

Master Wellness Volunteer Program

Relevance

One of the high-priority issues addressed by the Texas AgriLife Extension Service is helping county residents improve their health. Research shows at least 50 percent of health status is due to lifestyle factors such as not using tobacco, being physically active, having a normal weight, maintaining good nutrition, controlling alcohol consumption, and using seat belts. Having a healthy lifestyle reduces risks of developing costly chronic diseases like heart disease, cancer, and type 2 diabetes. Avoiding chronic diseases, or minimizing their impact, produces significant savings since these diseases account for 83 percent of all health care spending. AgriLife Extension has numerous programs such as Walk Across Texas and Do Well, Be Well with Diabetes that help people learn and adopt behaviors that can positively impact their health and wellness. The challenge faced by our county faculty is diffusing these programs among the vast audiences who are in need of such education. One method for expanding the reach of our Extension health and nutrition programs is to use trained volunteers.

Response

The Master Wellness Volunteer Program was piloted in 19 East Region counties in 2008. The program structure is outlined below:

- Volunteers receive 40 hours of education in health and nutrition.
- This education takes place over five training days. The major topics covered include: reaching limited-resource audiences, basic nutrition, food



safety, health and wellness, and childhood overweight.

- Participants are required to take a certification exam to ensure that they learned the primary concepts related to each training class.
- At the conclusion of the training classes, participants begin returning volunteer service to Extension. They are expected to give at least 40 hours related to helping Extension plan, implement, and evaluate health and nutrition programs.

Results

- 112 volunteers were recruited and trained in 2008.
- 4,266 hours were logged by these volunteers upon completion of the training classes.
- These volunteers taught or assisted with 488 educational sessions.
- 16,651 people were reached through these educational sessions.

East Region county Extension agents have indicated the Master Wellness Volunteer program has:

- increased outreach efforts,
- helped reach new audiences, and
- created advocates for the Family and Consumer Sciences program.

Volunteers have taught classes, helped with community health fairs, been involved in school outreach efforts, served as coordinators for AgriLife Extension's Walk Across Texas program, conducted healthy food demonstrations, and assisted in acquiring resources to support program efforts.

Volunteer Quotes

- “This is awesome...a way to learn more to help myself and give back to the community”!
– Tarrant County volunteer
- “Extension has so much to offer, and I’m glad to be a part of the educational process.”
– Hopkins County volunteer
- “I so appreciate having the opportunity to partner with Extension to help improve the quality of life for others. AgriLife Extension is an incredible positive influence, and I am honored to assist in expanding the ability of the service to reach even more people.”
– Smith County volunteer

State Roll-out

In Fall 2008, East Region agents conducted a state training on the Master Wellness Volunteer Program. In 2009, there are 35 counties across the state implementing the program. The need for increased outreach in the areas of health and nutrition will continue to be a high priority, and volunteers may be a key for helping AgriLife Extension reach more people with the educational programs we have available.

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