Executive Summary
Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities

*Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities: Supporting Community Action to Prevent Childhood Obesity* supported multidisciplinary partnerships in 49 communities to promote changes to local policies, systems, and physical environments to foster healthy living and prevent childhood obesity. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) invested $34.7 million in the program and its evaluation from February 2008 to August 2014.

The community partnerships helped create 715 policy and practice changes to improve access to healthy affordable food, 576 policy and practice changes to increase safe physical activity options, and 828 changes in the built environment. They raised more than $140 million in cash and in-kind contributions.

**CONTEXT**

More than 23 million children and adolescents in the United States were overweight or obese in 2007 and lower-income communities and communities of color are bearing the brunt of the childhood obesity epidemic.

**THE PROGRAM**

*Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities* evolved from RWJF’s *Active Living by Design* program, in which 25 community partnerships across the country aimed to change the built environment and support public policies to make physical activity part of everyday life. *Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities* broadened this focus to include policy and environmental strategies that would increase access to healthy food as well as to physical activity options.
activity for children and families at greatest risk for obesity based on factors such as race, ethnicity, income, and geography.

Some 49 communities received grants of $360,000 to $400,000 to support their work, and each community had to match at least 50 percent of its RWJF grant with cash or in-kind contributions. HKHC began with investments in nine communities, which it called “leading sites,” that had extensive experience in active living and healthy eating policy and environmental change, and that could provide leadership and mentorship to the 40 other sites.

Sarah L. Strunk, MHA, directed the Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities national program, which until January 2014 was located at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

At that time, Strunk became executive director of a new entity, Active Living By Design, which spun off from the university and became a fiscally-sponsored project of Third Sector New England. The program’s management moved with her.

Laura K. Brennan, PhD, MPH, president and CEO of Transtria, LLC, directed the evaluation.

OVERALL RESULTS

National program office staff offered the following results and findings in reports to RWJF and in interviews. The community partnerships:

- Helped create **715 policy and practice changes to improve access to healthy affordable food**. Changes in child-care facility nutrition standards were the most common of these changes.

- Helped create **576 active living policy and practice changes to increase physical activity**. Changes in child care physical activity standards were the most common of these changes.

- Helped create **828 built environment changes—417 that improved access to healthy foods and 411 that increased opportunities for active living**.

- Raised more than **$140 million in cash and in-kind contributions**. This was more than four times RWJF’s investment.
OVERALL FINDINGS

Evaluators reported the following findings to RWJF in a special issue of the Journal of Public Health Management and Practice,¹ and in an interview.

- The community partnerships made 4,261 policy, practice, and environmental changes across all strategies and 1,536 settings. For the six core areas examined (corner stores, farmers’ markets, child care nutrition standards, child care physical activity standards, active transportation, and parks and play spaces), there were a total of 3,629 changes and 1,195 settings.

- Child care nutrition and physical activity standards had the greatest number of changes and the greatest number of settings. Changes in farmers’ markets, parks and play spaces, and corner stores were less prevalent.

- When the prevalence of policy, practice, and environmental changes were combined with the number of people reached and the strength of implementation, the core areas that have the greatest potential to change peoples’ behaviors are active transportation, child care nutrition standards, and parks and play spaces.

AFTERWARD

After Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities ended in August 2014, 26 of the 49 community partnerships continued to operate.

As of May 2015, the new entity managed by Strunk, Active Living By Design, had secured nearly $5.5 million in grants, contracts, and fee-for-service work through December 2017. Its projects include some that go beyond healthy eating and active living to address other social determinants of health.

In February 2015, RWJF committed $500 million over the next 10 years to expand efforts to ensure that all children in the United States—no matter who they are or where they live—can grow up at a healthy weight.

Program Management

National Program Office: The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Active Living By Design
Program Director: Sarah L. Strunk, MHA

¹ May/June Supplement (21: Suppl. 31, 81–136)