



# Healthy Kids **Healthy Communities**

BUILDING HEALTHIER TOMORROWS

## Healthy Kids Cibola County

Cibola County has figured out what a small, rural community needs to do to develop a healthy environment for children and families: work together and share resources. For the Healthy Kids Healthy Cibola County Initiative, people who are focused on economic development and public health have come together to make it easier for residents to choose healthy foods and be active.

Cibola County sits on the western border of New Mexico between Catron and McKinley counties. Grants is the largest city with 9,200 residents and a small-town friendly atmosphere where families have raised multiple generations and residents know one another.

Grants is Laura Jaramillo's hometown. As coordinator of Healthy Kids Healthy Cibola County, she has recruited volunteers to create changes where kids learn, play and live so it is easier for them and their families to be active and choose healthy foods.

"It's very important to bring key people together when you're talking about serving your community or making changes," Jaramillo said. "You find out who the champions are and who has the resources."

Grants MainStreet, an organization that supports local businesses, shared Healthy Kids' vision as a way to promote economic development and tourism. MainStreet and Jaramillo are co-leading the effort to develop a sustainable farmer's market and extend a walking trail that connects the community.

## Key Community Successes

October 2011 - June 2013

- 2 of 7 Grants-Cibola County elementary schools (200 students) participated in the 5.2.1.O Challenge this past year
- Updated school district wellness policy to include language around healthy eating and physical activity
- Made significant infrastructure changes at Mesa View Elementary to encourage physical activity and community usage of schoolyard
- Mesa View Elementary participated in International Walk to School Day in October 2012
- Partnered with Grants MainStreet and transportation planner to extend a walking trail that will connect downtown sites to other parts of the community
- Partnered with Grants MainStreet to establish community farmer's market

Community transformation in Grants-Cibola has, to date, reached 71% of Grants-Cibola County elementary schools (1,312 students)

San Fidel Catholic School and Sky City (Bureau of Indian Affairs) School have also benefited from these efforts, primarily via healthy eating in school initiatives.

The River Walk Trail, also known as the Rio San Jose Legacy Trail, is a short path through a park in the center of Grants. Healthy Kids Healthy Cibola County proposes to extend the ¼-mile-path north and east a couple of miles. Going east, the trail would follow along the San Jose River downstream a little more than a mile to Nimitz Drive. This would connect the path from downtown to neighborhoods and schools.

“The extension would make the trail accessible and useable and would work for recreation and transportation,” said Tim Rogers, a transportation planner who consults with Healthy Kids Healthy Cibola County. “That’s key. Recreation is great if people can integrate that into their routine, but if you can get people walking or biking as their every day transportation, they don’t have to go out of their way to get exercise.”

The plan includes another short extension north to connect the path to Mesa View Elementary and continue to Washington Avenue. “When you build trails, the purpose for transportation is to complement the road system and to tie trails into other roads,” Rogers said.



Green line shows proposed Legacy Trail

Rogers said the plan may include benches for resting spots, improved street crossings and signs so people know where the trail is going. He helped present the proposal to the Grants City Council, which supports the plan. The city had included a trail extension in its 1991 master plan but hadn’t pursued the project yet.

Part of the project involves getting rid of trash and weeds along the path. “City Council thinks it’s a good idea to improve the look and enhance the area,” said City Councilor Reuben Sandoval. “Everybody would have access to it. It’s good to have kids walk to school and give seniors a place to walk.”



Weed clean-up on trail section behind Mesa View Elementary (*before & after*)

Healthy Kids Healthy Cibola County's proposed the trail extension to provide residents with a safe, easy way to be active in their community. But the trail has additional benefits that interest Grants MainStreet, including community beautification and economic development.

Bianca Mitchell, executive director of Grants MainStreet, said her goal is to help promote Grants' downtown along Historic Route 66. "We want to get more families in the area and to improve the health and wellness of our community," she said.



Open house community input meeting on proposed Legacy Trail

Mesa View Elementary is along the proposed trail extension, and Principal Mike O'Connell is already encouraging more of Mesa's students to walk or bike to school. He is also working on getting a fitness track developed around the school.

Over the years O'Connell has partnered with Jaramillo, who is also director of Future Foundations Family Center. Students attend after-school programs at Future Foundations, which was established next door to Mesa View to offer children and families more resources. High-school students who are a part of Future Foundations' youth coalition helped refurbish Mesa View's playground, including installing nets over the basketball hoops and marking the court with paint.



*"That doubled the number of kids who want to play basketball," said O'Connell. "The kids can't wait to get out there. That really made the basketball court more attractive to them."*

O'Connell is excited about other healthy initiatives at Mesa View, which has become Grants' pilot school for Healthy Kids Healthy Cibola County. Students participated in walk and roll day, are eating healthier foods in the cafeteria and fruit during after-school tutoring, he said. He wants to teach them how to fix flats on their bikes so they are more likely to ride often.

“Our whole year has been oriented toward healthy lifestyles,” O’Connell said. “I think it will change the culture of our school. Kids will be happier. They will be more alert and do better academically.”

Increasing the community’s access to healthy produce is another goal of Healthy Kids Healthy Cibola County, an initiative supported by Healthy Kids New Mexico. Jaramillo is partnering with Grants MainStreet to develop a farmer’s market downtown that hasn’t existed for at least 10 years.

To gain interest in the project, Jaramillo has arranged several community meetings and outreach to local farmers. Mitchell consulted with Carlsbad MainStreet, which runs a farmer’s market, to learn how to establish one.

Jaramillo keeps learning of more people who are interested in joining the cause. The community held a seed swap this spring and decided to schedule the farmer’s market on a Thursday evening so people can stop by after work and shop.

Mitchell attributes some of Grants’ success with healthy initiatives to leaders listening to people, seeking feedback and being open-minded about learning from one another and sharing information and resources.



(Top): Future farmer’s market locale, downtown Grants  
(Bottom): Face-painting fun at farmer’s market community kickoff event

“We’re moving in the right direction, but we have a lot to learn,” Mitchell said. “Getting the community involved and getting their feedback is a success already.”