



Master Wellness Volunteer Program

Relevance

One of the high-priority issues addressed by Texas AgriLife Extension Service is helping county residents improve their health. Research shows at least 50% 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 the 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% 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 Training Program was implemented in 20 counties in 2010. There are currently 28 counties that report having trained Master Wellness Volunteers who contribute service. 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

- 102 volunteers were recruited and trained in 2010.
- 4757 hours were logged by these volunteers upon completion of the training classes.
- There are 224 trained Master Wellness Volunteers in Texas.
- These volunteers taught or assisted with approximately 400 educational sessions.
- Over 10,000 people were reached through these educational sessions.

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, assisted with 4-H and youth development nutrition projects, and assisted in acquiring resources to support program efforts.

Volunteer Quotes

- "I loved the Master Wellness program. Along with gaining nutritional knowledge, my communication skills were sharpened during the training. While speaking to different groups this year, I realized just how much people need the type of information we have to share! It is a wonderful feeling to be able to help others gain knowledge that will hopefully improve their lives in many ways." – Johnson County Volunteer.
- "This training was helpful to me personally, as well as for my future role as a volunteer. I can't wait to start my volunteer service!" – Anderson County Volunteer
- "I wish all my employees would participate in this program. It would help them more fully understand the wellness program we have implemented in the county." – Ellis County Volunteers & Director of Ellis County Human Resources Department
- "Being a Master Wellness Volunteer really helps you understand the dimensions of wellness and all that is offered through AgriLife Extension." – Cherokee County Volunteer

Future Program Direction

In 2011, the Master Wellness Volunteer Program will be expanded and implemented in all urban areas of Texas. The Master Wellness Volunteer Development team



is also working to make 20 of the 40 hours of training available through online courses. The goal is to make the program more user-friendly and convenient for potential volunteers. The need for increased outreach in the areas of health and nutrition will continue to be a high priority, and volunteers are a way to help AgriLife Extension reach more people with our wellness education program efforts.