

Exploring healthy active living in rural Idaho using participatory photography

AT A GLANCE

Utilizing mapping technologies is innovative for documenting, communicating, and visualizing the social and built environments within communities.

The Situation

Rural residency tends to increase the risk of overweight and obesity for children and adults. Data from the National Survey of Children's Health shows that children living in rural areas are 25 percent more likely than children living in metropolitan areas to be overweight or obese (2011/12). In the 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) Survey, completed by the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the nation's high school students reported: a) 13.7 percent were obese and 16.6 percent were overweight; b) 15.2 percent did not participate in at least 60 minutes of physical activity (PA) on any day during a week's time; and c) 51.7 percent had participated in muscle strengthening exercises on three or more days during a week's time.

The prevalence of overweight adults in Idaho has increased significantly in the past decade from 55.7 percent in 2000 to 65.7 percent in 2014, and approximately one-in-four (27 percent) adults in Idaho are listed as obese (County Health Rankings, 2016). According to the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention, 57.2 percent of adults in Idaho participate in 150 minutes of aerobic physical activity per week (2011). The Idaho Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) reported that 18.7 percent of Idaho adults indicated they did not participate in any leisure time physical activity (IBRFSS, 2014, p. 8).



Local hiking spot utilizing participatory photography.

Our Response

GROW Healthy Kids and Communities (GROW) utilized participatory action research (PAR) and University of Idaho Extension to explore the obesogenic context in rural places, the environmental influencers of children's weight health behaviors at home, in school and in the community. GROW's goal was to optimize children's behavioral environments to make healthy eating and activity options their easy and preferred choice. To address the community context, GROW investigators developed Healthy Eating Active Living: Mapping Attributes using Participatory Photographic Surveys (HEAL MAPPS™) as a PAR technology to map and assess community resources and readiness (John, Langelotto, Winfield, Hystad & Gunter, 2017). Determining different methods (GPS, Google Earth) in UI Extension to produce valid data on local communities at a little-to-no cost effect can open doors to additional accessibility and opportunities for outreach and education.

Program Outcomes

Analyses of data from all sources, including photomapping activities and guided discussions during the community conversation, revealed the rural community participation in the case study has a variety of options that support healthy eating. Community-generated data revealed various thematic support for indoor and outdoor physical activity consisting of organized recreational sports programs, public (city and school) sports fields, courts, parks, playgrounds and commercial fitness centers. Additionally, the city is located in a mountainous rural area, offering a variety of outdoor activity and adventure opportunities, including fishing, hunting, hiking, skiing/snowboarding/snowshoeing, disc and traditional golf.

Barriers to being physically active emerged from community discussions and observational (photographs and maps) data, thematically categorized as issues with easy, spatial access. Despite the relative proximity to natural resources and recreation areas, many of the public and private opportunities are outside the city limits, not safely or spatially accessible using active transport, and require a motor vehicle and driver.

The community's profile, data, results, readiness scores and recommendations were provided to stakeholders in a written tailored report (Jensen, et al., 2016) for the community. Using reported information at the end of the HEAL MAPPS project, a plan was developed for action groups to outline next steps, prioritize actions and find resources to address the revealed barriers. Population approaches for childhood obesity prevention and awareness raising education will need to be a focus for the community and its' leaders in order to sustain interest in this ongoing project.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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