

Healthy Kids Healthy Communities

BUILDING HEALTHIER TOMORROWS

Healthy Kids Chaves County

From the beginning, Healthy Kids Chaves County (HKCC) has recognized the importance of cultivating a broad network of support. From schools to clubs and government to nonprofits, the initiative has created an extensive web of contributors. This level of community involvement has led to incredible changes in people's ability to be active and eat healthy food.

HKCC is a local initiative that the New Mexico Department of Health supports. The goal of the initiative is to increase people's access to fresh, affordable, healthy food and their opportunities to be active in their community.

Chaves County is in southeastern New Mexico, home to Dexter, Hagerman, Lake Arthur and its biggest city, Roswell. The city is known for the New Mexico Military Institute and its annual alien festival. Dexter is the largest of the three frontier communities south of Roswell. Lake Arthur, with about 400 residents, is the smallest. They are rural areas with rivaling schools and a tradition of farming before water became scarce.

Paula Camp, the Healthy Kids Chaves County coordinator, tapped into her connections and strengths to kick off the initiative three years ago. Camp, a retired school teacher, has spent most of her life in Roswell. Her mother and husband taught in the schools too. Camp focused on the schools first, establishing strong partnerships with the Roswell school district to get salad bars at all 12 elementary schools and fruit and vegetable samples provided to students.

Key Community Successes

- In Roswell Independent School District (RISD), more than one-in-three (36%) third graders (288 students) successfully completed all 21 days of the 2014-15 5.2.1.O Challenge. In the three rural school districts, more than one-in-two (54%) third graders (85 students) successfully completed. Several schools had 100% participation rates.
- All 12 RISD elementary schools now have salad bars
- 8 RISD elementary schools took part in the 2014 International Walk to School Day on October 8th; 883 students and 341 teachers and parents participated
- 7 RISD elementary schools have weekly walking clubs
- In Lake Arthur, Fruity Tuesdays continue to provide fresh fruit to all 119 K-12 students
- Lake Arthur farmers' market continued for the second consecutive season, and a greenhouse was built at the school
- HKCC is working collaboratively with Roswell city planners to enhance community-wide trail connectivity



Washington Ave. students walking to school on International Walk to School Day



Nancy Lopez kindergartners snack on fruit

Jane Batson, who has helped lead the HKCC initiative, worked with the school nurse in Lake Arthur and Roswell's local grocery store to bring in weekly fresh fruit deliveries and start a gardening program and farmer's market in Lake Arthur. Batson, a former grant writer and dean of the Division of Health at Eastern New Mexico University, passed away in September 2014.

To increase kids' physical activity, Camp worked with schools to encourage and support students to walk and ride bikes to school and to start an annual 5.2.1.O Challenge. The Challenge helps children develop healthy habits by asking them to follow the following behaviors every day for 21 days: eat five or more fruits and vegetables, limit screen time to two hours, be physically active for an hour and drink plenty of water.

Roswell's former and current mayors have led the Challenge with the involvement of Chaves County Extension and high-school students in FFA (Future Farmers of America). As a result of the partnerships, Roswell Independent School District has had more third graders successfully complete the Challenge than any other school district in the state.

Healthy Kids Chaves County extended the Challenge to the three neighboring communities as well as the Boys and Girls Club in Roswell over the summer. The work has been the most ambitious effort to reach children in New Mexico through the 5.2.1.O Challenge.

"I think the support has been wonderful," Camp said. "We haven't encountered anyone who didn't want to be a part of Healthy Kids. I think we're fortunate to live in a place where people want this. Everybody has a common goal. Everybody wants a healthy community, a healthy school, healthy families."



5.2.1.O kick-off in Roswell

HKCC continues to build momentum and expand on each success. To promote walking to school, Healthy Kids organized a walk and roll event for two schools in 2012. School children walked

during seven walk and roll events the next year and seven more in the fall of 2014. Seven schools also have walking clubs now.

“Everybody’s been very positive about it,” Camp said. “I had parents tell me that kids woke up excited on Walk and Roll Day.”

Camp turned to another supportive partner, the city of Roswell, to create aerial maps that highlight ½-mile and 1-mile routes from neighborhoods to schools. The maps help Camp talk to school officials about pedestrian possibilities for some of their students.

Walking isn’t conducive at every school because of isolated locations or busy roads. Eventually Camp would like to see 9 of the 12 schools encourage their students to walk to school once a month.

Students who participate in Healthy Kids’ activity programs earn rewards, such as soccer balls, Frisbees, jump ropes and hacky sacks, thanks to the support of parent-teacher organizations, service clubs and Batson’s grant-writing skills.

The Roswell Sertoma Club, Elks Club and Kiwanis Club each gave \$450 for incentives that Healthy Kids gives to schools that don’t have supportive parent-teacher organizations, according to Batson.

“I think the incentives make a great deal of difference,” Batson said. “Their parents are struggling to buy food so to get a toy for the kids is a real opportunity to get something that is theirs, that is brand new.”

At Batson’s request, Roswell’s local Wal-Mart, Roswell Sertoma, the Brinker Foundation and Stripes Convenience Store have all awarded grants to Healthy Chaves County. The funds have supported the Fruity Tuesday program at Lake Arthur Municipal School, physical education training for teachers and supplies for a free Thursday night track program.

Recruiting volunteers is another strength of HKCC. Batson applied to AmeriCorps to get 10 volunteers who did work projects for 16 weeks this summer around Roswell. Some of the youth learned about gardening by working at Enchanted Farms, a local farm that offers garden plots for people to grow their own produce. The youth brought their knowledge to Lake Arthur to further develop a farmer’s market there and build a greenhouse for the school.



AmeriCorps volunteers building Lake Arthur’s greenhouse

“I believe if groups know we need the help, we’ve seen them respond,” said Nathan Padilla, founder of Embrace Inc., a nonprofit that helps the community heal from social injustices and provides behavioral-health services to those in need. “Jane and all her connections have been really good – she’s able to network and rotate through different agencies and groups and let them know about our needs and usually she gets them filled.”

Batson was a board member of Embrace, which has an assortment of volunteers and students who have helped Healthy Kids’ work. “Our community ranks very high in childhood obesity, diabetes, suicide and bullying, and all those things interact and connect with one another,” Padilla said. “Healthy Kids is a great program we need to continue and grow in several ways.”

Healthy Kids Chaves County has made a concerted effort to reach beyond Roswell, home to 50,000 people. In addition to its work in Lake Arthur, the health initiative has connected with Dexter and Hagerman schools.

Healthy Kids supported the schools in measuring students’ BMI (body-mass index) levels, helped launch the 5.2.1.0 Challenge and will assist in strengthening the districts’ wellness policies so they support healthy food and physical activity for students and staff. With each success, HKCC is building sustainable programs and relationships.

“When you work with them, they see you have common goals – healthy kids and quality of life for kids,” Camp said. “They know healthy eating leads to healthy learning, and they want to do everything they can to make things better for their students.”



Bountiful Baskets delivery in Roswell

As HKCC has increased the availability of healthy foods in the schools, it has also expanded options for affordable produce in the community. Healthy Kids helped arrange for the national company, Bountiful Baskets Food Co-op, to ship fresh fruits and vegetables to two sites in Roswell every other week. The local convenience store, Stripes, now offers pre-packaged salads and fruits in addition to chimichangas and burritos.

With the help of its partners, Healthy Kids Chaves County is continuing its reach into the community -- developing a Fast Track for Health program for the Boys and Girls Club, teaching kids about healthy snacks and the importance of drinking water during golf lessons at the New Mexico Military Institute, and sponsoring large events for National Kids to the Parks Day.

Most importantly some programs are becoming institutionalized; schools have assumed responsibility for walking clubs, and the city folded the Thursday night track program into its routine recreational offerings.

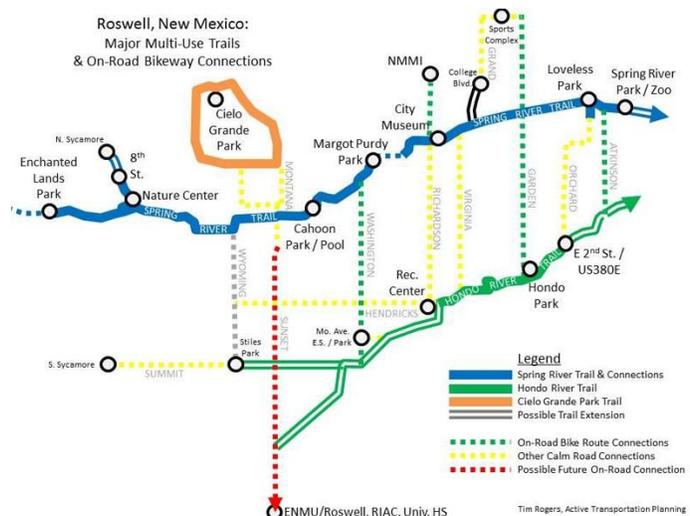
“I think it’s growing. I can see where it can be sustainable. I’m very excited about that since that’s the whole point,” Camp said. “I think we’re doing things that people want to keep doing because they see the benefit.”

Batson also saw definite results from Healthy Kids work: Lake Arthur students recognize the importance of fruits and vegetables, elementary-school kids expect more physical activity in their schools now, and Chaves County’s kindergartners and third-graders have lower BMI levels for the first time.

“That tells us people are being more active because measurable results are changing,” she said.

As those successes continue, HKCC is turning its attention to Roswell’s streets and trails to see how the city could connect its trail system and add bike lanes to support walking and biking safely through town.

The city has trails that people use, but there isn’t consistent maintenance or signs indicating where trails start and finish. Some trails are only a half block apart from each other, so creating connections could be easy and inexpensive. Tim Rogers, a Healthy Kids consultant who specializes in developing biking and walking trails, presented recommendations to several city officials who invited him to speak to the city’s Parks and Recreation Committee.



Grand plans to increase trail connectivity in Roswell

The city has trails that people use, but there isn’t consistent maintenance or signs indicating where trails start and finish. Some trails are only a half block apart from each other, so creating connections could be easy and inexpensive. Tim Rogers, a Healthy Kids consultant who specializes in developing biking and walking trails, presented recommendations to several city officials who invited him to speak to the city’s Parks and Recreation Committee.

Roswell City Councilor Tabitha Denny chairs that committee and is supportive of installing bike racks around town, and linking trails and roads to create formal routes that would take people to main attractions like downtown, museums and the zoo. The city is also talking about posting signs that would show mileage for routes that could take people from one side of town to another.

“It accomplishes a couple of things – families are getting healthy together, and it creates unity and bonding for families too,” Denny said. “It’s also about getting out and learning parts of Roswell. It’s getting together with your family and doing stuff, but it also supports families wanting to be here and tourism possibilities.”

The city is trying to fix uneven or cracked portions of existing trails as well as install extra lights so people feel safer, Denny said. The city councilor wants the city to look at marking bike lanes on streets by possibly shrinking the width of the road for vehicles. The city and Healthy Kids are at the beginning of discussions to set priorities and figure out funding.

“It’s about finding the best, least expensive way to do it,” Denny said. “It will be baby steps.”

Small steps can lead to tremendous changes, as Healthy Kids has learned. “We’ve learned the importance of being there to support, to help plan and to find grant sources to shore up needed things to make it work very effectively,” Batson said.