Conference Update:
Building Capacity for Healthy Communities

More than 100 people from around the state came to Columbia, Missouri on April 8 and 9 to attend the Building Capacity for Healthy Communities conference. The MU Extension Healthy Lifestyle Initiative, with support from the MU Extension Implementation Team, Missouri Council for Activity & Nutrition, Missouri Foundation for Health, Department of Health and Senior Services, and Health Care Foundation of Greater Kansas City, put on the conference as an opportunity for participants, who were also community representatives, to engage with others who are working to make their communities healthy places to live, work, and play. Community representatives included people from community coalitions, city governments, state and local health departments, MU Extension, schools, universities, hospitals, farmers’ markets, parks and recreation departments, community action agencies, community based and non-profit organizations, and of course, MFH Healthy and Active Communities grantees.

Conference participants heard from and interacted with speakers who work at the national, state, and local levels in areas of healthy eating/active living, parks and recreation, community food systems, and community organizing, among others. Monte Roulier facilitated question and answer sessions and allowed for brief periods of discussion between presenters in order to tie the content together.

Christy Hoehner and Sabrina Baldwin opened the conference with a presentation about an evidence-based evaluation process called a Health Impact Assessment (HIA). HIAs have been used in (continued on page 2)
the United States to evaluate the impact of projects, such as housing, urban, and corridor redevelopments, and policies, such as living wage ordinances, county land use planning, and the federal Farm Bill. Christy noted that an HIA is most successful if it is well defined, contributes new information, is technically feasible, is conducted with adequate resources in a receptive political environment, and considers potentially significant health effects as a justification for conducting such an assessment. A Health Impact Assessment is currently being conducted in the city of Pagedale, in St. Louis County, to evaluate the Page Redevelopment Zone.

Jan Neitzert, an advocate for parks and recreation, brought people to a new level of understanding about the opportunities to partner with parks and recreation departments to bring about policy and environmental changes in communities. Parks, when they are safe, clean, welcoming and accommodating, do a lot more than most people think and parks and recreation departments often offer a wide array of classes, workshops, and sporting and community events. Since 90% of Missourians think spending time outdoors leads to a happier and healthier life, now is the time to think about how you might be able to partner with your local parks and recreation department to bring more physical activity opportunities to your community.

Phil Valko and Jennifer Allen described their work with the Trailnet organization to improve quality of life in three St. Louis area communities. They recognize that programs are needed to complement other pieces of healthy eating/active living initiatives such as policy and environmental change and social networks. In each community, people came together to develop an action plan to guide their efforts. Part of the capacity (continued on page 3)
building consisted of developing a community identity either around the group itself or a recurring event, such as the Sunday Walkways. Phil and Jennifer also talked about the Trailnet Toolkit and presented it as a resource that schools, community residents, faith-based organizations, healthcare providers, local government, and others can use in the process of making changes to policies and the environment.

Mary Hendrickson and Bill McKelvey, in their presentation about community food systems, asked each person to draw a map of where they get food in their community. This exercise allowed people to visualize the food procurement outlets they frequent, the extent of healthy and unhealthy food outlets, and the amount of local food available. It also challenged people to ask where they would get food if they did not have money. Mary and Bill discussed the components of the current food system then provided a definition of community food systems and strategies for developing a community food system. Some outcomes of community food systems include better nutrition and health, improved local economy, and food security.

Mark Dessauer, in his presentation about messaging, encouraged people to develop a story about their community work that everyone can show and tell through videos, images, photos, simple language, and a consistent message. Be dynamic and unique in your communication or, as Mark said, “if everyone zigs, you zag with your story.” He also reminded us that information does not equal action, health does not equal well-being, and people will not change their behavior if the environment does not support it. What we are ultimately trying to accomplish is a leveling of the community barriers to making healthy choices.

Four community representatives talked about their work with local partnerships. Two of them represented H&AC grants that facilitated partnership work in their community. Pat Maltbia, of the Healthy and Active Bootheel project, described how churches, schools, and a community fitness center got involved in this health promotion effort. Bruce Wade, of the Fit Phelps Community Partnership project, talked about community gardens, walking trails, walking events, and worksite wellness activities. Molly Long shared the process that a small town committee went through to turn... (continued on page 4)
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seven acres of donated land into a park that the whole community could use. This process was a success thanks to many others who donated resources and money and volunteered time. Corey Johnson described the Community Healthy Living Index, an evaluation tool available through the YMCA. This tool is designed to help local leaders assess multiple aspects of their community to better understand how well they support environments that encourage healthy choices.

The peer-to-peer exchange was a chance for everyone to learn about the Missouri Convergence Partnership and provide input about how this entity and others such as foundations, MU Extension, and Missouri Council for Activity and Nutrition can help advance the work of community coalitions throughout the state. Coming as it did at the end of the conference, the peer-to-peer exchange really just planted the seed for people to think about future guidance and resources that the Missouri Convergence Partnership and others might provide.

Post-conference evaluation results indicated that among the 35% who completed the evaluation, most people thought that most of the sessions were more than satisfactory, the speakers gave them ideas to bring back to their projects, networking with others gave them ideas to bring back to their projects, materials and format of the conference kept them engaged, and were quite satisfied with the quality and usefulness of the conference. The website [http://extension.missouri.edu/healthylife/presentations.htm](http://extension.missouri.edu/healthylife/presentations.htm) has links to all of the speakers’ PowerPoint presentations, as well as other relevant resources and policy databases.

Other MFH Capacity Building Teams

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**MFH Healthy & Active Communities—Implementation Team**

**Purpose:**
The MU Extension Implementation Team provides grantees with assistance in implementing project activities. They are available by phone and email and for meetings in your community to provide program implementation support. Types of assistance might include: program specific assistance on topics such as worksite wellness, farm to school, and starting and sustaining community gardens; recruiting participants for community initiatives; fostering organizational buy-in and support; effectively engaging policy makers; and strategies to build community partnerships to ensure program sustainability.

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