

NCCDPHP Success Story

Arkansas Town Makes Strides to Create Safe Streets for Walking and Cycling



At A Glance

Arkansas has one of the highest obesity rates in the nation. The Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) Clarendon coalition launched a movement to make the streets of Clarendon, Arkansas, safer for walking and cycling and to improve access to healthy foods. The group hosted a pop-up event to show how traffic-calming measures such as signs and crosswalks could make the community a safer place to be active. HEAL Clarendon also started a community garden to improve access to healthy foods.

By Arkansas Healthy LIFE Project Team

Public Health Challenge

Arkansas and Alabama are tied for third among states with the highest obesity rates, according to 2016 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System data. Unless something changes, the state faces many years of chronic disease and stress on the health system. According to the Arkansas Department of Health, 82% of Monroe County adults were overweight or had obesity in 2016. Clarendon, the county seat, is a small town of about 1,400. A needs assessment conducted by Arkansas Healthy Lifestyles Involving Food and Exercise (Arkansas Healthy LIFE), a program of the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service, revealed about half of the county residents did not have access to any safe places for physical activity. In addition, the county scored only 5.2 on a 10-point healthy food environment index. Surprised by these findings, Arkansas Healthy LIFE formed the HEAL Clarendon coalition.

Approach

With support from Arkansas Healthy LIFE, HEAL Clarendon mapped out the town and conducted a walk audit to determine the downtown area needed safe places to walk and bike to neighborhoods and schools. North 7th Street runs through the heart of Clarendon and connects a senior center, low-income housing units, and the high school, making it a natural fit for walking and biking. During a local festival, the group hosted a pop-up event by placing temporary traffic cones, road tape, and signs to simulate crosswalks, parking changes, and a roundabout.

After participating in the walk audit, I have a better understanding of dangers faced by those who walk.

- HEAL Clarendon Coalition Member

Results

The pop-up event raised awareness of community needs and allowed residents to provide feedback about changes that would make walking and biking safer around downtown. Following the pop-up event, permanent crosswalks and painted speed bumps were installed along North 7th Street. The 1,400 residents of Clarendon can now bike and walk more safely through their downtown area. In addition, land was donated by the city for HEAL Clarendon to start a community garden. Volunteers plant and harvest the garden. Produce is accessible to seniors at the senior center next door, families living nearby, and high school students who walk to the garden to volunteer.

What's Next

HEAL Clarendon initially focused on North 7th Street but plans to make all of the neighborhood streets pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly. The group also plans to build a permanent farmers' market to help support the local economy and attract local producers to a central location. The group will engage further with the high school to develop a Safe Routes to School program and continue to work with multiple state and regional agencies to achieve its goals.

Find Out More

Learn more about Arkansas Healthy LIFE by visiting <https://www.uaex.edu/health-living/health/arkansas-healthy-life.aspx>. (<https://www.uaex.edu/health-living/health/arkansas-healthy-life.aspx>) The University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service is able to provide Arkansas Healthy LIFE through a cooperative agreement with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Programs to Reduce Obesity in High Obesity Areas – 1416).

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Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Web site

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The findings and conclusions in this success story are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position of the funding agencies or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).



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