardening, getting involved in physical activity, and keeping a healthy heart.

Collaboration between WPRD, other city government offices and small businesses appears to have occurred without difficulty, as all partners are proponents of healthier kids and a healthier Wichita. WPRD plans to continue working with partners, such as the Sedgwick County Extension Office and Small Smiles Dental Center, in the future to expand the reach of nutrition programming in Wichita. During the school year, WPRD plans to incorporate their gardening activities and nutrition education through their after-school program. They would also like to develop programming oriented toward the community’s teen population, perhaps in cooperation with a local community college. WPRD believes that the Serving Kansas Communities program has set the bar for future programming with an important educational addition. WPRD believes the community’s enthusiasm will be a huge component to keeping the momentum going.



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