



## Success Stories

### **Changing for the Future: Building on Past Successes and Improving Our Current Environment**

Thanks to the funding of the South Dakota Department of Health, the Strategic Team for Economic Wealth and Wellbeing (STEW) was able to set up a website, conduct a community assessment using survey monkey, and establish meetings to explore and finalize our strategic plan quite quickly. Participant enthusiasm led to the immediate implementation of a number of projects including: a community garden, legislative cracker barrels, Paint the Town project, cosponsored leadership, school activities, safety programs, and health-related events.

Having active and involved community participants, a website, and Facebook page has been key for community communication. The Paint the Town projects in the communities of Vale, Newell and Nisland improved each town's appearance. Residents who could not physically or financially paint their homes benefited, and so did the volunteers who formed or strengthened working relationships. The community garden has created a place for residents to come together as neighbors to share ideas, life stories, gardening tips, children events and physical labor — the front porch experience of our grandparents.

Our coalition includes the SD Department of Health, SD 4H and extension service, WIT, the school and churches, civic organizations, law enforcement, National Guard, city and county government, local businesses, Regional Health Systems, and residents.

### **Challenges**

In 1999, an article published in Community Transportation described Newell as the type of small rural town that may or may not make it; where main street seems to be falling apart with crumbling side-walks and buildings badly in need of general upkeep. In 2008 a civic group led Newell to become a Horizons Community. However, there remains work to be done to enhance our environment.

### **Our challenge:**

Community strategic planning for ways to improve the health and welfare of our community.

### **Our biggest obstacle:**

How do you change individual behaviors and the entrenched community culture?

### **Solution**

We started with an online survey and seven working committees to assess community needs and identify potential areas for change/improvement. The seven working committees whose members represented various segments of the community then coalesced into one working group, STEW. We quickly realized that communication was not only one of our five areas for change, but key to



our success and we started the website STEWorganization.org and a Facebook page to post local news, health segments, and the community calendar.

The City of Newell and the Fire Department have donated city/private property for community use. The Fire Department donated lots for the community garden and the City donated ground for the ice rink. These donations set a precedence and future plans include development of a walking path, camping and picnic area, and community event center on city and/or donated property.

### **Results**

Our mission is to build a culture that supports healthy choices. We believe education can improve decision making and healthy choices can be modeled and/or positively rewarded.

Projects geared toward making cultural changes have been implemented and include: establishment of a community garden; houses painted by volunteers in Vale, Newell, and Nisland (paint and primer was supplied by a grant from the South Dakota Housing Authority); summer safety program, activity days, and leadership events co-sponsored with other community organizations; and development of our website communication tool.

The STEW website and Facebook page allows us to communicate upcoming events, solicit volunteers, and celebrate our successes. Our project, including planned future projects, incorporate multiple goals. For instance, the community garden met our goals for youth activity (4H groups and families planted the pots), community education (the master gardeners taught classes), and infrastructure development (improved community appearance).

### **Future Direction**

We started with projects we believed we could complete successfully. Now that we have had success with our first projects, we have community confidence to take on and complete more complex projects. The whole community has identified the need for a community event center. We will seek grant and private or in kind funding for the event center.

### **Advice:**

Start with projects you can complete successfully, then advertise and build on your success.

Email received from a 4H Leader:

*We would like to enter the Newell Labor Day parade with some members of our community garden group. We are proud of what they all have done and how it has helped the community and we would like anyone else involved with the garden to join us. We are going to have a fun time and maybe even have some kids dressed up like veggies!! I have so much zucchini that maybe I could give them to the crowd instead of candy! We are happy to be part of such a positive step toward greater health in our community!*