Abstract

Connecticut Fitness and Nutrition Clubs In Motion (CT FANs IM) has been established in five cities of three counties over a five-year span, supported by a curriculum and leader’s training guide delivered online. An interactive app and cooking videos have been developed and introduced to parents and children; the recipes include produce that can be garden grown.

Objective

To reflect upon impacts of CT FANs IM: 4-H STEM Program among third and fourth graders, their school, families, and teen mentors. Impacts areas include behavior, attitudes, healthy eating, fitness, and self-efficacy.

Methods

Teenagers ages 16 to 18 years old were recruited from local schools and community agencies in five cities as 4-H teen mentors. The teens were trained to deliver the 4-H FANs IM curriculum to third and fourth graders. Topics for training included nutrition education, food safety, food demonstrations, fitness games, gardening, youth development, presentation development, classroom management, conflict management, and diversity awareness. 4-H teen mentors, supported by adult supervisors and 4-H adult leaders, delivered the intervention program in an 8-week session during the winter or spring months to the 4-H club youth. Youth were administered pre- and post-test questionnaires and conducted fitness measures (strength, endurance and flexibility). After the 8 weeks, teen mentors continued to deliver nutrition, fitness, and gardening lessons from various curricula developed by 4-H, Extension, and/or the USDA. Qualitative interviews with youth were conducted with past and current intervention sites. During the spring and summer months, garden beds were built under the guidance of a master gardener with staff at the school and community sites. Community engagement was fostered by mini in-kind grants offered to non-intervention elementary school sites in each community. Over 84 garden beds were installed. CT FANs IM sites were provided resources and encouraged to sustain fitness, nutrition, and gardening topics as best suited their needs with staff support. Examples of sustainability include a school-based 4-H environmental club, garden activities incorporated into extended learning programs at the school, and incorporation of the 4-H FANs IM program for an afterschool program for all students. In order to enhance opportunities for sustainability and adoption, the 4-H FANs IM curriculum was transitioned to an online train-the-trainer curriculum and reviewed by teachers, 4-H staff and administrators in Connecticut and New Mexico. Lastly, interactive apps and cooking videos (recipes with garden-based ingredients) were developed and tested with parents and children in New Mexico.

Results

Due to timing of post-test evaluation measures taking place, a hard copy of results will available during the poster session.

Conclusions/Implications

Preliminary teacher input regarding the online curriculum has been favorable. Formative evaluation conducted with parent-child teams for the interactive app and cooking videos guided the design. Follow-up interviews with parents suggested at least half of the children later cooked a recipe at home.

Seven sites participated in the 8-week study. Two sites participated in formal programming without evaluation measures due to changes in Institutional Review Board protocol in the first year of the grant cycle. More than 6,000 youth and 900 adults were reached by the 4-H CT FANs IM program via formal programming, family nights, health fairs, and other special events. Despite limited intervention time, data suggests a positive influence of behaviors, attitudes, healthy eating, fitness and self-efficacy. The sustainability of CT FANs IM, 4-H STEM program has been interwoven with committed school staff and volunteers. For the remained of the grant, the team will promote the online curriculum, cooking videos, and interactive app via 4-H, the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP), current partners, and families. These outputs will extend the life and influence in the prevention of childhood obesity of the CT FANs IM program.

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