

CATEGORY ARCHIVES: COLLABORATION FOR HEALTH, ACTIVITY, AND NUTRITION IN CHILDREN'S ENVIRONMENTS (CHANCE) AND ADOPTING HEALTHY HABITS (AHH) BEST PRACTICES: DOCUMENTING EFFORTS AND PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

Would you rather have feral dogs or the possibility of gunshots?

Posted on **September 3, 2015** by **Dana Larsen**

A few weeks ago, Tisa and I embarked upon the final leg of our journey to document AHH by visiting all the sites. The first stop of the 3-day trip took us from high above Cayuga's waters to the Big Apple. Our first destination was CU-CE NYC (Cornell University-Cooperative Extension), located in the heart of Manhattan.



- Here we are in the Big City! First day at the NYC office.

Up to this point, all the other site visits we had conducted (Jefferson, Schenectady, Herkimer) were in rural areas. NYC is anything but rural.

Difference #1: NYC is a high-density, urban area that presents numerous barriers and challenges to the

type of environmental change work AHH and CHANCE entailed.



- Where do all these people come from?? And not a tree in sight.

Additionally, in terms of structure of agency, NYC is the odd ball. NYC is Cornell University-Cooperative Extension rather than Cornell Cooperative Extension as is the case with the rest of the counties in New York State. The staff at CUCE-NYC are employees of the university system.

Difference #2: CUCE-NYC has a different structure than other counties in NY state. On the ground, this translates to having different staffing and managerial divisions and classifications.

One of the challenges the incredible AHH staff discussed at our site visit was the difficulty that comes with meeting numbers (number of contacts for EFNEP or SNAP-ed) and having time left to do environmental work. This is a challenge that is pervasive throughout the state.

As the importance of shaping the environment to support the adoption of healthy habits is becoming more recognized, there is an increasing need to be able to document and quantify time spent doing this environmental change work.

If there is one thing I am taking away from all these interviews it is that environmental change is a slow ongoing process. It is not going to happen overnight. In a job where performance needs to be measured based on deliverables and time needs to be accounted for this presents numerous challenges.

The urban setting in NYC also presents problems to the old idea of letting kids run loose till the dinner bell. It frankly is just not safe for children to be by themselves outside. Additionally, there aren't always safe places to play. The concept of a back yard is a novelty in the urban maze of NYC. Encouraging physical activity in urban settings takes creativity.

Some of the strategies that the CUCE-NYC have used are wellness days in the parks, walks across the Brooklyn Bridge and utilization of the extensive park system in NYC.

An additional challenge in New York city that was brought in up in the schoolwork group interviews, was the prohibitively high cost of rent in NYC. As soon as school is out, both the kids and parents are looking for work, which often leads to low attendance at programming events.

Although there are numerous challenges and obstacles, many different groups have banded together to form multi-lateral, multi-stakeholder initiatives to promote and enable the adoption of healthy habits. These partnerships, such as Make the Road NYC! are inspiring! Good people, who believe there is a problem, and that this problem needs to be addressed are doing good work.

After our site visit, Tisa and I played tourist (well, I, the newbie to NYC did) and walked around the city. After spending the summer in Ithaca, the chaos and the pace of the city was definitely overwhelming. Walking around the city was a great way though to see first-hand the environment of NYC.



— Check it out, it's the Empire State building!

The next morning we set off bright and early for Suffolk County. We had hoped to stop by the beach on the way home, but unfortunately we brought a little of Ithaca with us. This was my first time in Long Island so the day started with a quick Long Island geography lesson.



- CCE- Suffolk County is one of the largest sites in the state.

One of the biggest challenges in terms of programming in Suffolk is the geographical spread and distance between places. Due to traffic, it could take hours to get from one end of the island to the other.

Our final site visit of the summer and final site visit for AHH in general, was at Orange County CCE. The site where the office is located is very interesting and eye-catching right off the bat. I later learned that the campus used to be a self-contained mental hospital. With a farm, bakery and crematorium on site.



- Couldn't resist! What a beautiful (and haunted!) building! Last site visit to CCE-Orange County.

Orange county CCE also has done great work with Worksite Wellness. A few of their initiatives include a healthy vending machine, healthy workout lending cart, building wide physical activity initiatives and "potty talks."



- This was a big initiative in Orange County. Water packages were distributed across the county to interested businesses.



- Healthy Vending in the office at CCE-Orange!
Shouldn't making the healthy choice always be the easy choice??



- The Wellness cart is free for anyone in the building including non-CCE staff to use and enjoy!

If you stuck with me all the way to the end of this blog novel, then you are probably still wondering what the title of the post, “Would you rather have feral dogs or the possibility of gunshots?” means.

It all goes back to different environments. The 6 counties involved with AHH/CHANCE across New York State all had the same mission and guidelines laid out before them. However, if you look at the partnership mapping, policy changes and community coalitions in each county you will see they are all drastically different! There is no cookie cutter model for this type of PSE work. The work is done by the community members to best serve the needs of the community.

So that brings me back to the question of “Would you rather have feral dogs or the possibility of gunshots?” Both of these are very real situations that team members have faced in their respective communities and both are problems that are not going to be addressed over night.

No two environments are the same, but we can all learn something from each other and by working together to accomplish the same goal.

Even though the summer is over and AHH official wraps up at the end of September, the work is not ending! Much of the work started with AHH has become operationalized or will be part of other exciting ventures that are brewing up in FNEC!

Posted in **Collaboration for Health, Activity, and Nutrition in Children’s Environments (CHANCE) and Adopting Healthy Habits (AHH) Best Practices: Documenting efforts and preparing for the future**

Wait, are we talking about recycling?

Posted on **July 25, 2015** by **Dana Larsen**

Over the past two weeks Tisa and I have covered miles of New York's picturesque rural roads visiting Herkimer, Jefferson and Schenectady counties. At each county we met with professional staff (managers) and community workers. We looked over the case studies and summaries of partnerships that I have been working on pulling together for the past few weeks for any inaccurate or missing information.



- Don't worry, I am not driving! Beautiful rural scenery captured on the way back to Ithaca.

My main project this summer is working on documenting efforts and outcomes of this multi-year project across all the participating counties. Herein is where one of the struggles lies. How do you document environmental change work that was intentionally designed to transcend the confines of one agency? At the beginning of the project, each county team was told they had to do work at the community level, agency level, home level and individual level (parent/child).



- An example of a worksite wellness initiative in Schenectady county CCE. The posters, all with a health theme, are placed over the copiers, which is a central location that everyone can see and are rotated monthly.

A common theme across the interviews that Tisa has been facilitating with each county team is the difficulty in describing this type of work. As someone brought up in one of the interviews, environmental change work has its own language. A staff member from Schenectady said a few a years ago when they would say environmental change, people unfamiliar with the work would immediately think of recycling. However, both Tisa and community workers have noted that after being engaged in this work for so many years the ability to talk about it and speak the language has grown.

Whereas now, environmental change work is omnipresent in grants and programming requirements for nutrition education, 9 years ago when this project was started it was new and represented an untested frontier. The community nutrition workers discussed having little direction in the beginning and just being told to try something and campus would tell you if they liked it.

Coming into the project (AHH) from the perspective of an outsider immersing myself in documentation of years of work, it seems like AHH was a journey for not only communities, but for the campus staff. Even looking at the evolution and differences between the year end summaries collected for each county it is apparent the development of figuring out what works from campus and the communities.

I have even found myself struggling for words to accurately and concisely describe what I am doing this summer when friends ask. If I say documenting efforts of an obesity prevention research study, I am frequently prompted with questions of what does that mean? Well where to begin.....

Here are a few more pictures:



- Headed to Schenectady from Herkimer County CCE. I think the foliage might be confused about the season!



- A picture of the office banner after our meeting with the incredible staff at Herkimer CCE.

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Week 3/4: Environmental Change in Action

Posted on **July 6, 2015** by **Dana Larsen**

Over the past two weeks I have been submersed in reading about the environmental change work each county in the Adopting Healthy Habits (AHH) program have undertaken. I also participated in a CCE/FNEC orientation and overview workshop. For part of the workshop we participated in one task of one module of the Navigating for Success: Culturally Responsive Teaching curriculum.

This past week also marked the anniversary of the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862! Every state has a land-grant university; Cornell University is the land grant university for New York State. Cornell, although private, has three contract-colleges including CALS and Human Ecology, which serve to fulfill the land-grant mission to NY.

To continue the theme from last week:

3 Things I Have Learned:

1. There is about an 8:1 QALY (Quality Adjusted Life Years) benefit to cost ratio for EFNEP!
2. Each state has at least 1 land grant university through which Cooperative Extension is facilitated.
3. A handbook of acronyms commonly used is not only helpful, but also entirely essential to learning the language of CCE!

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Week 2: What Does Environmental Change Look Like?

Posted on **June 24, 2015** by **Dana Larsen**

3 Things I have learned this week:

1. Strong partnerships can take a long time to develop
2. Documenting work in an organized, detailed manner is essential
3. There is a lot more to New York State than just NYC

CHANCE was started in 2005 as a pilot program in 3 sites: Jefferson County, Brooklyn and Suffolk County. In 2008, the program expanded to include Queens, Orange County, Herkimer County and Schenectady County. Adopting Healthy Habits (AHH) was initiated in 2011.

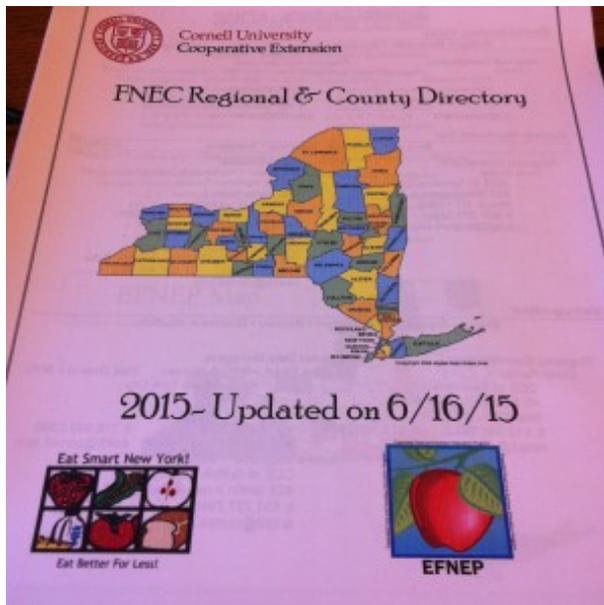
The aim of the program was to “give kids a chance” by preventing unhealthy weight gain in low-income youth and promote the adoption of healthy habits by working to make the healthy choice the easy choice. This approach of working within the community to create sustainable environmental change is called a socio-ecological model.

September 2015 will mark the end of special funding for AHH. Fear not, programming and the hard work of creating environmental change will continue as part of a new initiative with the Nutrition Education Center of Excellence!

Currently, I am working on sorting through year-end reports from the last 5 years for all 6 CCE worksites. My specific task is to organize the information in a way that shows both depth and breadth of the partnerships in the communities.

It is incredible to follow the progress of work through the course of 5 years and see how the program has evolved! For example, a county in 2010 may report meeting with a local school to discuss planting gardens and creating a wellness policy. In 2012, the report might now include documentation of the completion of both of these tasks along with a nutrition education course on healthy drink options being offered.

This is just one example of one school, but think how many lives these small policy changes have the potential to impact! Our environments influence and dictate our choices everyday. The healthy choice should be the easiest choice, but unfortunately this is not always the case.



- So many counties! Growing up in the South, I imagined all NY was just like NYC. I have since learned of the beauty and diversity that exists within NY State beyond the City That Never Sleeps.

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Week 1: Starting Out

Posted on **June 15, 2015** by **Dana Larsen**

Hello readers! My name is Dana Larsen. I am a senior Nutritional Sciences major pursuing dietetics.

This summer I will be working with the Food and Nutrition, Education in Communities on the Collaboration for Healthy, Activity, and Nutrition in Children's Environments (CHANCE) and Adopting Healthy Habits (AHH) projects. CHANCE and AHH operate in 6 different counties across New York State.

The first things I did this past week was to read over the summaries of work done by each AHH County. Each community is unique. No two communities have identical make-ups, whether that is economically, geographically or socially. Therefore, the work done in each community is specific to the need of the community in question.

Additionally, this week I also learned about and explored literature centered on the Community Readiness Model. The CRM is a method to assess a community's readiness to change. The CRM operates under the premise that a community must be ready for change. If the community in question is not ready for change and an intervention is implemented, the intervention is likely to fail. It is essential that an intervention be not only tailored to the specific needs of the community, but also the level of the readiness of the community to change.

I am looking forward to continuing to learn more about community nutrition, working the FNEC team and delving into this project further in the coming weeks!

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