

Reaching People with Disabilities through Healthy Communities

Phase Four – Implementation

Implementing Policies, Systems, and Environmental (PSEs) Changes

[Karma Harris] This Implementation phase is really the phase where the community coalitions work to implement the strategies that were outlined and described in the community action plans that they all developed. And as a recap, these community action plans should be representative of new policy, system, or environmental change strategies which would, or should, improve access and opportunity towards healthy eating, physical activity, general accessibility improvements, and also preventing the use of tobacco products and accelerating tobacco cessation within each of the identified community sectors.

And so, community coalitions really got to determine which of those sectors they would focus in, and which focus areas their policy, system, and environmental change strategies would target. And I just would maybe think it's beneficial if you could provide us with maybe an overview of the types of successes each of these communities accomplished.

[David Ellsworth] Both of these communities at the beginning kind of had similar strategies. Both wanted to do something with regard to adaptive bikes, or adaptive equipment, and then they both kind of had nutrition in mind, and it's so cool how they were able to address these in very different ways as the project evolved to meet the needs of their county.

So, I'll start with Adams County. I had a blast working with these guys. So, the first thing that they really latched onto was adaptive equipment, specifically adaptive bicycles that could meet the needs of a range of people with disabilities. And originally, they were thinking, you know, we'll buy a couple of these adaptive bikes so that they can be used in schools. And that's a wonderful idea. So, you know kids with disabilities would be able to participate in physical activity alongside their peers; everyone could ride bikes together at recess. And that was a good goal. But in examining this we realized that you know it would probably only serve a handful of kids. So, here's where we pivoted just a little bit and thought about "Okay, how can we make this a little bit more sustainable and how can we expand this to serve more people?"

So we decided that, you know, we would kind of make this a bike-share system where the bikes could be loaned out through the schools and community centers and for special events, such as walk/run events, like walk/bike/run events, to make sure that these bikes were really community-based resources and we were able to accomplish that by creating a memorandum of understanding, an MOU that kind of outlines, you know, how this bike share works: who would maintain them, where they're housed, the process of checking them out.

So, I think that, that, was a really cool example of something that, you know, could have been scaled-up and was scaled-up to meet the needs of a lot of different people. So that was one example of how this bicycle adapted, bicycle program, really kind of started out as an environmental change strategy; helping kids and people with disabilities experience see the environment that they interact with. But through that MOU, and through that bike-share program, we made it more of a physical activity policy that was supported at the local level. So, I think that that was a really cool example of how we were able to accomplish both.

The second example from Adams County was a program that's called Health Matters™, so Health Matters™ is a health and wellness program that was developed to meet the needs of people with disabilities. It was developed for them. It was tested to make sure that it really does benefit people with disabilities. And they were able to integrate this into their community.

So, it started out as kind of like an adaptive yoga/Zumba class at a local studio, but we were able to kind of scale this up and make it a real community resource. So, it started out as that one class, but then it expanded to meet the needs of more individuals. And it's actually being adapted or utilized in their school system. So that's something that hasn't really been done before but is a really cool way that this program that, you know, targeted one group of people, has been expanded upon to meet the needs of an entire school system.

So, I think that that's a really good example of how, kind of a program, or a programmatic change was scaled-up to become a system change to meet the needs of more individuals. And then finally, they were able to install several wheelchair charging stations. So if people are using power wheelchairs, you obviously need a charge to get to where you need to go, and through talking at the beginning of the grant, we realized that there is a real problem where some people would be traveling long distances in their power chair and run out of charge, or be stranded and need assistance from there.

So, these wheelchair charging stations were located throughout the county. It started at one that was at the at the fairgrounds, and then we were able to put more charging stations at some key community resources like parks, playgrounds, etc., to make sure that people could charge their power chair whenever they needed to. So that's a really good example. Again, an environmental change where you've kind of altered the landscape and people are able to interact with the environment and with their community in a way that they had not been able to before.

[Karma Harris] What about, can you tell us some more about Marion County's efforts and maybe how they differed?

[David Ellsworth] Yes. So, Marion County took a different approach to improving health and wellness for people with disability in their community. And I'm excited to share some examples. So, I think probably the best example of this, Marion was able to utilize a mobile food pantry that improved access to healthy foods throughout the community.

So, Marion was very fortunate to receive some matching funds where they could purchase a van that was used to bring fresh produce throughout the county. And it benefited people with disabilities in several ways. So, first of all, the mobile food pantry was staffed by people with disabilities. They would help prepare the food and organize the food, loaded onto the van and would kind of man the distribution from there on.

It was managed and operated by the Marion County Developmental Disabilities (DD) organization, their local Board of DD in that county. So, they were able to take ownership of that community-based resource. And the other market effect that it had, was that now you could deliver fresh produce and nutritious food in areas in the county where that had not been available before.

So instead of, you know, if you identified where food deserts were, where you know there weren't a lot of opportunities for healthy food or healthy eating, and this mobile food pantry was able to go there. And oftentimes those are areas of the county where you do have a higher prevalence of people with disabilities. So not only were people with disabilities taking ownership of this resource, but they were also helping to better serve people with disabilities within their community. And I think that that kind of spans across most of these levels. It's a policy change, you know, kind of at the local level, and probably, more so, it's a programmatic and systems change where this program was able to serve a large proportion of people with disabilities in the county.

Another notable example was they created an opportunity for adapted recreation at the Tall Grass Trail. And that's a bike trail that was located in the community. It's very scenic. It's, you know, when you get on the trail, it's accessible, it's pretty flat. It's paved, there's access to a dock, some water recreation, and whatnot. And we realized that there were a couple of things. So, there is an environmental barrier where you could get to the trail head, but it was very difficult to get from the parking lot to the trail itself. So, we were able to address that environmental barrier, but then, through kind of a systems change, they were able to partner with a local organization that had adapted equipment that could be leased or borrowed. So, they had some adaptive bikes that they were able to demonstrate, they had adaptive kayaking lessons, which was kind of a really cool way to bring in existing resources and make them available to the community. So again, that's an example of how a program change really kind of became a system change.

And then finally, this is kind of a local level policy example, but Marion County Health Department was able to spearhead an effort on disability inclusion called Commit to Disability Inclusion, and they had their organization and other partner organizations and businesses in Marion commit to including people with disabilities – just stating that with regard to our efforts, our business, whatever it is - we are going to dedicate ourselves to making sure that people with disabilities are included in a meaningful way and that our goods and services benefit them.

So, I think that those were some really notable examples of policy, systems, and environmental changes among both communities.

[Karma Harris] I agree. I think you've provided for our listeners tangible examples of each of those examples of the new policy changes, systems changes, and environmental changes. I think one of the things I want our listeners to know is that we were specific in saying we only wanted to see policy, systems, environmental approaches on the Community Action Plan.

And the reason for that is because we feel these are more sustainable over time. They hit a larger number of community members, and have the ability, or the potential to impact more people. And when you're creating local community change, I think the sustainability, and the potential impact, and potential reach, are very important components. So, some of our communities would want to do some programs, and I think, David, you've given us a really good example of how to take a programmatic change and really embed it at the system level in some capacity.

So, with the Health Matters™ at the school system, I think, is a great example of how to make that into a systemic change. And so, we did allow those. I think, too, it's important to note for our listeners that we told them they could adopt the “twin approach” of the policy, system, environmental change, which meant they could designate or implement their new policy, systems, and environment in one of two different ways: One is they could target these changes for the entire communities or the entire community population, but it had to have some sort of inclusion component to it; and then the other avenue that they could choose is to target their changes towards a specific disability group, or to people with disabilities in general. And I think the examples that you gave us not only showed us examples of policy, system, and environmental changes but also would really fall in line with one of those two twin approaches based on some of those that you just shared with us. I thank you for that.