



## Grants aimed at improving health, wellness

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PITTSBURG, Kan. — Seeds planted a year and a half ago by a grass-roots initiative to improve nutrition and physical activity in Crawford County are now well-established and have begun showing signs of growth.

To date, the Community Foundation of Southeast Kansas has awarded more than \$75,000 in grants as part of a three-year initiative through the Kansas Health Foundation. Last week, the initiative's program director, Stephanie Joiner, announced that the goal is to double that by 2011, with remaining money earmarked for nutrition and physical activity.

Joiner said work on the grant program began after she went on a listening tour "from Riverton to Pleasanton, Oswego to McCune."

"The idea is not to dictate what needs to be done to our community, but to find out from our community how we can help," she said. "Our emphasis is on making small, sustainable changes. Best practices shows you can't change your life in a day, but you can make small changes."

About 500 residents in 19 groups in Crawford, Cherokee, Bourbon and Labette counties weighed in on what it means to be physically active, and what could be done in workplaces, schools, families and communities to improve nutrition and fitness.

"What we learned is that people know they need to make good choices, but the problem is that people are not motivated to make those changes," Joiner said. "Motivation has to be trained like you train a muscle, and the older we get, the more atrophy happens to our motivation."

More than \$20,000 in first-year grant money awarded in late 2007 helped fund seven programs serving diverse groups. All of them were designed to motivate and support healthy lifestyle changes, Joiner said.

One such program really took off: At Pittsburg Community Middle School, a group of girls now meets two to three times a week under the moniker "Dragons Fired Up for Change."

The extracurricular club features physical activities, nutritional lessons, shopping on a budget in a healthy fashion, and trips to the YMCA.

"The feedback was tremendous," Joiner said. "They have been able to have conversations with their parents about health and have started seeing changes within their families, and they found a real sense of community with each other."

Another program, this one designed for teachers, also has had lasting effects. A countywide health and wellness committee staged an in-service day last fall for the county's teachers. They went on to form walking groups and nutrition groups, and hosted school-level contests related to health and wellness.

Last week, a series of weekly and monthly activities on nutrition and health kicked off at those same area schools, including after-school teacher programs such as strength training,

tennis, gardening, stress management, biking, and eating and cooking right. And this week, another grant recipient, the Crawford County Extension office, will kick off a Walk Kansas for Kids program at Westside Elementary School in Pittsburg. Grant funding provides for 10 school districts in three counties to participate in the Walk Kansas for Kids program, which is expected to serve at least 3,000 students with incentives to encourage fewer sweetened beverages and less screen time, more time spent with family, and an active lifestyle.

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#### Photos



Globe/T. Rob Brown Fifth-grade teacher Diane Deplue (left), of Frontenac, learns some fitness tips from Karleigh Zafuta, owner of Phase 1 Fitness in Pittsburg. A grant program involving schools and other groups in Southeast Kansas helps pay for health and wellness programs.