



Moore and Montgomery counties, NC

▲ Community Example from Chapter 4 of "Lessons for Leaders:"
Lessons in Advancing Policy/Systems Change

Community Background

Experienced in healthy community change work, FirstHealth of the Carolinas did not shy away from complexity when it became the lead agency for the Moore and Montgomery counties' *Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities* (HKHC) project. The group focused its HKHC efforts in five municipalities across two high-need, rural counties: Aberdeen, Southern Pines and Robbins in Moore County; and Candor and Mount Gilead in Montgomery County.

Community Action

A key initial HKHC goal was to create a diverse partnership to guide and implement the community change work in the five municipalities. FirstHealth provided overarching support through a project director and project coordinator that helped each community tailor healthy eating and active living strategies based on their unique needs and opportunities, while staying attuned to how the work in each municipality was influencing change across the region. The project staff also provided valuable resources to the communities, including assessment and evaluation tools and data, used in combination with specific community context to select promising strategies.

Recognizing that large-scale change and impact would not occur through a single healthy eating or active living approach, or one type of policy or physical change across the five communities, the Moore and Montgomery counties' HKHC partnership identified community champions in each of the communities to serve as the main points of contact to the project director and project coordinator. The community champions provided the necessary insider perspective

to identify the most needed and promising strategies for their communities. Together, the community champions and HKHC project staff established project management and decision-making guidelines, developed a communication system to keep partners involved in the work, conducted annual partnership assessments, participated in quarterly learning exchanges to share lessons learned, and established a sustainability plan to maintain partner engagement when HKHC funding ended.

This approach led to significant policy and environmental changes to support healthy eating and active living in all five of the communities. These included new healthy eating policies for town-sponsored events; greater access to healthy food and beverage options in corner stores and farmers' markets; improvements in bicycle, pedestrian and trail infrastructure; and inclusion of a goal in a county's land use plan that explicitly addresses improving the built and natural environments to improve citizen health through the use of open space and recreational opportunities.

These successes have enabled advocates and decision makers to continue influencing healthy community systems change. According to Katrina Tatum, Town Manager and HKHC Community Champion in Mount Gilead, "A lot of us have learned healthier choices. As we learn these things, we're passing them on. We think about things differently as a result of HKHC."