

# Community Change Chronicles

## Health Department Staff Promote Stairwell Use

### Process of Creating Change

A new, 3-level, government office complex was recently completed for Nash County employees. Three levels means stairs, and a perfect opportunity to encourage more physical activity among employees! Nash County's Health Education staff advocated for visible stairwell placement in the new building by sharing articles about stairwells and the importance location plays in their usage. However, building plans were almost complete, and it was too late for floor plan changes. Unfortunately, the elevator, not the stairs, is the first thing one sees when entering the building's main entrance. Though the layout of the building is not as supportive as it could be for choosing the stairs, Nash County Health Department's Health Promotion team is working to make the stairs well used.

The Health Promotion Team ordered clear, modern-looking, acrylic sign-holders, which could be mounted on the brand new walls without damaging them. The team developed several sets of messages for placement in the sign holder near the elevator and messages for use near the stairwell entrance. The goal was to redirect employees and visitors from the elevator to the stairs. The motivating signs encourage stair usage and will be changed regularly so employees and visitors are encouraged in different ways.

At a recent health fair, employees had the opportunity to register for a drawing featuring several great prizes. To promote the stairs and employees' use of them, people who could provide the number of stairs that were in the stairwell were given extra chances in the drawing. There were also "poker chips" randomly placed in the stairwell that could be redeemed for prizes. Almost all participants knew the number of stairs and asked about the poker chips, proving they took the stairs at least once!

It took almost a year to get the signs in place. A health educator, the county's new Human Resource Director, the Assistant County Manager, and county maintenance staff were all involved in sign placement. Persistence paid off. Three weeks after installing the signs, stair use had visibly

increased. The staff is still evaluating implementation of the signs to determine just how much stair use has increased.

### Importance of Change

According to the Surgeon General's Report of Physical Activity and Health, people of all ages should accumulate 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity on most, preferably all days of the week. This environmental change creates an opportunity to increase physical activity levels for both employees and visitors to the building. Although the initial advocacy for a more visibly placed and accessible stairwell did not result in structural changes, the Health Promotion staff was persistent in implementing an alternative way to get people more active and take the stairs in the building.



### Lessons Learned

- ♥ This option worked well because most employees and public visitors use a main elevator.
- ♥ A new employee may be able to advocate for changes in a different way that catches the attention of others and results in change.
- ♥ Be assertive and persistent with good ideas! Share them with a variety of decision-making folk—you never know which will become your advocate!
- ♥ Make the change fun—the drawings created good stairwell "icebreakers"!

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| <b>Type of Change</b>         | Environmental  |
| <b>Risk Factor Addressed</b>  | Physical Activity  |
| <b>Location of Change</b>     | Nash County Office Building (houses 80% of Nash County Government employees in Nashville, NC)  |
| <b>Reach/Impact of Change</b> | Approximately 570 county employees work in that building and 75% of all visitors to Social Services, Tax, Planning, Environmental Health, Register of Deeds, and the County Administrative offices use this main entrance. |