

# NOTHING CAN STOP US



COMMUNITY HEALTH ASSESSMENT  
RESULTS AND PRIORITIES

# Introduction

## ideal community versus Butler County environment

**W**hat does a healthy community look like? There are many ways to define a healthy community, with answers as varied as the people being asked. Some of the factors that are present in healthy communities include quality, affordable healthcare, vibrant businesses, quality child care and schools, a lack of crime, availability of healthy food choices, accessible public transportation, active citizen leadership and volunteerism, and the availability of places to exercise, indoors and outdoors.

Butler County faces challenges in the majority of these areas, much of which can be attributed to decades of planning and decisions focused on private transportation (auto-centric) instead of social networking. The City of Poplar Bluff, the main population center of Butler County, is a prime example of a community that developed based on auto-centric policies and planning. Some areas of the city have some sidewalks, but many are in cracked, uneven, and in various states of disrepair. Crosswalks are nearly non-existent, with a notable lack of safe crossings near schools and senior housing. Very few business locations provide bike racks or benches that would encourage pedestrian traffic. Locally grown produce is available on a limited basis from roadside vendors and at the farmers market, which is only open on Friday mornings. Fast food restaurants are abundant, providing convenient access to high fat, high calorie foods. The city developed in an auto-centric capacity, with the majority of businesses are located along busy, multi-lane roads with virtually no access for pedestrians or bikes.

Problems are compounded in areas outside of the population hub of Poplar Bluff. Rural areas face unique challenges to promoting healthy and active lifestyles. Schools are located farther from homes due to population dispersion and walking or biking are not a safe transportation options for students. Rural areas also lack the paved trails, parks, and recreation facilities that are available in more urban areas.

Many residents that live in Butler County's rural areas travel to Poplar Bluff for work. These commuters face additional challenges due to the extended amount of time spent being sedentary in a vehicle. The travel time also means less time at home for meal preparation, which makes convenience foods attractive alternatives.

Time and convenience seem to play crucial roles in lifestyle choices for many of Butler County's residents. Finding time to exercise and prepare healthy, nutritious meals is a challenge for most working adults. For those with children or those that care for elderly relatives, time becomes even more limited as child/elder care issues pose additional challenges.

## CONTACT & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### Contact Information:

Robert Hudson, Administrator  
Butler County Health Department  
1619 North Main  
Poplar Bluff, MO 63901  
Phone: 573-785-8478  
Fax: 573-785-2825

### Acknowledgements:

Special thanks to Sarah Jane Faughn and Monique Crowley for their help with photos, meetings and community outreach efforts



# What are the keys to creating a healthy community?

There are many variables and organizations that must cooperate to transition a community towards healthy and active lifestyle choices.

- **Schools** – serving healthy meals, snacks, and drinks ensure opportunities for exercise and encourage physical activity.
- **Workplaces** – developing health and nutrition programs to encourage physical fitness and healthy employees, reward employees that are healthy and fit
- **Public Spaces** – provide public access to trails, maintain sidewalks, develop crosswalks and bike lanes
- **Businesses** – provide bike racks, maintain sidewalks, establish locations within walking distance of residential areas
- **Government** – work with community to promote healthy and active lifestyles, sponsor/promote health fairs, develop long term plans to incorporate pedestrian and bike friendly streets and shopping areas
- **Health organizations** – provide education programs and exercise programs
- **Community Organizations** – cooperate and network to maximize funding and impact, advocate
- **Individuals** – volunteer, set examples for others by being healthy and active, shop locally and advocate to government

Health literacy and education play important roles in the development of a healthy community. Community members must be knowledgeable about their own health, about disease prevention, and about the roles of proper nutrition and exercise. Education and exercise are key components to preventing many chronic diseases and conditions such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease.

Education and exercise are the key components that need to be addressed at all age levels, and across all socio-economic demographics. Education can start early in schools, with healthy school lunches, drinks, and snacks combined with classroom discussions on nutrition. Work places can advocate and encourage employees to eat healthy by providing refrigerators and areas to eat. Employers can also work with fitness facilities to obtain employee discounts, or develop incentive programs for employees that exercise.



# Data Section

**B**utler County residents struggle with the issues facing many Missourians today – obesity, chronic diseases such as heart disease and diabetes, poor nutrition and unhealthy lifestyle choices. According to the 2009 BRFSS survey, 25.5% of Butler County residents consider themselves to have fair or poor general health status, along with 16.3% indicating they had activity limitations due to physical, mental or emotional problems. The BRFSS data also shows that 38.6% of residents are considered overweight, with a Body Mass Index (BMI) between 25 and 29.9, and 30.0% are considered obese, with a BMI greater than 30.

Being physically active is a key element in living a longer, healthier, happier life. It can help relieve stress and can provide an overall feeling of well-being. Physical activity can also help you achieve and maintain a healthy weight and lower risk for chronic disease. Physical activity simply means movement of the body that uses energy. Walking, gardening, briskly pushing a baby stroller, climbing the stairs, playing soccer, or dancing the night away are all good examples of being active. For health benefits, physical activity should be moderate or vigorous and add up to at least 30 minutes a day. (source: <http://www.mypyramid.gov>)

Focus Group participants completed demographic surveys to provide information regarding socio-economic status and healthy choices and activity levels. According to those survey results, 77.1% of respondents had participated in some type of physical activity or exercise within the past month. The 2009 BRFSS data indicates that 42.2% of respondents had participated in some type of physical activity or exercise within the past month. While the BRFSS data and the Focus Group data differ somewhat, it can be safely assumed that over 20% of the Butler County population does not get adequate exercise.



In order to make physical activity a regular part of the day, choose activities that are enjoyable and that can be done regularly. Fitting activity into a daily routine can be easy—such as taking a brisk 10 minute walk to and from the parking lot, bus stop, or subway station. Or, join an exercise class. Keep it interesting by trying something different on alternate days. What's important is to be active most days of the week and make it part of daily routine.

Along with physical activity, part of living a healthy lifestyle includes eating healthy, nutritious foods such as fruits and vegetables. People who eat more fruits and vegetables as part of an overall healthy diet are likely to have a reduced risk of some chronic diseases. Fruits and vegetables provide nutrients such as potassium, vitamins A, C, and E, and dietary fiber that are vital for health and maintenance of your body. Most fruits and vegetables are naturally low in fat, sodium, and calories and none have cholesterol. Along with providing good nutrition, eating foods such as fruits and vegetables that are low in calories per cup instead of some other higher-calorie food may be useful in helping to lower calorie intake, which in turn can help with weight loss.

Consumption of fruits and vegetables, healthy nutrition choices, is also a problem in Butler County. The 2009 BRFSS results showed that 34.5% of residents indicated consuming fruit less than once per day. According to the current Focus Group survey results, 39.1% of respondents indicated they consumed fruit (not including juice) less than once per day, with an additional 33.5% consuming fruit only once per day. According to the 2009 BRFSS survey, over 50% of respondents indicated they ate vegetables (other than potatoes, carrots, or salad) once a day or less. Sixty percent of the Focus Group respondents also answered that they consumed vegetables (other than potatoes, carrots, or salad) once a day or less.

In order for Butler County residents to become healthier, they must change eating habits and become more physically active on a regular basis. However, residents face many challenges to overcoming existing barriers.



## Activity Resources

Organizer	Activities	PRICE BRACKETS			
		Free	Under \$20	Under \$40	\$40 and over
Black River Coliseum	Walking Track	X			
	Fitness Center/Swimming Pool		X (seniors)	X	
Curves	Fitness Center			X	
Ozark Fitness	Fitness Center			X	X
Boys and Girls Club	Community Garden				
	Triple Play Program				
	Archery Program				
Mileage Clubs (BCHD)	Elementary Schools	X			
Poplar Bluff Parks and Rec	Walking trails at city parks	X			
	Summer baseball leagues	X			
	T-ball		X		
	Track and Field Day	X			
	Volleyball, wrestling, football, softball, baseball camps	X			
	Tennis Clinic		X		
	Basketball Camp				X
PARC Fitness	Fitness Center			X	
Xtreme Gymnastics	Gymnastics and Dance				X
Ozark Gymnastics	Gymnastics				X
Black Belt Academy	Martial Arts and fitness classes			X	X
Twin Towers	Exercise classes	X			



# Challenges

- funding and prioritization,
- auto-centric development,
- self-factors (motivation, mentors, lifestyle choices, generational habits, education),
- obstacles that are unique to rural environment

**B**utler County has many challenges that must be overcome in order to develop a healthier community. One of the biggest challenges is finding funding to accomplish projects. The majority of funding comes from grants. Butler County faces competition for grant monies from other urban and rural areas. Competition for funding can also come from within the county, as local service organizations vie for limited dollars. In order to maximize the available funding, service organizations, local health agencies, government, and others must work together to prioritize the areas of greatest need. Once these projects and services are prioritized, all groups within the community can work towards common goals. It is only in this way that available funding can be utilized to serve the greatest number of people, and local competition can be decreased.

Along with funding and prioritization, community leaders and mentors must step forward to set examples of healthy and active lifestyles. Focus group participants indicated that adults and youth need more examples of local leaders making healthy choices. Often, people can be setting poor examples and be unaware. As one Focus Group participant explained, '...the MoDoT worker who was smoking, while he was holding the STOP sign in the construction zone...' doesn't realize the number of people driving by that are observing the behavior.

Like many areas throughout the country, Butler County and the City of Poplar Bluff have developed in an auto-centric capacity, with the majority of businesses located along busy, multi-lane roads with virtually no access for pedestrians or bikes. Planners have focused on how to control automobile traffic, with little consideration for pedestrians, bikes, or community centered activities. Small, local businesses have given way to mega-shopping centers and strip malls. These locations provide easy access for automobiles, but leave little room for shade, benches, or landscaping. For community members that do not have a privately owned vehicle, planning a trip to the grocery store can become a burdensome chore. Imagine the following scenario:



You are a resident in senior housing, living on a fixed income. The nearest grocery store is located several blocks away, on the opposite side of a busy, multi-lane road. There are no crosswalks, no public transportation, and you do not have a car. You have limited mobility due to age and chronic disease. There are no sidewalks between your location and the store, and no benches for resting. There is also very little shade and no place to shelter from adverse weather. After making it to the store, you face the same obstacles to return to your housing, but must also carry home your groceries.

Unfortunately, that scenario is the daily reality for many Poplar Bluff residents. The societal trend of auto-centric development has caused hardships for all, including small business owners and limited-income individuals and families.

(insert photo of Wal-Mart crossing)

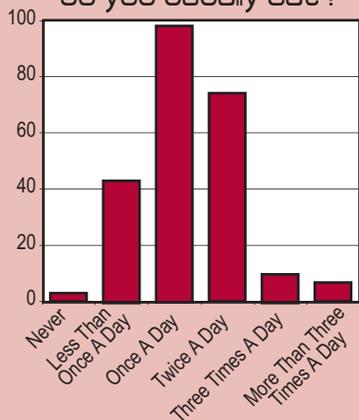
Auto-centric development has also impacted the lifestyles and activities of children and teenagers. Although many children live near schools, a lack of sidewalks and crosswalks makes it unsafe to walk or bike to school. For students in rural areas, the distance from school makes it impossible to walk or bike. Physical Education in schools has also been declining, with emphasis placed instead on academics and standardized test results. Recesses have become shorter and/or eliminated in favor of extended academic periods. School lunches are the best opportunity for proper nutrition for some students, but most schools cannot afford to provide fresh fruits and vegetables and serve processed foods instead. While nutrition programs can help children make healthy food choices, the lack of fresh fruits and vegetables in the school cafeteria enables unhealthy eating. When transportation, activity, and nutrition are considered, it becomes obvious why children face challenges with obesity.

Challenges to get and remain healthy can also come from within ourselves and our communities. Motivation and time are factors that people struggle with every day. It's a continuous challenge to get out of bed earlier to exercise before work, or to find a babysitter so that you can squeeze in a workout before going home. Society is filled with electronic distractions such as computers, music and video entertainment, game consoles, and television and movies, providing temptations to remain sedentary. Once the motivation factor is overcome, opportunities for activity become more obvious. Poplar Bluff residents have several parks available that include walking trails, playground equipment, and space for various sports. Smaller communities in Butler County also have walking trails, or low-traffic areas where walking could occur. County residents in general tend to be well aware of the opportunities for exercise that are available, with 97% of Focus Group participants indicated there are opportunities and places to be physically active in the county. The majority of Focus Group participants, 77%, also indicated they had participated in physical activity within the past month.



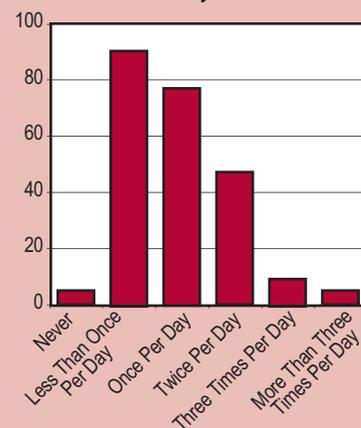
The rural environment poses its own obstacles to healthy and active lifestyles. Obviously, in rural settings there is a lack of paved trails, sidewalks, parks, and indoor recreation facilities. Transportation is also a key problem for rural residents as they must commute to more populated areas for food, employment, and health care. As stated in Focus Groups, motivation and time also play roles. 'No one wants to work all day, rush to pick up kids from daycare, then make the 20 minute drive home to rush through dinner, just to turn around and drive 20 minutes back to town to exercise.' People also struggle with learning new ways to eat and cook, as opposed to the eating habits they had as children and young adults. Generational mind-sets can be difficult to overcome, with many believing that 'what was good enough for my parents, is good enough for me.' Many people struggle with learning how to cook healthy meals, and with trying to incorporate fresh fruits and vegetables into their diets. Of the Focus Group participants, 39% indicated they eat fruit less than once per day, and 42% indicated that they consumed only one serving of vegetables per day (not including carrots, potatoes or salad.)

Not counting carrots, potatoes, or salad, how many servings of vegetables do you usually eat?



People also struggle with learning new ways to eat and cook, as opposed to the eating habits they had as children and young adults. Generational mind-sets can be difficult to overcome, with many believing that 'what was good enough for my parents, is good enough for me.' Many people struggle with learning how to cook healthy meals, and with trying to incorporate fresh fruits and vegetables into their diets. Of the Focus Group participants, 39% indicated they eat fruit less than once per day, and 42% indicated that they consumed only one serving of vegetables per day (not including carrots, potatoes or salad.)

Not counting juice, how often do you eat fruit?



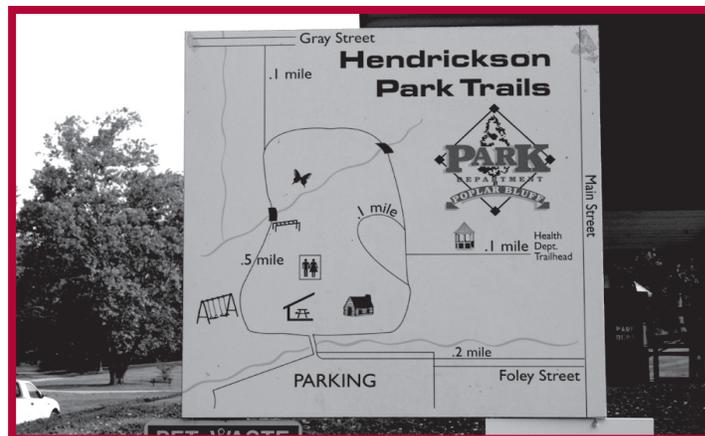
# Success Stories

- local groups with programs,
- nutrition based programs,
- Parks Department efforts and
- park efforts outside Poplar Bluff,
- Twin Towers (activities & info for seniors)
- Chart of activities based on fees

**T**here are several groups within Butler County that provide nutrition services to county residents. These groups provide nutritious foods and meals for economically needy in the area. The Backpack program is facilitated by the SEMO Food Bank and provides a backpack of food for school age children. The food is enough for the child to eat for an entire weekend. The Angel Food Network is also present in Butler County and provides nutritious foods at discounted prices. The food also comes with a recommended meal plan to help with menu preparation. The Nutrition Centers provide healthy, balanced meals for seniors. Residents of the senior housing at Twin Towers in Poplar Bluff are also able to eat some meals at the facility, with diabetic choices always being offered.

The Parks and Recreation Department in Poplar Bluff has made significant improvements to the parks in the past several years. The improvements include the addition of walking trails and playground equipment. The Parks and Recreation department also provides organized sports activities and youth and adults, and summer camps for school age children to encourage outdoor physical activity when school is not in session. Fees for the programs vary and financial assistance can usually be provided if needed.

Other small cities in Butler County, such as Fisk, have small parks that make good use of the small space available. The Fisk Park has a paved trail that outlines the park, which enables parents to exercise while maintaining a close distance to children that are playing. Lake Road Elementary School also has a walking track and playground equipment that is used by the public when school is not in session.



Indoor recreational facilities are available, and can vary based on fees. The Black River Coliseum has an indoor walking track that is available at no cost. The Coliseum also offers a full service aquatic center and exercise facility, with rates varying from \$21 per month for an individual, \$16 per month for seniors, and \$31 per month for families. Ozark Fitness is another exercise facility in Poplar Bluff. Rates at Ozark Fitness range from \$20 to \$60 based on various types of memberships. Other fitness facilities include Curves and PARC.

Other types of recreation are available for those that enjoy the outdoors. There are several Conservation areas for public use that would include hiking and biking. The Black River is also located in Butler County for those who enjoy fishing and boating.

Bluff Falls Waterpark provides seasonal recreation for county residents. The water park features a wave pool, three water slides, a lazy river and a kiddie pool. Along with the water features, the park also offers an 18-hole miniature golf course, a 700-ft. go-kart track, batting cages and sand volleyball, and several bounce houses. Current pricing is \$12.95 for adults, however daily specials and packages are available.

Residents outside of Poplar Bluff have fewer options for physical activity, but can always choose the option of exercising close to home. High school tracks are often open during non-school hours and can be used for walking or running. Many people in rural areas can simply go outside to hike or walk on their own property.

For those who are truly seeking to incorporate exercise, it can be as simple as walking up and down stairs at home, or finding other creative ways to boost your heart rate: dance while you vacuum and dust, add some squats and lunges while putting away laundry, play hopscotch and jump rope with your kids. Your opportunities for exercise are limited only by your imagination.

# Next Steps/Summary

- needs of community and how to get there
- funding needs
- prioritizing projects, etc.
- collaboration and advocates



**B**utler County has many challenges to overcome in order to become a more vibrant, healthy, and active community. These challenges vary from economics to policy development, from generational habits to habits of convenience, and from rural lifestyle to city lifestyle. Education and community leadership will play an important role in creating new initiatives to improve the quality of life for Butler County residents.

One of the biggest issues for many cities and counties, including Butler County, is the lack of funding and financial resources for projects. Limited funding is available for services, so sidewalk repair competes with trail creation and maintenance which competes with law enforcement services and road projects. The Butler County area is already economically depressed when compared to the rest of Missouri, with high unemployment rates and lower per capita income. Opportunities for sales tax revenues are mostly limited to the Poplar Bluff area, with a few other small towns scattered throughout the county. Without outside funding such as grant dollars, the lack of economic resources will cause community initiatives like the Parks improvements to become stagnant and eventually decline to a state of disrepair.

Local leaders, at the city and county levels, must work together to create long term strategies for a healthy community. Policy and decision makers must become educated about developing pedestrian and bike friendly streets. Prioritization of projects should include factors that consider the importance of healthy lifestyles and the impact of physical fitness and nutrition in the community. Additionally, leaders can create local ordinances that require food service establishments to post nutrition information. Small businesses such as local markets can be encouraged to develop within walking distance of residential and housing communities.



Along with city and county leaders, the leaders of health, religious, and social organizations need to work together to reduce competition for scarce dollars. When various organizations are competing for the same dollars, the chance of either organization receiving funding is reduced. Organizations offering similar services should collaborate and cooperate instead of competing. Collaboration would enable service providers to reach greater numbers of community members that are in need.

Communication is also a key to overcoming barriers. Community members do not always know of available services. Information sharing, networking, and providing education and referrals are critical to ensuring that residents know where to go for help. A community resource guide would help residents know where to find food resources such as the Angel Food Network and the Nutrition Centers, along with where to find parks and areas for physical activity.

Local leaders must set an example of healthy and active lifestyle choices. Focus Group participants indicated there is a need for more role models in Butler County. Community leaders, including government employees, school officials, business community leaders, and social organization leaders, must set examples such as biking and exercising and making healthy food choices. These leaders must also be knowledgeable about transportation issues in the county, including problems with the safety of biking and walking. Parents and family members must also set examples for children by being more active and making healthy food choices.

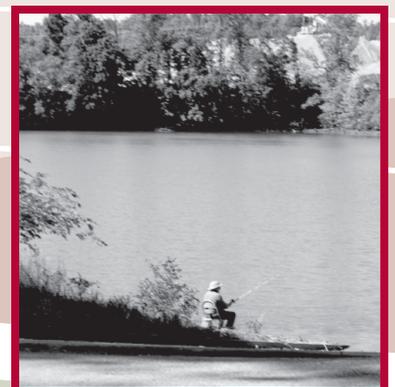
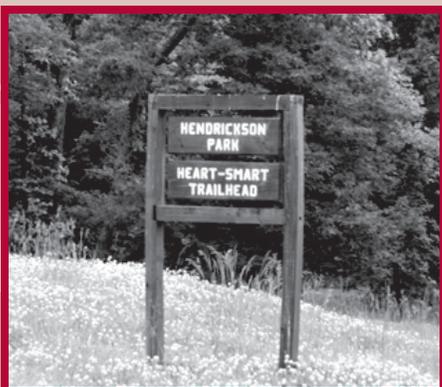
Nutrition education, including how to make healthy food choices and how to prepare healthy meals, is also needed in the community. Families can participate in nutrition education together, helping to break generational habits. Schools can further this process by providing healthy choices for lunches and eliminating access to unhealthy drinks and snacks. Students need to learn why it's important to be physically active, how to find creative ways to be active, and how to use food to support and fuel their bodies. Teachers can collaborate to create a multi-disciplined approach to nutrition education, incorporating physical education classes, science, math, and language arts.



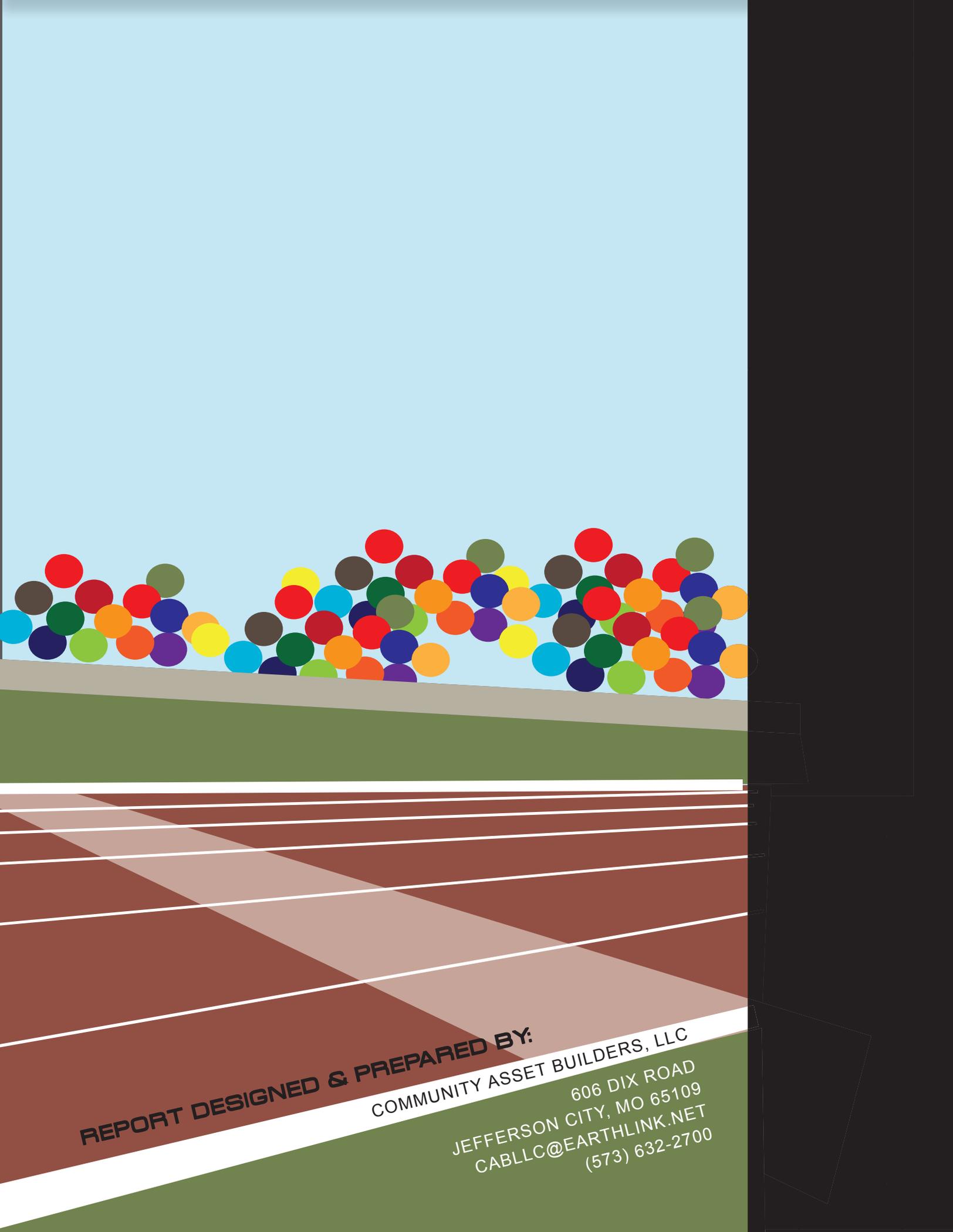
# Focus Groups

Focus Groups were conducted with the following community organizations:

- Community Obesity Advisory Council
- Parks and Recreation
- Southeast Missouri Community Treatment Center
- Northside Nutrition Center Board
- We Can Be Drug Free Coalition
- Twin Rivers Smokebusters
- Senior Advisory Council
- BCHD Employees
- In-Home Services Group
- Teen Parent Mentoring Group
- Three Rivers Striders
- Haven House, Inc.
- Twin Rivers SHAC (Student Health Advisory Council)
- Neelyville SHAC (Student Health Advisory Council)
- New Life Christian Church United
- Briggs & Stratton Wellness Team
- Poplar Bluff SHAC (Student Health Advisory Council)
- Family Community Education
- Life Skills Group
- Children Ready to Enter School Group
- Butler County Youth Task Force
- Health, Safety, & Nutrition Group
- Community Action Council
- Twin Towers Senior Living Group







**REPORT DESIGNED & PREPARED BY:**

COMMUNITY ASSET BUILDERS, LLC

606 DIX ROAD  
JEFFERSON CITY, MO 65109  
CABLLC@EARTHLINK.NET  
(573) 632-2700