Exploring Rural People’s Perceptions of Weight-Healthy Attributes of Community Place

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Background
Generating Rural Options for Weight (GROW) Healthy Kids and Communities aims to prevent overweight and obesity in rural children and communities. Many characteristics of rural communities are associated with overweight and obesity in children, including environmental attributes that make it difficult for children to access and consume healthy foods and participate in physical activity to maintain a balanced energy equation.

Objectives
- Assess features of the community environment that are viewed as obesity promoting and preventing
- Assess perceptions of the community’s readiness to support efforts and implement obesity prevention efforts.

Target Community:
Wells, Nevada
- Population of approximately 2,000 people:
  - 27.6% of the residents are under the age of 18 years
  - 37% of students are receiving free or reduced lunch
  - 29.6% of children in Nevada that are entering kindergarten are overweight or obese.

Personal Observations
My personal goals were to better understand how people’s perceptions play a role in understanding and participating in health interventions. I also wanted to gain experience working with qualitative data and applying it to health research.

Methods
GROW:HKC encourages community health action through resident engagement in research that uses various activities to identify supports/barriers to healthy eating and physical activity. HEAL MAPPS™ is the tool developed by GROW:HKC researchers to help collect the qualitative data with and from communities.

My role as a research apprentice was to code results from the Wells, NV community conversation into nodes that represented the six dimensions of the Community Readiness Model (CRM). NVivo 10, qualitative research software, was used to manage the project.

Community Readiness Model
CRM assesses community readiness to implement effective programs. CRM is composed of six dimensions:
- Community knowledge about the issue
- Community efforts
- Community knowledge of efforts
- Local Leadership
- Community climate
- Resources related to the issue

The results, stage of community readiness and emerging themes, were provided back to the community in a written report.

Results
After evaluating the community conversation, I gave Wells, NV a score of 3 on the CRM, showing that the community is only vaguely aware of how the environment affects population health.

Identified supports to Physical Activity & Healthy Eating include:
- Year-round youth sports
- School recreation programs
- Outdoor trails and parks
- School’s Food assistance program

Identified barriers to Physical Activity & Healthy Eating include:
- Unmaintained or nonexistent sidewalks throughout Wells
- Lack of local food production
- Limited access and high cost of fresh fruits and vegetables

Evaluation of Outcomes
Personal Observations
I noticed that participants consistently polled higher than the community conversation data suggested.

Poll of CRM dimension: local leadership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local Leadership</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Moderately engaged</td>
<td>Very engaged</td>
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</tbody>
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Poiling results conflicted with remarks stating local leadership was a barrier to a healthy lifestyle. Community perceptions indicate that residents are unaware of how the local environment affects individual health, and that Wells, NV would currently be unable to support effective health interventions.

Personal Development
Through my apprentice position with GROW:HKC I developed a better understanding of:
- How personal/community perceptions reflect awareness of an issue
- How different aspects of the built environment affect the health and habits of a community
- How health models are applied to research and how they are applied in health interventions
- The beginning stages of planning a health intervention and how research leads to program funding
- Different mediums of qualitative data used to interpret themes and characteristics of communities
- How to use the qualitative research program, NVIVO

This experience has given me the opportunity to relate concepts from class to real world public health situations, and apply the skills I’ve learned to future endeavors.

A special thanks to Dr. Deborah John and Alinna Ghavami for mentoring and coaching me through the project.