Portage County residents develop tools for improved health, well-being

**Description:** The Fit Families-Fit Communities project improved Portage County residents’ physical activity by increasing awareness of and involvement in activities, working with employers to offer workplace health promotion programs and collaborating with county and school staff to promote walking or biking to work and school. This was a multi-faceted approach and a good example of one rural community tackling the problem of obesity.

**Relevance:** According to estimates from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 60 percent of adults in Portage County are overweight or obese. The CDC also estimates that 35 percent of coronary heart disease among people who lead a sedentary lifestyle could have been prevented by increasing physical activity. Heart and cardiovascular diseases are the leading cause of death in Portage County, which includes urban and rural communities in central Wisconsin.

**Results:** This grant allowed Portage County CAN to collect data about the physical activity habits and needs of adults and children in Portage County and to implement six strategies for developing partnerships and improving the well-being of all residents.

To increase residents’ awareness of and involvement in physical activities, Portage County CAN developed a comprehensive website which included a county-wide activity calendar. A 52-page Portage County Physical Activity Guide with descriptions, locations and contact information for physical activity facilities and programs also was published. In addition, the grant helped establish the Central Wisconsin Worksite Wellness Network, which published a resource directory for area businesses.

Another strategy focused on schools and children. Portage County CAN’s Youth & School Committee worked with UW-Stevens Point students to create an online log for children to track their activities and provided assistance with launching four local Safe Routes to School programs. The Bicycle Federation of Wisconsin also facilitated a Safe and Accessible Streets discussion with local government officials.

According to a Community Profile Survey conducted in 2012, more than one-third (38 percent) of respondents were as physically active as they wanted compared with 26 percent of respondents in 2008. Two-thirds of respondents in 2012 also increased their walking (67 percent) and 60 percent increased their working out during the previous year. In addition, 27 percent of respondents in 2012 believed they had more opportunities to be physically active than one year ago and 23 percent believed there were more opportunities for children to be physically active.


**KEY INFORMATION**

**Grantee:** Portage County CAN, Gary Garske

**Grant Title:** Fit Families-Fit Communities

**Academic Partner:** Annie Wetter, PhD, UW-Stevens Point, School of Health Promotion & Human Development

**Dates:** January 1, 2010 – June 30, 2013

**Amount:** $400,000

**Program:** Community-Academic Partnership

**Project ID:** 1631