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BECAUSE COMMUNITY MATTERS

WeThrive partnerships will pay healthy dividends

As health commissioner, I could write columns, send flyers, or talk to you through the media, continually telling



Tim Ingram
COMMUNITY PRESS
GUEST COLUMNIST

you that we eat and smoke too much and don't get enough exercise. I could share studies and data illustrating the ills awaiting us as a result of our less-than-healthy lifestyles. Or, I could engage you and your communities to make substantive, long-lasting policy and infrastructure changes to encourage healthy practices. Which tactic do you think would be most successful?

Hopefully, you will agree that the latter approach is most effective. If so, you and your community are prime candi-

dates to join the WeThrive movement, making healthy practices part of your community vernacular.

WeThrive is a county-wide movement of community partners, schools, businesses, places of worship, elected officials and residents working together to make healthy living easier and healthy practices part of your daily routine. The movement focuses on increasing access to healthy eating and physical activity, while decreasing tobacco use and exposure to secondhand smoke. WeThrive is about making lasting changes that keep communities healthy for generations.

We are working to change the paradigms inherent in delivering healthy messaging and programming to Hamilton County. Rather than talk about change, our team jumps directly in with community teams dedicated to addressing some

of the most common but preventable health issues facing us today. WeThrive engages community leadership through four distinct pathways: chronic disease, environmental health, community health, and emergency preparedness.

Participating communities adopt resolutions, organize teams, select a pathway and then get to work improving their health and preparedness. Each community team works at its own pace and implements the changes necessary to achieve healthier goals, while Hamilton County Public Health staff provides community-level health data, lends experience and helps guide the process.

Since we launched the WeThrive initiative in 2008, we have seen substantial change in some of the participating communities. Parks and areas for physical play and recreation have been developed.

Gardens have sprung up in several communities around the County. Schools and child-care facilities have adopted healthy eating and smoke-free policies. School districts have carved out safe ways for children to get some exercise while walking to school. And perhaps most important, people are incorporating healthy practices into everyday living.

There are 19 Hamilton County communities participating in the WeThrive initiative. That is approximately half of the communities served by Hamilton County Public Health. Imagine the health benefits we could affect together if our communities lined up behind one or more of the pathways to health identified by WeThrive.

Imagine the county-wide reduction in obesity and subsequently the preventable diseases associated with obesity, if we could implement

healthy eating and exercise programs in the communities with the most to gain. Think about the health improvement for our younger generation as they grow up with healthy eating, exercise and tobacco reduction as part of their everyday routines. This year, for the first time, we can work with communities to develop and implement emergency preparedness programs to round out a community's public health offerings.

Will you consider joining us as we work to make healthy choices easier choices? Give Rebecca Stowe a call at 513-946-7845 and she will be happy to work with you to assemble a team to start thriving in your community.

Tim Ingram is the health commissioner for Hamilton County and heads up the Hamilton County Public Health Department.