

Small Steps to a Healthier Life

Issue

Community data from Island County, Washington showed that many low-income families were struggling with healthy eating and living an active lifestyle. The Island County Health Department wanted to help these families realize that boosting their physical activity and improving their nutrition can start with small steps—taking the stairs instead of the elevator, walking an extra block, or even making their own trail mix.

Intervention

The Island County Health Department identified low-income families with children as the population for a physical activity and healthy eating project funded by the 2007 Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant. They conducted a thorough survey of parents on what they'd like to do about physical activity and nutrition. Results revealed parents were interested in learning where to go to be active in the community and wanted to know about healthier food choices, especially for lunches and snacks. The Island County Health Department came up with several interventions:

- **Creating and distributing a guide to outdoor activities** to help families find safe, outdoor places to be hike, walk, and bike
- **Holding a forum** for city and county officials, other policy makers, schools, and community members aimed at developing policy initiatives and brainstorming ideas around implementing healthy options in schools
- **Hosting a booth** at Children's Day (a community-wide event) with hands-on activities to educate children about healthy eating
- **Presenting information about healthy eating and making healthy snacks** at preschool cooperative classes, Girl Scout troops meetings, elementary school classes, and 4-H groups

Impact

The Island County Health Department is seen as a leader in physical activity and nutrition. They are continually invited to be a partner in many initiatives to improve the health in their county. Other results include:

- Over **264 children** participated in healthy eating and healthy living activities
- Several **walking school bus programs** help children walk safely to school instead of taking the bus
- South Whidbey School District in Island County **hired a part-time nutritionist** to help children learn more about nutrition and physical activity

Changing behaviors related to nutrition and physical activity will not happen overnight, but Island County Health Department is helping residents take small steps every day that are adding up to big changes on a community-wide level, thanks to block grant funds.

County population*: 78,400

Island County Public Health
Coupeville, Washington
<http://www.islandcounty.net/health/>

