



## Partner Success Stories

Read these short articles about all the exciting work CVHNC partners are doing to improve health in the Central Valley. If you are interested in sharing a success story, contact Communications Coordinator Hilda Martinez at (559) 255-4300 or via email at [hmartinez@cvhnclinics.org](mailto:hmartinez@cvhnclinics.org). These stories are shared widely via email, on the web and in collateral materials. Share your story today!

### **Fruits and Veggies are Learning Tools for Special Education Students**

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For the Merced County Office of Education Special Education students, fruits and vegetables mean more than tasty snacks and good nutrition, they are tools in developing life skills.

Special Education transition students, or students who have completed their twelfth year of school and are emerging into the world as adults, visit local grocery stores and purchase the ingredients needed to bring fruits and vegetables taste and recipe testing into classrooms as part of the Harvest of the Month program.

Harvest of the Month promotes California-grown fruits and vegetables in the classroom through integrated nutrition education and tasting. "During each month the teachers get a newsletter that includes history, fast facts, information about selection, storage, preparation and it includes activities for the teachers to use in their classrooms and it also includes recipes," said Jaci Westbrook, Merced County *Network* Program Manager. "Our teachers go to our website and they get to sign up for the recipes and taste tests in that newsletter that they would like delivered to their classrooms."

Transition teacher Marcy Gamble then summarizes each teacher's order into a shopping list and then assigns one or two transition students to shop for that individual teacher.

Gamble makes the shopping trip a total learning experience. "Marcy teaches the students how to move through the grocery store, shopping in inner and outer aisles, check out and paying," Westbrook said.

The transition students, 17 to 22 years-old, pair up in twos or threes to fill the orders of six to eight teachers and then deliver the ingredients to each teacher's classroom.

"In addition to shopping for other classrooms, the transition classes also participate in the taste and recipe tests so they shop for themselves too," Westbrook said. The students also get to participate in preparing the recipe, working as a team to put the recipe together and then tasting it. "The students get a real sense of pride in making their own food."

This program is a shining star for the *Network for a Healthy California* by showing how to effectively integrate nutrition into special needs education. In shopping, preparing and tasting nutritious recipes, fruits and vegetables become more than tasty snacks for these special education students, they become learning tools for success.

## Central Valley Elementary Schools Collaborate in Celebration of International Walk to School Month

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Central Valley elementary schools collaborated with local businesses and organizations in celebration of International Walk-to-School Month in October 2006, and created empowering events that combined physical activity and nutrition education.

On October 4, 2006, over 350 students, teachers and parents in Mariposa joined Chipper, the California Highway Patrol (CHP) mascot, in the first-ever Mariposa Walk-to-School Day. Mariposa Elementary School, Mariposa Unified School District Bus Garage, Mariposa CHP, Jazzercise, Pioneer Market, and the *Network for a Healthy California-Central Valley Region* all joined together to make the event a success and raise physical activity awareness among Mariposa residents.

Mariposa students and parents met at Pioneer Market where they were greeted by *Network for a Healthy California-Children's Power Play! Campaign* staff and Jazzercise to warm up with physical activities including hula hoops, jump ropes, a fruit and veggie toss and a 20-minute Jazzercise routine. The students enjoyed an apple and water donated by Pioneer Market to provide extra energy before walking to school. Upper grade students also completed a community assessment addressing the walkability of the school route.

"Walk-to-School was Mariposa's first opportunity to engage the entire community in health and nutrition awareness," said Central Valley Project LEAN Coordinator Alyssa Walling. "Many residents came up to us during and after the event and expressed their support and excitement for the community collaboration."

On October 20, 2006, six Sanger Unified elementary schools joined together in a Walk-to-School event led by the Sanger Unified Physical Education Department, Sanger Unified School Food Service and the Fresno County Office of Education. Over 600 people gathered in the Sanger Save Mart parking lot for a pre-event rally. Sanger High School Cheerleaders energized families as they ate breakfast and then the Sanger Police Department escorted the 600 walkers to school.

Elizabeth Villalobos, the Central Valley *Network for a Healthy California-Children's Power Play! Campaign* Coordinator, said the event was inspiring because it was organized entirely by the community. "The Sanger Walk-to-School event was completely led by Sanger Unified and with over 600 students and parents participating this was a really successful event."

Walk-to-School events serve to reinforce children's traffic safety skills, remind adults to drive safely in school zones, raise awareness for the need for neighborhood walkability, emphasize the message that children need regular physical activity and nutritious meals to stay healthy and to do well in school and remind families that walking is a simple and fun way to spend time together.

These two Central Valley Walk-to-School events demonstrate how community mobilization can bring about health awareness through fun and interactive events. Congratulations to Mariposa and Sanger residents for collaborating for healthy changes in their communities!



## Nutrition educators making a difference through community mobilization

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For Nutrition Educators at the Kern County Department of Public Health Nutrition Program, nutrition education is a community affair where people from all walks of life come together to teach children about healthy lifestyles.

Anna Safari and her team in Kern County reach their nutrition education goals by mobilizing community members to live healthy lives. Parents, high school students, teachers, principals, food service directors, grocers, and farmers all do their part to bring fun and educational events to elementary schools throughout the year.

No-sales involved Farmers' Markets are held at local elementary schools and students travel through four stations: nutrition education, agriculture education, taste testing, and lastly a reinforcement station with t-shirts, coolers and other give-aways all with a printed message of nutrition and physical activity. At the stations, students brainstorm healthy snacks, play a fruit and vegetable trivia wheel and talk about the new food pyramid.

Safari, a Kern County Nutrition Program Health Educator, said their program is unique because of the community interaction, "We connect the community to our message," Safari said. "Parents and high school students get incentives to come as volunteers, and they also get to learn and participate in the nutrition education. Local farmers donate produce for the event, providing visibility for locally-grown fruits and vegetables that are sometimes less expensive because they are grown in Kern County."

The Nutrition Program, in collaboration with Kern County school districts, also hosts salad bar events where an entire elementary school has lunch from a salad bar composed of a wide variety of fruits and vegetables ranging from exotic fruits like jicama and yellow watermelon, to familiar foods like apples and celery. "After the information session the kids are so excited to taste what they just learned about, their faces light up when they see the salad bar," said Jane Keir, a Health Education Assistant.

The nutrition events also feature physical activity stations where students dance with volunteers dressed in fruit and vegetable costumes and learn fun activities that can be easily done at home with little to no cost, such as jumping and playing with hoola hoops.

The program further engages parents in the learning process with events like Turn off TV Week. Students are awarded prizes based upon a seven-day log that tracks exercise and fruit, vegetable and water intake. Parents initial the logs for verification, providing children an opportunity to emphasize healthy messages at home. Students who successfully meet their requirements each day are awarded prizes and certificates at a school assembly.

The Kern County Nutrition Program is a perfect example of successful community mobilization toward healthy lifestyle goals. The program is receiving raving reviews from schools and parents for making a real difference in school cafeterias. One school district is in the process of revising their cafeteria manuals and has committed to adding fruits and vegetables in the after school program snack manuals.

## Fresno State dietetic interns make a difference for Central Valley residents with healthy messages

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In 1998, the University of California Cooperative Extension Fresno County (UCCE Fresno) began an internship partnership with California State University, Fresno. In this partnership, interns spend two weeks at UCCE Fresno doing activities that meet entry-level professional competencies established by the American Dietetic Association (ADA) and working closely with the *Network for a Healthy California-Central Valley Region*.

Interns conduct *Network* food demonstrations, provide nutrition education session for staff and food-stamp eligible participants, participate in major *Network for a Healthy California- Central Valley Region* events, and assist with evaluation and research.

Interns report the experience increases their knowledge of community organizations and how work can be completed at various levels, individual, organizational and through partnerships. "Involving dietetic interns is a win-win," said Jeanette Sutherlin, UCCE Fresno County Director. "With a small investment in training, dietetic interns provide strength to the workforce of a project."

In the summer of 2006, the interns were busy in the produce section of grocery stores demonstrating healthy food recipes and providing *Network* goodie bags containing cook books and healthy eating tips.



The interns visited four of the local grocery stores in Hanford, Calif. and received an overwhelmingly positive response from residents. Suzette Simmons, of Hanford, (pictured) provided testimonial of how the *Network* cookbook she received at a food demonstration changed her eating habits. At checkout Simmons demonstrated the change by showing *Network* staff a grocery cart full of fruits and vegetables. She later collected two more cookbooks for herself and a friend.

Others expressed similar appreciation for the program. "This is wonderful what you are doing," said a mother of three shopping at the

Hanford Foods Co. "I've been trying to get my kids to eat better. I'm sure this will help."

The CSUF Dietetic Internship Program is an excellent example of how strong partnerships can further community outreach. The *Network for a Healthy California- Central Valley Region* and the CSUF interns are working together to educate and mobilize Valley residents toward healthier lifestyles one recipe at a time.

## **Tulare County Family Challenge changes lives one week at a time**

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Tulare County is facing the obesity epidemic head-on with the Family Challenge Program that challenges residents to increase their physical activity and improve family eating habits in a 10-week program.

The Family Challenge is a 10-week bilingual program developed in collaboration with the American Cancer Society, Blue Cross of California, Family HealthCare Network, Health Net, and Kaweah Delta Health Care District. Participants receive a Family Challenge Tool Kit and participate in 10 weeks of classes emphasizing behavioral changes in nutrition and physical activity. The tool kits include weekly nutritional and physical activity goals, tips, recipes and accountability postcards to monitor family progress.

A total of 8,000 bilingual (English and Spanish) tool kits have been distributed since the program's beginning in 2002 through community organizations in Tulare County. Approximately 1,500 people have participated in the Family Challenge Program since 2002. Participants reported increased self-esteem, developed a new perspective on fruits and vegetables, and reported changes in family interaction as a result of physical activity together.

Carol Cribbs, a Tulare County Health Education Specialist, said the Family Challenge is unique because, "We are taking the education to them, they don't have to come to us. It's not a diet, we are not teaching them how to lose weight- we are teaching them a new lifestyle."

Testimonials to the success of the Family Challenge include:

"After 24 years, I have quit smoking!"

"My nine-year-old son says he loves me more when I go outside and do physical activities with him. We are outdoors more often and my energy is flying high!"

"I cook more nutritiously and my family likes the recipes because now I am making different foods."

Cribbs said after each evaluation there is an increase in every area measured including fruit and vegetable consumption, physical activity, water intake, and family time. "We know it is making a difference because even after week one, they come back with success stories; they become their own support group," Cribbs said.

Word of the Family Challenge's success has spread to other regions and agencies, both in and out of Tulare County. "A few other programs have grown out of the family challenge and the women that go through the family challenge then become volunteers for those programs," Cribbs said.

Congratulations to Tulare County residents and health educators for taking the steps to live healthier lifestyles. The Tulare County Family Challenge is an inspiring example of how communities can come together and work toward a healthier California.

## Mapping California the fruity way

Gina Wise, a fourth grade teacher at Rocky Hill Elementary School in Exeter, harvested more than creative minds in 2007. Wise developed a lesson consisting of commodities that farmers have grown, colors that artists would truly admire and elements that geographers could appreciate.

Wise constructed strawberry mountains, sunflower seed valleys and raisin rivers. It may sound like a recipe for a fruit salad, but it is not. It is a topical map of California. The class used a large, oversized map of the California regions. First, the students applied a base of low-fat cream cheese with sugar substitute. Then strawberries were added (upside down) to depict the majestic Sierra Nevada Range. A little dollop of whipped topping was placed on "Mount Whitney," the largest strawberry. Red grapes were used to represent the coastal range where many grapes are grown. Sliced kiwis were placed appropriately to symbolize the Central Valley where kiwis are abundant. Dried raisins mark the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers.

"This project originated with a desire on my part to teach nutrition to students. As with everything, I knew this had to be integrated into an existing lesson, or it was not going to happen due to time constraints," Wise said. She adds, "I had students who had never eaten Kiwi. In an effort to teach kids about the benefits of strawberries, kiwi and other fruits, I began thinking of how I could put the two together."

Through collaboration with the Exeter Public School District and their Food Service Department, Tulare County Office of Education, *Network for a Healthy California* provides grade-appropriate resources and encourages teachers to integrate nutrition education into all areas of curriculum. Wise's lesson is a wonderful example of connecting social studies to nutrition. The students at Rocky Hill experienced a beautiful and delicious map of California and other teachers can easily model this memorable and tasty lesson.

Courtesy of Nani Rowland,  
Tulare County Office of Education

