



## Success Stories

### **Healthy Choices for Children & Their Families: Dakota Hospital Foundation's Children's Health and Wellness Steering Committee**

Vermillion, South Dakota is located in the southeastern corner of South Dakota along the Missouri River and is the county seat of Clay County. Vermillion is home to the University of South Dakota and has a strong agricultural presence, making this community a unique mix of academic and rural cultures. Several community organizations promote health and wellbeing, yet little communication was taking place between organizations, and their efforts were not coordinated. Vermillion's Dakota Hospital Foundation (DHF) understands that the future burden of chronic disease in adults can be addressed through the activation of healthy habits in children. They have established a Children's Health and Wellness Steering Committee to lead health promotion activities and further their mission of "improving health and wellness of the individuals and communities in the Vermillion area."

#### **Infrastructure**

DHF's Children's Health and Wellness Steering Committee represents stakeholders throughout the community: health professionals, educators, community members, community wellness staff, and Vermillion Parks and Recreation. Under the leadership of this committee, a school and community health assessment was conducted in 2012. The qualitative and quantitative assessment was comprised of community assets and resources, demographics, health status, and school health. This assessment led to the development of a strategic plan for children's health promotion with activities tailored to the Vermillion community's assets and needs.

#### **Solution**

The strategic plan guides the selection of training, development, and programs that promote and activate children's healthy behaviors. A community coordinator helped to facilitate community-wide efforts including:

- Offering the fit-Care best practice health and wellness curriculum training for early childhood care providers during the spring of 2013.
- Piloting the fit4School health promotion program in six elementary classrooms during the 2012-2013 school term. This classroom program works to raise awareness and activate healthy behavior choices for children in grades k-5.
- Providing Saturday gym programs, sponsored by Vermillion Parks and Recreation Department, to promote physical activity during winter months.
- Providing summer health promotion programs for children ages 4-6, and 7-9, sponsored by Vermillion Parks and Recreation Department.

#### **Results**

Assessments and evaluations of the actions reveal that—in Vermillion—over 600 children (and their families) have been touched by programs promoting healthy behavior choices during the first six



months of 2013. Individuals working with early childhood programs attended training to broaden their capacity to promote healthy behaviors. Educators who participated in the pilot program have not only promoted health and wellness with their students, but an external evaluation concluded that their efforts have also created a shift in their student's recognition of healthy behaviors.

### **Future Direction**

The Steering Committee will continue to promote and coordinate children's health activities through 2013 and beyond. 2013-14 plans include:

- Additional training for childcare providers will take place during the fall of 2013.
- All elementary school educators will have access to health promotion activities and resources during the 2013-2014 school term.
- The Vermillion Parks and Recreation Department will continue to offer fitness activities for children in the community.
- Most importantly, the Steering Committee will continue to expand opportunities to fulfill its vision to empower all children in the community to develop healthy lifestyles.