



Community Health Visioning 2004

Photo: Richard and Geniva Coates, of Jay, Maine complete a Community Health Visioning survey at the Apple Pumpkin Festival in Livermore Falls, Maine, October, 2004

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Community Health Visioning 2004: The Report

Every other year health leaders in Greater Franklin County sponsor a Community Health Visioning process to build widespread consensus on priorities for improving community health. This unique process engages residents and leaders alike in conversation about issues impacting health as well as the resources available to address concerns and opportunities. The sponsors are the United Way of the Tri-Valley Area, HealthReach Community Health Centers, Health Leaders Forum, University of Maine at Farmington, and the Franklin Community Health Network.

Visionings over the past years have significantly strengthened the community. These include greatly improved transportation services, expanded mental health services, more doctors, expanded dental health services, and more health education. (See **Appendix D** for a list of priorities generated over the last twelve years during the Visioning process, and the resulting action on those priorities.)

The Visioning process began with a comprehensive survey of greater Franklin County residents (See **Appendix B**). 450 surveys were completed by residents throughout greater Franklin County at such venues as the venerable Farmington Fair, the Apple Pumpkin Festival in Livermore Falls, various schools, libraries, town halls, SeniorsPlus, and worksites, particularly in the northern tier of Franklin County.

This year we expanded our efforts to reach the volunteer organizations that reach and represent the voice of a large number of people, shape attitudes and behaviors, and mobilize members to act on many different issues. Associations that completed a survey include:

East Parish Housing Ministry, Starks
Mt. Abram High School Honor Society
The Farmington Day Group Quilters
Town of New Vineyard Selectmen/Town Clerk
Maine Mountain Quilters
Farmington Rotary Club
Girls Night Out group, (various towns represented)
Fairbanks School Neighborhood Association
St. Joseph's Parish Nurses
Marni Larson watercolor artist representing painting group
Hannaford Brothers, Jay
Safe Visitors Program
Evergreen Behavioral Services
Franklin Community Health Network Operations Team
Family Childcare Providers of Franklin County
The Zone, Phillips
Farmington Ski Club
Seventh-day Adventist Church
Church of the Nazarene

Seven priorities came out of Community Health Visioning 2004.

These were:

1. **Physical Activity**

Increase affordable indoor recreational opportunities and outdoor opportunities that are family oriented, and increase awareness of that which already exists.

2. **Youth Opportunities**

Improve access to constructive activities for youth after school and on weekends.

3. **Health Care**

Increase community understanding of health care resources and improve access to care.

4. **Nutrition**

Develop more affordable and easier options for healthy eating choices and provide more education about healthy eating options that already exist.

5. **Environmental Issues**

Cherish our region's beauty: Develop ways to sustain and improve our air and water quality.

6. **Tobacco and Substance Abuse**

Support individuals in the community who reduce their tobacco/substance use and efforts that address tobacco and substance abuse prevention.

7. **Economic Stability**

Create a more stable economic environment by developing and supporting better paying jobs with benefits.

The Visioning process culminates with a Community Health Visioning conference. This year's conference was held on November 12, 2004. Coordinated by the Healthy Community Coalition, the conference is a forum at which we review the findings from surveys and community meetings, and come together to plan for action.

At the conference, the Rev. Alan Shumway, Association Resource Minister with the American Baptist Churches of Maine, gave a keynote presentation and aired an inspiring video called *Celebrate What is Right with the World*. We were pleased to have internationally known scholar and community organizer John McKnight present at the conference as well. Mr. McKnight encouraged the assembled group to rethink the reliance on institutions to "fix" us and encouraged a shift in thinking. He recommended that we concentrate on our community's assets and that we honor the gifts and talents and the capacity of individuals and associations to contribute to creating a strong and healthy community.

Those in attendance then broke into small groups to first review the assets or resources already present in our community. Secondly, the group was asked to identify and discuss issues that were raised in the survey and arrive at three action steps to address those issues over the next two years. The small groups will reassemble over the coming months with other interested individuals who will be identified and invited. Goals, steps, and ways to measure progress of the goals will be created, recorded, and shared with the community.

We welcome more participants in our continued discussions. Please contact Lisa Laflin, Community Building Coordinator, Healthy Community Coalition at 645-3136 x5103 or lflafin@fchn.org for more information and meeting dates and times. Visioning conference participants and invited others will reassemble to join the continuing discussions and projects.

In concert with follow-up meetings, the results from each Community Health Visioning process are shared with leaders from every agency and organization providing services or outreach in the community. These organizations are encouraged to consider the priorities from the Visioning as they develop strategic plans. Over the years organizations have repeatedly responded positively to the Visioning process and results and used the information to shape the organization's plans. The Visioning process will therefore be a continuing process of reflection and action.

Visioning Priorities and Action Steps

The following is a summary of the priorities established by the Community Health Visioning 2004 survey. Action steps follow each priority. These action steps were developed by participants in the small group discussions held at the culminating Community Visioning 2004 Conference.

1. PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Summary of the Priorities

Community Health Visioning survey responses indicated the need to increase affordable indoor recreational opportunities and outdoor opportunities that are family oriented, and increase awareness of that which already exists. Comments were varied and urged the community to “Create more bike and walking paths,” “Improve sidewalks for better walking,” and “Develop an affordable site for indoor recreation.”

Action Steps

At the Visioning Conference, participants recommended the promotion of lifetime fitness. Promotion efforts include weaving together media campaigns, local businesses for promotion, and the increased use of existing local resources including the Farmington fairgrounds, Hippach Field, snowmobile trails, UMF and resources in outlying areas. In addition, resource guides with information about scholarships and activities will be created. Lastly, a year-round equipment swap will be developed to increase access to resources for a lifetime of physical activity.

Physical Activity Small Group Participants

Joyce Murphy, Roger Wing, Sandy Gregor, Norma Wing, Cynthia Goding
Nate Morse (Presenter), Belinda Lilley (Facilitator)

2. YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES

Summary of the Priorities

Responses to the Community Health Visioning survey continually repeated a desire to improve access to constructive activities for youth after school and on weekends. The following two comments captured the tone of the survey responses: “Have a youth center to help with children, kids, and teens to have a place to go after school” and “I’d set up a program that would involve our youth in outdoor activities such as biking, hiking, camping, mountain climbing, canoeing, swimming. Also inside activities such as quilting, woodworking, flytying, knitting, painting, etc. that would get kids away from the TV and videogames. Our youth are terribly overweight and inactive. If there were free or relatively inexpensive things for kids to do and they were promoted, more kids would partake.”

Action Steps

Participants in the Visioning conference recommended focusing on getting family, organizations, and community members engaged and acknowledging that youth are a tremendous community asset. A detailed list of current resources available for youth in our communities will be created, and community discussions will be held about existing programs and ways to expand after-school opportunities. Additionally, the group intends to host a community fair to draw attention to current resources and make youth aware of, and feel ownership of, opportunities.

Youth Opportunities Small Group Participants

Kawika Thompson, Alan Shumway, Brent Laflin, Janine Winn, Camille Blanchet, Michelle O’Meara Nicole Ditata (Presenter), Joel Moser (Facilitator)

3. ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Summary of the Priorities

Community Health Visioning survey results suggested the community seeks increased understanding of health care resources. Comments ranged from “Continue health educational initiatives/health information on preventive healthcare,” to “Provide more health information.” Health care affordability was also a common thread woven throughout the survey responses and best summed up by the comment “We need affordable health care and insurance we can afford.”

Action Steps

Participants in the Visioning conference recommended focusing on the promotion of available health care services and the assurance of quality care. With greater awareness of and access to the services, trust in local services will be increased. For instance, the public should be aware of Franklin Health Access, which connects uninsured residents with health services available on a sliding fee scale. Additionally, the group intends to promote and educate the community about personal health accountability.

Access to Health Care Small Group Participants

Cindy Welch, Edna Tyler-Rose, Burgess Record, Alison Duncan, Rose Welch, Leslie Hawkins, Rita Porter, Carrie Walker, Laurie Winsor Tracy Harty (Presenter), Kathy Gregory (Facilitator)

4. NUTRITION

Summary of the Priorities

Community Health Visioning survey data encouraged efforts to develop more affordable and easier options for healthy eating choices and provide more education about healthy eating options that already exist. “Improve community health by having fewer fast food restaurants” and “We need affordable healthy eating choices” summed up the feeling of many survey respondents as did “offer healthier school lunches.”

Action Steps

At the Visioning Conference, participants recommended concentrating efforts on education: providing thorough nutrition education to the community to encourage better choices, and a collaborative effort to improve school lunches. The group will also bring together area partners to address the potential increase in fast food franchises with new development in Franklin County.

Nutrition Small Group Participants

Connie Otero, Candy Bachorik, Cindy Brophy, Don Nicolson, Jo Josephson
Eileen Liddy (Presenter), Rachel Marble and Sandy Richard (Facilitators)

5. ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Summary of the Priorities

Community Health Visioning survey results charged the community to cherish our region's beauty and develop ways to sustain and improve our air and water quality. Comments included “Improve our air quality”, “Find a way to clean the air and water from mill waste,” and “Reduce paper mill and other industrial pollution.”

Action Steps

Participants in the Visioning conference recommended focusing on sustainable development in a two-pronged approach: Advocating for the Legislature to enforce current laws and hosting a “Community Focus Day” to discuss Ethics and Education.

Environmental Issues Small Group Participants

Rachel Roberts, Peter Smith, Millie Whittier, Mary Frank
Dr. Kathleen Welch (Presenter), Debi Davidson (Facilitator)

6. TOBACCO AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Summary of the Priorities

Community Health Visioning survey responses determined the need to support individuals in the community who reduce their tobacco/substance use and support the momentum of efforts that address tobacco and substance abuse prevention. Responses were varied and diverse such as “more quit-smoking education” and “get people to quit smoking.”

Action Steps

While participants in the Visioning Conference did not address this identified priority, the Healthy Community Coalition will continue to address tobacco and substance abuse prevention. Initiatives include Smokeless School Days, a monthly tobacco cessation and awareness program for students in grades 6–12 for Greater Franklin County students and parents; and a comprehensive tobacco prevention program called Tobacco Free Franklin Families. In addition, HCC is setting up a youth initiative to support young people in speaking out against tobacco and substance abuse.

7. ECONOMIC STABILITY

Summary of the Priorities

Community Health Visioning survey responses determined the need to create a more stable economic environment by developing and supporting better paying jobs with benefits. Responses include: “develop a plan for more jobs,” “raise aspirations,” and “if I had a year to something to improve the health of the community, I’d work to bring more business and economic development to the area—more jobs equals better health.” Also, “build a stronger connection between our business community and family. Promote businesses that support family involvement and healthier employees.”

Action Steps

Community Health Visioning conference attendees recommended developing networking opportunities for local businesses including a mentoring program once students graduate to keep students in the community and give them good job skills. In addition, the group will advocate for developing a communications infrastructure with increased access to high speed Internet access, increasing local transportation options, and creating an east–west highway.

Economic Sustainability Small Group Participants

Kay Webb, Fen Fowler, Matt McCourt, Carol Coles, Leah Binder, Rod Prior
Alison Hagerstrom (Presenter), Nancy Morgan (Facilitator)