



news release

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The Wellmark Foundation Funds Ten Health Improvement Projects in Iowa and South Dakota

(Des Moines, Iowa) – The Wellmark Foundation funded ten health improvement grants in Iowa and South Dakota totaling \$656,627 at its recent board of directors meeting. The ***Growing Up LEAN: Living to be Energetic, Active, & Nutrition Grant Program*** supports childhood obesity prevention efforts of healthy eating and appropriate physical activity that can be incorporated into home, child care, school and community settings. The following organizations received awards this cycle.

- Buchanan County Health Trust in Independence received a one-year \$23,126 grant to promote healthy lifestyles among preschool children in efforts to reduce the growing childhood obesity rate in the county. SPARK – Igniting Health in Kids will educate four-year old preschoolers and their adult role models to develop the knowledge and skills to adopt healthy habits for life. The program will include weekly classroom nutrition and physical activity sessions, as well as free events for children and families. Preschool staff, teachers and parents will be involved in the program, which will be piloted in six classrooms across the county.
- The Cerro Gordo County Department of Public Health in Mason City received a two-year \$49,688 grant to implement a national evidence-based program designed to increase physical activity and enhance gross motor skill development among preschoolers. Animal Trackers, which incorporates movement of animals into daily classroom-based activities combined with home activities, will target 120 four-year olds in three preschools. The program will strive to prevent childhood overweight and obesity by increasing structured physical activity in preschool classrooms by 10 minutes a day and increasing unstructured activity outside classrooms by 10 minutes per day.
- Clinton Community School District was awarded a two-year \$52,060 grant to support a program designed to reduce the rates of overweight and obese elementary school-aged children in the Clinton community. Step Up: Citizens for Community Health, which educates children and families about factors that contribute to childhood obesity and promotes lifestyle changes, will be implemented in partnership with Clinton Community Healthy Lifestyles Coalition. Step Up will develop before- and

after-school physical fitness and nutrition education programs, family activities throughout the year, and marketing materials for use in the community.

- The Education Resource Center of South Dakota in Sioux Falls, S.D, received a one-year \$21,087 grant to implement KidZ Health Club, a multiple media project designed to teach healthy habits to children in kindergarten through third grade. Project elements will be incorporated into existing classroom curriculum areas of math, science and language, and will include lesson plans, materials, games and activities. The project, which will partner with the successful South Dakota Health EDventure Program, will reach 4,000 students in 200 classrooms throughout the state.
- The Iowa Department of Education in Des Moines will use a two-year \$144,400 grant to support Iowa schools implementing nutrition standards for foods and beverages sold on school grounds, which are currently being adopted by the Iowa State Board of Education. Building on the Healthy Kids Act Opportunity will strive to foster healthier nutrition and physical activity environments for youth, and establishment of healthier habits. The project will provide resources and guidance to assist schools in advancing this policy, and will engage parents, students, school staff and the community in necessary wellness conversations and activities.
- The Lee County Health Department in Fort Madison received a one-year \$24,978 grant to expand the use of a national evidence-based child obesity prevention program in Lee County. CATCH (Coordinated Approach to Child Health), promotes physical activity and healthy food choices, and prevents tobacco use in elementary school-aged children. The Department successfully piloted CATCH in the Central Lee School District through a previous grant. This phase of the project will target an additional 850 students in kindergarten through fifth grade at four schools in the Keokuk Community School District.
- Pathfinders Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D), Inc. in Fairfield will use a two-year \$91,808 grant to establish fresh food school lunch programs in schools using locally sourced fruits, vegetables and other products. The program will target students in kindergarten through twelfth grade in six southeastern Iowa counties. Fresh Food for Healthy Habits will work to increase fresh fruits in school lunch programs, help youth develop healthy eating habits, and reverse choices away from highly processed foods that can lead to childhood obesity and other diseases. School staff, local food producers and the Hometown Harvest Leadership team will be involved in the program.
- Iowa State University Extension – Union County in Creston was awarded a one-year \$7,842 grant to support a marketing project designed to increase awareness of healthy food choices among young children and their families. The project will be implemented through the Union County Nutrition Coalition and will target families using in-home day care providers served by the Child and Adult Care Food Program. The primary strategy will be distribution of information materials, including a magnetic calendar/stickers, grocery shopping lists and rush hour meal ideas. Day care providers will be instrumental in promoting healthy nutrition and increasing the variety of fruits and vegetables served.
- South Dakota State University in Brookings, S.D., will use a two-year \$146,638 grant to implement Bountiful Backpacks, an obesity prevention project targeting elementary students living on the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota. The project will provide food and education to elementary children in extremely low-income families. Activities will include distribution of healthy grocery items through the backpacks each Friday during the school year to address nutrition and food security issues, and interactive nutrition and cooking lessons to increase children's awareness of healthy

eating habits and food preparation skills.

- University of Northern Iowa Foundation in Cedar Falls received a two-year \$95,000 grant to implement healthy school lunch programs in three northeast Iowa public school systems. Healthier School Meals Through Strong Farm-School Connections will work to develop reliable supply lines for school food service staff to easily utilize locally grown healthy foods. Additional strategies will include convening a working group of stakeholders; offering mini-grants to participating schools; marketing healthy nutrition to students, parents and staff; and integrating food awareness into curriculum through school gardens, farm visits and visiting chefs/farmers.

The Wellmark Foundation has provided approximately \$16.98 million to fund 422 health-related grants in Iowa and South Dakota since 1997, including \$656,627 this **Growing Up LEAN: Living to be Energetic, Active, & Nutrition Grant** cycle. “The Wellmark Foundation works to improve the health of Iowans and South Dakotans,” says Matthew McGarvey, director of The Wellmark Foundation. “These are strong and active grantee organizations that have great influence in their communities. Collectively, these comprehensive projects will positively impact the short-term and long-term health of thousands of Iowans and South Dakotans,” says McGarvey.

The Wellmark Foundation is a private, non-profit foundation created by Wellmark, Inc., doing business as Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Iowa. The deadline for the **Healthy Communities Grant Program: Supporting a Culture of Wellness and Prevention** supporting community-based wellness and prevention projects is September 3, 2009. Visit The Wellmark Foundation's Web site at www.wellmark.com/foundation for grant application instructions. Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield and The Wellmark Foundation are independent licensees of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association.