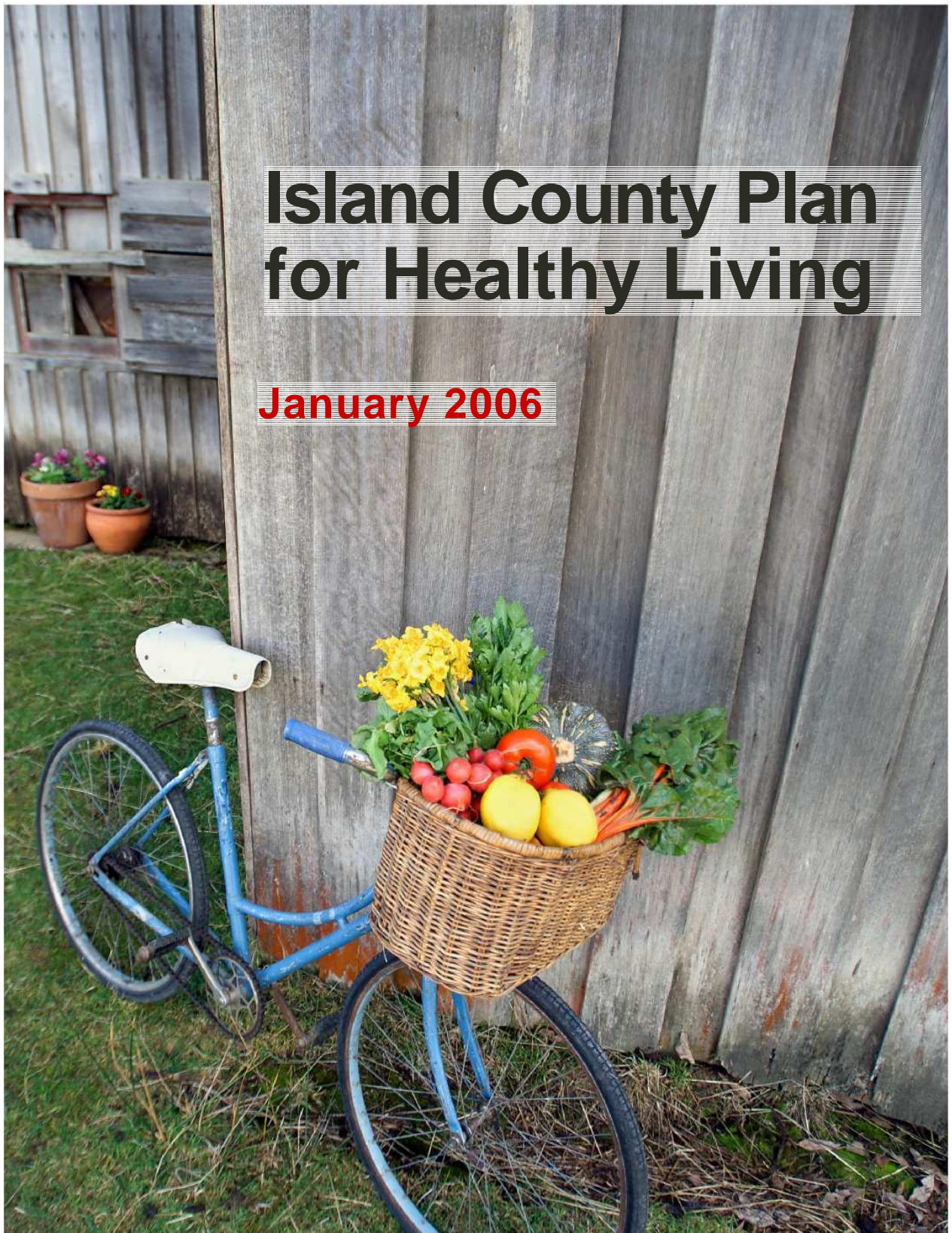


Island County Plan for Healthy Living

January 2006



SLR/STRATEGIC LEARNING RESOURCES

Island County
Health Department

The Island County Plan for Healthy Living

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**Part I:
Vision in Context**

**Introduction:
The Background**

The Washington State Department of Health published the State's Nutrition and Physical Activity Plan in June 2003 to address the public health concern of an inactive and overweight population. The goal of the plan is to present "a framework that can be used to make healthy living easier for all of us." The core idea of the plan is to "promote nutrition and physical activity simultaneously at several levels – for individuals, for families, within institutions and organizations, in communities, and through public policy." The Island County Plan for Healthy Living was developed with the same goal and core theme.

Planning for Island County has some unique challenges. Most residents live on the islands of Whidbey and Camano, which have no direct physical connection and, which therefore, have limited interaction at a community or individual level even though they share a county government. Whidbey Island itself has three distinct regions tied to the school district boundaries, each of which has a different flavor and demographic make-up. (More information about the geography, demography and health status of Island County can be found in Appendix A.) During the planning process, the planning team looked for strategies that would apply across the County and strategies that would address the specific needs of the different Islands and their communities.

The Island County Plan described in the following report uses the State's Plan as a starting point, but looks specifically at the priorities and needs of Island County residents. Information for the plan was developed by:

- Reviewing literature from national and state plans and models for reducing the number of overweight individuals and increasing physical activity.
- Interviewing key informants and stakeholders from each region of Island County representing a wide array of stakeholders with particular interest in physical activity and nutrition-related issues.
- Carrying out a public web-based survey to assess the needs and priorities of residents.

With the State Plan as a guiding framework, a team from the Island County Health Department and Strategic Learning Resources Inc.¹ worked to analyze the information gathered and from it, cull specific recommendations for the future.

¹ SLR was retained by Island County Health Department (ICHD) to develop the plan using community-based approaches. SLR found that the large geographic area of Island County and the distinct communities made it difficult to develop an effective coalition to create the plan. SLR and ICHD staff, working together, decided to substitute the use of interviews and the public survey as a means of hearing from different types of stakeholders.

Visions for Island County

When stakeholders were asked to describe in concrete terms their vision for a healthy Island County of the future, they generated a diverse, creative array of images, out of which emerged some important themes. Overall, the stakeholders imagined a future in which physical activity was directly and explicitly linked to the core reasons they feel Island County is a special place to live.

Walking and Biking



One stakeholder used the phrase “walking scale is human scale” and this link between walking and quality of life was a recurring theme for stakeholders from every region of Island county. Many described a future in which citizen involvement in preserving, mapping, planning, and developing sidewalks, trails, and pathways yielded both a greater ability to get from point a to point b without getting in a car and an ongoing sense of connectedness to the land and to each other.

Whidbey Island stakeholders saw a future in which networks of biking and walking trails had health and social benefits for residents, and also broad economic benefits by boosting tourism as Whidbey Island becomes known as a premiere destination for walking and biking vacations.

Access to Healthy Foods



In the ideal future, stakeholders said, healthy foods are conveniently available to everyone, regardless of income, and there are ample opportunities to expand one’s knowledge of quick and easy ways to prepare healthful foods.

The rural history of Island County was an important value to respondents, many of whom saw a future in which small farms are supported, open spaces are preserved, and community feeling is nurtured via outreach to potentially marginalized groups like seniors, new moms, people with low incomes, and young kids. In this vision, local food sources and farms become an important part of the healthy diets of all residents.

Active Children with Healthy Diets



Stakeholders overwhelmingly envisioned a future in which kids are more physically active both in and outside of school environments. They saw a future in which families are well educated about the connections between nutrition, activity, sleep and successful learning; in which readily available scholarships eliminate any financial barriers preventing kids from participating in activities of their choice; and in which kids have regular access to fresh foods.

While many respondents believed that breastfeeding issues were not a high priority for focused attention, those working most closely with new mothers envisioned higher levels of employer support for breast pumping at work, and more consistent support of breastfeeding by local health care providers.

*Choice and
Information*



The natural beauty of the islands of Island County was seen as a clear asset to cherish and preserve; but many also noted that rain falls on that natural beauty for many months of the year. Numerous portraits of the ideal future included affordable and accessible indoor recreation options for people of all ages, including at the workplace.

Finally, stakeholders envisioned communities in which information about the wide variety of available activity options and resources to support healthy living are easily accessible with the click of a mouse.

Taken together, these themes form a compelling vision for Island County, one which takes advantage of unique historical and geographic assets in order to support vibrant, active lifestyles for people of all ages. The following comprehensive plan for healthy living in Island County emerged from efforts to discern just what kinds of actions might most effectively turn these imagined futures into realities.

**Part II:
Review of Existing
Nutrition and Physical
Activity Policies and
Programs in Island County**

Strong Foundations

A number of programs and policies designed to make physical activity and good nutrition easy for all residents to achieve are already in place in Island County. The following matrices offer a number of examples of the kinds of current efforts, which form a strong foundation on which future policies and programs can be built. (It should be noted that these examples are organized by the goals and objectives delineated in the State plan, which formed the context for the Island County Plan.)

High Impact Emerging Developments

Four emerging developments are also worth highlighting as they may have particularly high impact on the future of Island County residents with respect to physical activity and nutrition.

Trail Plan

In January 2006, Island County Public Works will publish a comprehensive non-motorized trail plan, which will propose priorities for trail projects for each of the regions of Island County. The priority proposals were developed through a rigorous community engagement process. It seems likely that community groups with interest in walkability and trail development will be able to use this plan to help focus their efforts and policy makers will have a resource to help guide their fundraising and development processes.

South Whidbey Parks & Recreation Master Plan

The South Whidbey Parks and Recreation District is soon embarking on a Master Planning project. Early response to a community needs assessment survey seems to indicate strong support for a community pool and a wide variety of other indoor athletic offerings.

Physical Activity Coalition Funding Ended

The three-year funding period for the Physical Activity Coalition, which supported both WHIM (Whidbey in Motion) and the Camano Neighborhood Walkers, ended in December 2005. Both groups were highly effective in supporting community fitness through the formation of walking groups, the development of educational materials, and direct outreach to schools and other community settings. The current challenge will be to sustain the momentum generated by these committed coalition groups in the absence of continued funding from Regence Blueshield.

New requirements For schools

Another clear area of high impact is the recent statutory requirement that each school district re-visit their physical activity and nutrition guidelines. The four school districts in Island County have taken important stands by establishing minimum nutrition standards for contents of vending machines and school lunches, and by beginning to work toward integrating more physical activity into school curricula for grades K-12. These new policies alone, however, will not accomplish the desired vision for children's health described by both key informants and survey respondents.

**Examples of Current Nutrition Related Programs, Practices, and Policies in Island County
(Organized by Strategic Goals in the Washington State Physical Activity and Nutrition Plan)**

NUTRITION 1: INCREASE ACCESS TO HEALTH PROMOTING FOODS		
Program / Organization	Area Served	Description
1.a. Increase Vegetable and Fruit Consumption		
Bayview Farmers Market; Coupeville Farmers Market; South Whidbey Tilth Farmers Market; Oak Harbor Public Market; Mount Vernon Farmers Market	South, Central, and North Whidbey	The general Whidbey population has significant access to seasonal markets as both a community and nutritional resource. WIC food dollars can be used at these markets.
1.b. Increase Worksite and Schools provision of healthful food and drink		
Nutrition Policies: School Districts	Whidbey Island	Example: Oak Harbor School District Nutrition, Food Services and Physical Fitness policy 6700 establishes nutrition standards for vending machines as well as food prepared by the district food services program. Similar policies have recently been enacted by South Whidbey and Coupeville school districts.

NUTRITION 2: REDUCE HUNGER AND FOOD INSECURITY		
Program / Organization	Area Served	Description
2.a. Adequate support for food and nutrition programs		
Island County Health Department and Skagit County Community Action agency	Island County	In 2004, WIC served 3,335 women, infants, and children and conducted 7,939 nutrition education sessions. WIC encourages breastfeeding. New regulations allow discussion of physical activity as well as nutrition. (Funding: Food & Nutrition Services of the USDA; Washington State Department of Health; Island County Health Department)
2.b. Increase access to food programs		
South Whidbey Good Cheer Food Bank	South Whidbey	Good Cheer food bank serves 14% of South Whidbey residents and saw the largest increase in working poor 19-54 yrs old. 9% is grant funded and 91% is funded by Good Cheer Thrift store. It is open 7 days a week. New facility is planned to open in 2008. Partner with Northwest Harvest. It is particularly costly to keep fresh vegetables and fruits rotated.
Gifts from the Heart Food Bank	Greenbank & Coupeville.	
Help House Oak Harbor	Oak Harbor, Coupeville	Food assistance is based upon income guidelines and immediate need. USDA food commodities are distributed on the first Friday of the month at the Help House in Oak Harbor and the Masonic Hall in Coupeville.
Senior Nutrition Program: Senior Services of Island County	Island County	Provides nutritious meals and limited dietician counseling for seniors at eight locations in Island County and by home delivery via Meals on Wheels. (Funded by Northwest Regional Council, Island County, City of Oak Harbor, United Way, Camano Senior Services Foundation)
Food and Schmooze Program: Senior Services of Island County	Coupeville, Oak Harbor	Outreach & social connection promotion, adds facilitated support/discussion groups to existing nutrition services. (Island County Health Department Grant)

**Examples of Current Physical Activity Related Programs, Practices, and Policies in Island County
(Organized by Strategic Goals in the Washington State Physical Activity and Nutrition Plan)**

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY 1: INCREASE # OF PEOPLE WITH ACCESS TO FREE OR LOW COST RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES		
Program / Organization	Area Served	Description
1.a. Funding for state and local recreation sites and facilities (public infrastructure)		
Fort Nugent State Park New Playground: City of Oak Harbor Parks Department	North Whidbey	Playground is complete as of fall 2005 and already well used. (Funding partnership: City of Oak Harbor, Island County, and private donations)
Master Planning process for community center and Sports Complex at Community Park: South Whidbey Parks & Recreation:	South Whidbey	There has been strong community response (1000 respondents = 25%) to the 2005 community needs assessment survey. Results, which will be released early in 2006, will help shape the design and offerings of the proposed community center. Other elements of the Master Planning process will need to take place in 2006 before any decisions are made. (Will likely require capital campaign. No physical plant likely for at least 3-5 years.)
Land acquisition - 200 acre parcel in South Whidbey: South Whidbey Parks & Recreation	South Whidbey	Land will become Parks & Recreation owned in late 2006. Now planning for how to develop the resource. Commitment for National Park staff assistance with planning and coordination of community input into land design/use. Emphasis will be on environmental and nature programming (not athletics). Planned trail-linkages to Bayview and Maxwellton community park. The development process will be lengthy.
1.b. Policies to increase access to public facilities		
Community access to Navy facilities	North Whidbey	Base gym is working toward more community linkages; now offers 3 visits for \$15 to general public; Navy Youth Center has all day court, open to general public for \$12 per year.
Activity guide and trail map supplement in Marketplace: WHIM	South Whidbey	Annual summary of activity options and available walking trails published as a supplement. (Funding period ended December 2005)
Website with information on trails and links to information on other walking options: WHIM	Whidbey Island	There is no further funding. Website could be adapted to become a central information resource on activity options countywide.
Clearinghouse website for physical activity program information and registration: City of Oak Harbor Parks Department	North Whidbey	This is still in development. It will ultimately include links to registration for classes and events offered by diverse programs.
1.c. increase # of worksites with policies to enhance physical activity opportunities		
City of Oak Harbor Employee Wellness Program	North Whidbey	A grant funded "wellness committee" organizes monthly meetings; emphasize healthy at-work snacks, moderation, support and reward for cholesterol testing; lunchtime walks & jogs; 5-a-day fruit and veggie program; health awareness workshops & healthy potlucks; mandatory stress readings and stress management training. City employees participated in Relay for Life activities & "walk across Washington" with other Association of Washington Cities members.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY 2: INCREASE # OF CHILDREN WHO MEET RECOMMENDED GUIDELINES FOR MODERATE OR VIGOROUS PHYSICAL ACTIVITY		
Program / Organization	Area Served	Description
2.a. Schools provide quality, daily physical activity		
School Districts' Physical Activity Policies	Whidbey Island	Example: Oak Harbor School District Nutrition, Food Services and Physical Fitness policy 6700 - Nutrition, health, and fitness topics integrated into health education curriculum K-12. Grades 1 - 8 require 100 minutes of physical education per week. 2 credits are required of high school aged children. While they represent an improvement, these physical activity guidelines do not accomplish the goals expressed by community members interviewed and surveyed.
2.b. policies to increase k-12 physical activity opportunities outside of formal classes		
Pedometer Program: WHIM	3 of 4 school districts	The funding period ended December 2005.
Mayor's award for health and nutrition: City of Oak Harbor Mayor's Office	North Whidbey	This is still in the planning stages – K-5 kids can complete a set of activities and receive a medal or certificate from the Mayor's office. Schools earn a flag or banner.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY 3: INCREASE ACTIVE COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTS		
Program / Organization	Area Served	Description
3.a. Replace sedentary behaviors with physical activity		
Camano Neighborhood Walkers: Island County Physical Activity Coalition	Camano Island	Several continuing walking groups; numerous written materials (brochures, posters, logs, instructions, tips). There are significant safety concerns - no sidewalks or shoulders on most roads; school on busy road with no sidewalks or bike paths. Funded by Regence Blueshield 3 year initiative, funding ended December 31, 2005.
Whidbey In Motion (WHIM): Island County Physical Activity Coalition	North, Central, and South Whidbey	Provides trainings for school nurses; school pedometer programs; trail signage; "Activity and trail guide" newsletter; website. They have developed a website and are looking for a partner to adopt it after 2005. Funded by Regence Blueshield 3 year initiative. Funding ended December 31, 2005.
Parks & Recreation class offerings targeting boomers and seniors: South Whidbey Parks and Recreation	South Whidbey	South Whidbey Parks and Recreation has traditionally been youth-focused. They are trying to do more outreach to adults and seniors with targeted offerings. There is difficulty getting numbers needed for adult classes.
3.b. Urban planning approaches – zoning and land use		
City Planning subcommittee on non-motorized transport: City of Langley	Langley	Partner with Langley Walkers citizen group to offer priority recommendations re: sidewalks, trails, and pathways to the City Master Plan
City of Oak Harbor looking at increasing pedestrian walkways in existing and new developments: Oak Harbor Planning Department	Oak Harbor	
3.c. Transportation and infrastructure promoting non-motorized transit		
Island County 2006 Non-Motorized Trail Plan: Island County Public Works	Camano and Whidbey Islands	The Island County Trails Plan will focus on non-motorized trails on Whidbey and Camano Islands for walking, hiking, road cycling, mountain biking, kayaking, and equestrian purposes. The Trails Plan was

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY 3: INCREASE ACTIVE COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTS		
Program / Organization	Area Served	Description
		developed with community input from focus groups and public workshops. The goal is to enhance the livability and connectivity of our communities. The trail plan is to be presented to County Commissioners in January 2006. Regional projects will be funded individually - funding is not secured.
Plans for "linear parks" (i.e. trails connecting congregation areas): South Whidbey Parks & Recreation	South Whidbey	Engineering is complete on the plan to connect Downtown Langley with South Whidbey High School & community park. Other "linear parks" are planned to connect centers of activity. Emphasis is on multipurpose and multi-use trails. Only 75% of the funding is in place. The plan is on hold pending additional funds.
Environmental Health Assessment Team (EHAT), Walkability subgroup: Island County Health Department	North Whidbey	Anticipate playing an active role in helping to increase public awareness of non motorized Trail Plan. Planning walkability survey.
Friends of Camano Island Parks	Camano Island	Build, maintain, map, and educate about trails on Camano Island. Also organize and lead guided nature walks. Currently completing trails loop around senior center. (Very limited funding - fundraising by volunteers and membership dues. Larger development projects are difficult without other sources of financial support.) There is no one designated to do outreach to seniors or encourage use of the trails. There are not many ADA accessible trails.
Surveying, mapping, preservation, and planning for Langley sidewalks, trails, and pathways: Langley Walkers	Langley	9-member volunteer citizen group who is working to survey existing sidewalks, trails, and pathways in order to develop a map and priority recommendations to the City master plan, which will guide future development within city limits and surrounding Urban Growth Areas. They are developing approaches to working with private property owners; planning to create a brochure/booklet of Langley walks; working to maintain and protect existing walkways and alleys; exploring "shared use" roads designation for specific targeted streets.
Developing paths and trails for shoreline access: WSU Extension	State	Potential partner of other trail protection and development groups.
Oak Harbor Parks Department	Oak Harbor	Currently completing trail extensions along the waterfront.

OTHER PHYSICAL ACTIVITY-RELATED PROGRAMS & EVENTS		
Program / Organization	Area Served	Description
Navy Base Resources: Dietician for Base and Director of Health Promotion	Oak Harbor Military personnel only	Active duty personnel have required annual health assessment. Individual nutrition education appointments, "health heart" classes, 8-week "ship shape" program are offered. Navy WIC does some breastfeeding support.
Whidbey General Hospital Life Center for Essential Wellness	Whidbey Island	Base no longer offers breastfeeding support or pre- and post-natal nutrition classes. (Health Promotion focus areas include tobacco, drugs, and alcohol - no specific emphasis on activity/nutrition.) Wide range of wellness programs and outreach efforts including Cardiac Wellness, Pulmonary Wellness, a wellness program aimed at persons 20 pounds overweight or more, health education classes, and an exercise series (3 classes) for post partum women.
Large-scale community events		
Relay for Life event: American Cancer Society Benefit	Central and North Whidbey	Annual event with broad community participation
Tour de Whidbey event: Whidbey General Hospital	Island County and beyond	Successful fundraiser for Whidbey Island Hospital Foundation and has grown each of the last 4 years
Whidbey Marathon & Half Marathon: Nature's Path Organics (2006 Sponsor)	Regional	Annual event with diverse community sponsors North end annual event

**Part III:
What Did We Learn From
the Community?**

Key Informant Interviews

The SLR consulting team carried out 17 individual interviews and small focus groups with key informants representing a cross-section of people involved in or concerned with the issues of healthy living. They included representatives from:

- Camano Neighborhood Walkers
- City of Coupeville
- City of Langley
- City of Oak Harbor
- EHAT
- Friends of Camano Parks
- Good Cheer Food Bank
- Goosefoot Community Fund
- Island County Commissioners
- Island County Health Department
- Island County Public Works
- Langley Walkers
- Navy Base
- Oak Harbor School District
- Soroptomists
- South Whidbey Children's Center
- South Whidbey Parks & Recreation
- Toddler Learning Center
- WHIM
- Whidbey General Hospital

These stakeholders were asked a range of questions from their vision for a healthy Island County to what the barriers are to their own healthy living. (The complete set of questions is included in Appendix B). Their responses:

- contributed to a picture of the desired vision for a healthy Island County (described in Part I),
- helped build the understanding of the programs and services existing in Island County (described in Part II), and
- were the basis for the design of the community survey, whose findings are delineated here.

Community Survey A web-based survey was used to solicit information about community members' physical activity and dietary habits, and their perspectives on the barriers to healthy living and potential remedies. The survey questions were developed based on ideas and concerns voiced during the key informant interviews, and gave the opportunity to test strategies offered by the key informants with the broader community.

The survey had 668 respondents and provided much valuable information. The survey itself and a detailed summary of the responses are provided in Appendix C.

Before delving into what can be learned from the survey, a few caveats are important:

- The sample was not random. (Respondents learned about the survey through emails from people involved in the project and through posters and newspaper articles.)
- Very few respondents were under the age of 25 and therefore, the survey does not offer information on the youth perspective and overall, the survey respondents were older than the general population of Island County.

- More women (69%) than men took part in the survey.

In part, because the survey was not representative of the population as a whole, and in part to develop more focused strategies, the survey was sliced and diced into a number of demographic groups (where the sample size was large enough to come to some useful conclusions).

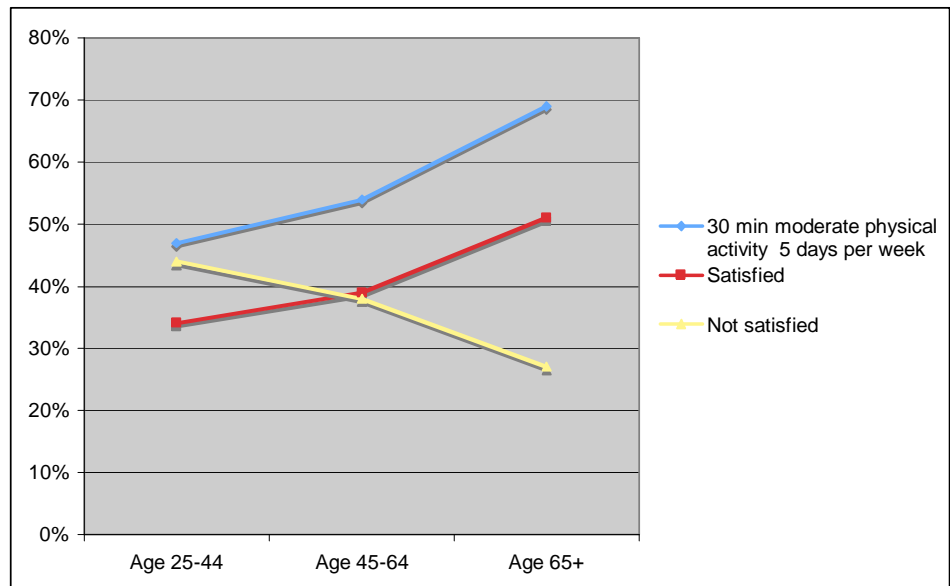
The survey data was analyzed by region, gender, age, whether or not children were in the home, whether or not the respondent was employed, and whether they were satisfied with either their level of exercise or their diet. Some responses did vary by gender, age, or region, but some themes stand out as cutting across all groups and different ways of dissecting the data. Together, these themes form the core opportunities for strategies that might be helpful countywide.

Physical Activity

Older Respondents Exercise More

Respondents were asked whether they typically had 30 minutes of moderate exercise 5 days per week and whether they were satisfied with their activity level. Overall, 56% of the respondents said they were typically active at that level – but more men said that than women, and men were also more likely to be satisfied. Age, however, makes the greatest difference in activity level with almost 70% of the respondents 65 or older reporting a healthy level of physical activity.

Chart 1
Exercise and Satisfaction Level by Age



Greater Choice in Physical Activity

Walking - whether in a neighborhood, on a trail or on the beach - is done by more than half of the respondents. But, it is less popular when people are asked what they would most **like** to do. For example, 64% walk in their neighborhood but only 46% would like to do it given other choices. When asked what they would most like to do, more people would be swimming, bicycling, dancing, kayaking or rowing. More people between the ages of 25-44 would like to be able to work out in a fitness club than are able to (and approximately a third of the respondents age 65+ who do use a fitness club would prefer not to). Trail walking is desired, in particular, by the 65+ age group, and respondents in the age group 45-64 want the greatest range of options. In all cases, greater choice of activity is clearly desired.

Barriers to Activity

Overall, the greatest barrier to being as physically active as respondents would like was “lack of time” (58%). Barriers change with age and are somewhat different for men and women, however. The barriers most often identified are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1
Barriers to Physical Activity by Gender**

	% of respondents	
	Male	Female
Lack of time	50%	63%
Too dark in the morning and/or evening	35%	48%
Family obligations	21%	37%
Too tired	20%	32%

It is interesting to note that women, in general, were more likely to identify something as a barrier than were men.

These same barriers varied by age group with older respondents having fewer barriers, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2
Barriers to Physical Activity by Age**

	Age		
	25-44	45-64	65+
Lack of time	70%	61%	26%
Too dark in the morning and/or evening	50%	47%	18%
Too tired	37%	28%	10%
Family obligations	52%	30%	5%

Another significant barrier, not to be forgotten, is lack of motivation, identified by 29% of the respondents. This did not vary significantly by age, gender, or region. People who were dissatisfied with their activity level were even more likely to “be too tired” or lack motivation – and only 34% had the recommended level of physical activity.

*County-Wide
Strategies to
Encourage
Physical Activity*

Across the County, and across age groups and gender, there were seven strategies identified as having significant benefit by respondents:

- More lighted and paved trails,
- A County web-site with information about trails, events, and low-cost ways to be active,
- Free or low-cost access to fitness programs and equipment,
- More bike paths,
- Regulations requiring walking paths or trails in all new housing developments,
- Greater beach and shoreline access, and
- Being able to walk safely to stores and services.

In addition to these strategies, there are two regional strategies worthy of consideration:

- A community pool is of importance to residents of Camano and South and Central Whidbey (the only public pool is located in Oak Harbor).
- Transit stops at the parks and pools are seen as beneficial in South and Central Whidbey.

Some variations by age do exist. Respondents in the age group 25-44, who are likely to have children at home, were likely to see the following as beneficial to themselves or their families:

- More open gym nights at schools,
- More playgrounds, and
- More youth recreation programs.

But, residents 65 and older were likely to want to have a “walking club so people have company”, particularly in North Whidbey and Camano.

*Employer-Based
Strategies*

The stakeholder interviews suggested a number of strategies that might help people who are employed and lack time to be physically active on a daily basis. These were also tested in the survey with people who were employed (excluding self-employed). The top five strategies were:

- Having an employer-paid membership in a fitness club,
- Flex time to allow for physical activity before or during your workday,
- Having access to a worksite fitness center,
- Being able to exercise during lunch or breaks, and
- Having the employer sponsor free health screenings.

School-Based Strategies

There was a resounding countywide endorsement for all of the strategies tested in the survey directed to improving the health of children and youth. Some strategies are school based and may support new policies:

- 83% of respondents said that it was of much or great importance for schools to require physical education at least three times a week at all grade levels.
- 84% said it is of much or great importance that schools have “only healthy beverage and food choices in the cafeteria and vending machines.”
- 81% said it was of much or great importance that “schools offer exposure to life-long activities such as golf, skiing, dance or biking.”

83% of parents with children at home also rated “students have the time and space to eat in a relaxed environment” as being very important.

And, not to be over-looked, “families eat dinner together” was seen as highly important by 92% of parents with children at home and 87% of all respondents.² This may be a strategy to be encouraged through community groups, schools, churches etc.

Nutrition

Older Respondents Eat Healthier Diets

Two-thirds of the respondents rated their normal diet as healthy, but this assessment varies by age as seen in Table 3.

**Table 3
Perception of Diet by Age**

Age	% who rated their diet as healthy
25-44	56%
45-64	68%
65+	83%

² The survey did not, unfortunately, ask how often that occurs.

The self-assessment generally correlates with the responses to questions about the frequency of eating fruits and vegetables and other healthy or 'unhealthy' foods. For example, the older you are the more likely it is that you eat whole grains and fruit or vegetables, and the less likely it is that you have fast food.

Overall, only 24% of the respondents reported eating five or more servings of fruits and vegetables six or seven days a week, and 18% said they did 0-1 days per week. Women were more likely to have an adequate level of fruits and vegetables than men.

Only 8% of the people who reported that they were either neutral or dissatisfied with their diet ate the recommended amounts of fruit and vegetables, and 36% did so 0-1 times per week. Interestingly, people who were dissatisfied with their diet were likely to have a high level of dissatisfaction with their level of physical activity. (The reverse is not true.)

Barriers to a Healthy Diet

The greatest barrier to healthy eating, of the choices given respondents, was "When I'm busy, I reach for whatever is convenient" (66%). Statements reflecting lack of knowledge such as "I don't know which foods are best for me," or "I don't understand what the nutrition facts on food labels mean" were seen as barriers by less than 10% of the respondents. Overall, time - not knowledge - is perceived as the greatest barrier.

Some gender and age differences do exist among respondents. Women more likely than men to identify the following as barriers to healthy eating:

- Time to plan for and cook healthy meals, and
- Reaching for whatever is convenient.

Men were more likely than women to identify as barriers:

- "Eating what I like, not necessarily what is good for me," and
- Being "confused by conflicting news about what is healthy or unhealthy."

Time related barriers decrease with age and knowledge barriers increase (though there appears to be little interest at any age in receiving more information). Table 4 summarizes the barriers to healthy eating by age.

**Table 4
Barriers to Healthy Eating by Age**

Potential barriers	Age		
	25-44	45-64	65+
It costs too much to eat healthy	36%	22%	12%
It takes too much time to plan for and cook healthy meals	49%	33%	16%
When I'm busy I reach for whatever is convenient	74%	66%	45%
I'm confused by conflicting news about what is healthy or unhealthy	19%	22%	29%
I don't understand what the nutrition facts on food labels mean	5%	5%	12%

Strategies for Encouraging Healthy Eating

As with physical activity, a number of strategies suggested by stakeholders to encourage healthy eating were tested in the survey. The lukewarm response to many of these strategies points to the challenges in changing the eating habits of the community. Across the County, the following were seen as having much or great benefit by 45-49% of the respondents:

- Healthy fast food,
- Less expensive food,
- Restaurants marking healthy choices, and
- Healthy food choices in vending machines and cafeterias.

Age appears to affect the responses however, as persons age 65+ were more likely to see little benefit to those strategies and those age 25-44 were more likely to see considerable benefit. The exception is 'restaurants indicating healthy choices' which is supported by all age groups.

It is important to note that some of the strategies tested were directed either to supporting elderly in their homes or low-income residents (such as vouchers for farmers markets and meal delivery). Most of the elderly who responded to the survey are active, and the number of low-income residents that responded is not known. These strategies may not, therefore, have been tested with the right populations.

Conclusions

The community survey provided some insight into how Island County residents exercise and eat, and what strategies may help them live healthier lives. The survey results, while not from a random sample, do appear to capture an adequate sample of adults over age 25 to draw useful conclusions. (It should be noted that two populations are likely to be under-represented: housebound adults and low-income residents.)

Some key insights are:

- There are viable strategies that have support County wide.
- Age is more important in targeting strategies than is either gender or where you live in the County.
- Employer-based strategies to increase physical activity are greatly supported and might be an effective response to the barriers of time and family commitments.
- School based strategies supporting the health of children and youth also are highly supported across the County.
- The suggested strategies that support healthy eating do not have as strong support, and educational strategies are not of great interest. More work in this area to identify how to frame the issues and the potential policies may be needed.

**Part IV:
Recommendations for the
Future**

Overview

Information gathered from the community, both through the interviews and the survey, as well as numerous discussions by the planning team as they wrestled with the implications of what they learned, has led to a set of recommendations in seven areas:

- Increase and support the ability of Island County residents to walk for exercise.
- Expand and support the information available to residents about opportunities for exercise and healthy eating.
- Expand the variety of low-cost physical activities that residents can engage in.
- Increase the health of young children through child-care based strategies.
- Increase the health of children and youth through school-based strategies.
- Increase the health of working adults through employer-based strategies.
- Improve the health of all residents by encouraging healthy food choices.

Walkability

Walkability Conference



A key strength of Island County is the existence of committed community volunteer groups with an interest in trail development, mapping, planning, and preservation. Each of these groups, however, has a distinct regional focus and leaders are largely unaware of the strategies and plans of the other groups. The upcoming publication of the Island County Comprehensive Non-Motorized Trail Plan could mark a special opportunity to align the work of these local citizen's groups, expand their effectiveness as policy-shapers, and broaden their vision beyond the scope of the city or town they represent. A county-wide "walkability conference" could bring together these community groups to share best practices, brainstorm approaches to gathering funding and community participation, and compare tools and plans. Important participants would include:

- The EHAT Walkability Team
- Langley Walkers
- Camano Neighborhood Walkers
- Friends of Camano Parks
- Friends of Freeland
- Island County Public Works
- Washington State University
- Cities of Oak Harbor, Coupeville and Langley

Zoning for Walking



There is very strong community support across the County for the development of regulations and guidelines that would require new housing developments to include provisions for trails and sidewalks to make walking possible. There are many good models for such policies and it is recommended that the County and local Cities develop and adopt similar policies.

Easy Access to Information & Education

Countywide Website



A County website with information about trails, events, and low-cost ways to be active was one of the top strategies identified by survey respondents as having “significant benefit” for encouraging physical activity. This website could be developed through a public/private partnership of organizations, agencies, and businesses supporting physical activity and provide active and updated links to other local websites. Potential partners might be County and City governments, realtors, telephone companies, fitness clubs, parks and recreation departments and ports. Such a website might also be built on the WHIM website, which could be expanded for this purpose.

Published Activity Guide and Trail Map



WHIM’s activity guide and trail map has been a highly successful source of information and much in demand. Continuation of this publication could have high value for Island County residents.

“Healthy Living” Column in Local Newspapers



Being physically active and making healthy eating choices are ongoing, life-long issues for all Island County residents. When asked about their personal activity and nutrition habits, even key informants with deep professional commitments to health and activity spoke about the real barriers that too often prevent them from personally eating the recommended fruits and vegetables or getting the level of exercise they know is good for them. A regular feature on healthy living in the local community newspapers could be an important strategy for keeping physical activity and nutrition issues in the consciousness of local residents; for profiling county residents who are personally or professionally working for a healthier community; for updating residents on community and County-wide initiatives which impact this arena; and for highlighting creative ideas for overcoming specific barriers – from coming back from an injury, to getting your family around the dinner table, to ways that new mothers can exercise with their children, etc.

Choices

Expanded Variety



Although walking is clearly a vital activity for Island County residents and support for expanded walking infrastructure is strong, the survey results also indicate a strong desire across the county for access to a wider variety of activity options. Respondents ranked rowing/kayaking, dancing, swimming, tennis and yoga as highly desirable activities to which they would like to have more access. It is recommended that Parks and Recreation departments and other community stakeholders work to expand the variety of available activity options.

Youth Scholarships



Children of low-income families in Island County can face significant barriers to participation in both school-based sports programs and non-school based activities. Partnerships between youth-oriented organizations, parks and recreation departments, schools, private exercise centers, and businesses should be encouraged and supported to expand activity-related scholarships for children with low incomes, including gear and equipment costs, course and membership fees, etc.

Another strategy for increasing access to organized sports would be to encourage youth athletic organizations and local thrift stores to work together to collect used sports equipment from children who outgrow them (e.g. catcher masks, soccer cleats, football pads, dance shoes, etc.) and offer them to families who cannot afford to purchase them.

Healthy Young Children

Early Childhood Conference and Guidelines



The early childhood educators who were key informants noted some disturbing trends in the physical activity and nutrition habits of pre-school aged children. Even as brain and education research increasingly shows clearly the relationship between nutrition, physical activity and brain development in young children, television viewing by preschoolers continues to rise, and young children are also increasingly spending time in front of computers and video games. Early childhood educators and nutritionists in Island County also shared anecdotal evidence of preschoolers whose parents routinely provide fast food snacks and lunches.

It is recommended that Island County, in partnership with early childhood educators, sponsor a conference for childcare and preschool providers in Island County to educate and engage providers in the issues and strategies of physical activity and nutrition for infants and toddlers. An outcome of the conference would be a set of Early Childhood Physical Activity and Nutrition Guidelines (including screen time guidelines) targeted to educators of young children as well as their parents as a resource to spread the word about the vital importance of physical activity for infants and toddlers, and the key role that nutrition plays in both behavior and learning.

Healthy Children and Youth

Boosting the activity and nutrition levels of Island County children and youth was clearly identified as a high priority across the County and achieving that through school policies and actions was seen as improving both the physical health of students as well as their academic performance.

School District Policies



Recent changes to school district policies are helping the school districts strengthen their role in this arena. However, the policies set only minimum standards required by law, and more can be done to assure that physical activity and nutrition issues are fully integrated into school environments and curricula. For example, parents participating in the survey overwhelmingly supported the idea of physical education three times a week for all ages and limiting food choices in schools to healthy foods. This community support can serve as the platform for assuring the health of Island County children. It is strongly recommended that the Island County Public Health Department work with the schools to develop pilot programs and policies which more deeply integrate physical activity and nutrition issues into curriculum and into lives of families.

Possible starting points for changes in policies or programs are described below.

“Rethinking School-Lunch” Pilot Program



Around the country, there are innovative and creative programs that have been developed around the idea of linking farms and schools and bringing “slow food” concepts to school contexts. 83% of survey respondents with children at home rated “students have the time and space to eat in a relaxed manner” as very important to the health of children and youth, and an equal number wanted only healthy food choices in the schools. Linking this to the vision of supporting small farms and local food sources seems a natural starting point.

One of the best researched and well developed of school nutrition initiatives has been designed by the Center for Ecoliteracy and is called the “Rethinking School Lunch” program. “The RSL program uses a systems approach to address the crisis in child obesity, provide nutrition education, and teach ecological knowledge.³” The Center offers detailed policy and implementation guides, as well as assisting with funding. Island County Public Health could partner with teachers and administrators and local farmers in one or more Island County School Districts to seek grant funding (from the Center for Ecoliteracy and others) and undertake an RSL pilot project in Island County.

Another model, closer to home, is the Seattle Nutrition Action Consortium (SNAC), made up of public and private agencies, which brings teams of professionals into elementary and middle schools to teach children how to cook healthy foods and help develop community gardens. This offers a lower intensity, but less systemic approach.

³ Website: www.ecoliteracy.org

Physical Education Curriculum



School District policies require 100 minutes per week of physical education for children in grades one through eight and two required credits for ninth grade through 12th grade. This is compared to a desired activity level of 60 minutes per day, which may be divided up over the course of the school day.⁴ Island County schools follow the national pattern of having very limited physical activity in the curriculum for high school, leading to a precipitous drop in physical activity in adolescence. Competition for students' time to assure meeting academic requirements has accelerated this pattern – but it flies in the face of research, which demonstrates that physical activity improves student behavior and academic performance.

It is recommended, therefore, that the Public Health Department, perhaps in partnership with the Parks and Recreation Departments, work with the schools to increase the standards and opportunity for physical activity across all grade levels.

Enhance Parent Orientation



As their children transition from one school to another, parents are routinely oriented to the physical layout of the new school and to the overarching goals and philosophies of the school. An enhanced parent orientation approach could be developed in partnership with schools, which would incorporate age-specific developmental information including:

- the range of normal social/emotional/physical changes to expect during the ages served by the school, and
- the important impacts of nutrition, physical activity and sleep on emotional well-being, physical health, and ability to learn for children in the age range served by the school.

Healthy Working Adults

Healthy Workplace Pilot Program



A striking finding of the survey was that the least active group of respondents (and the group least satisfied with their level of activity) was the age group between 25-44 years old. 70% of the respondents in this age range named “lack of time” as a significant barrier to activity, and half of this group cited “family obligations” and “too dark in the morning/evening” as additional barriers. These survey findings suggest that workplace-based physical activity policies and programs could be an important way to improve the health of the least active age group in Island County.

⁴ National Association for Sport and Physical Education guidelines for ages 6 – 12.

As one of the largest employers, the County has the opportunity to provide leadership in the development of workplace-based physical activity programs. It is recommended that the County develop and evaluate a results-based, two-year work place physical activity program for employees. The City of Oak Harbor wellness program could serve as a local model, and the demonstration program could operate in partnership with Whidbey General Hospital. The survey results suggest that some important elements of such a pilot program would include:

- Sponsoring memberships to fitness clubs for employees and offering flex-time to allow for use of those memberships,
- Creating worksite fitness centers,
- Actively encouraging lunch time exercise, and
- Offering health screenings.

The 25-44 age group also self-reported the lowest rates of healthy eating among all those who took the survey, and 74% of respondents in this age group cited “when I’m busy I reach for whatever is convenient” as the primary barrier to a healthier diet. These findings suggest that an employer-based pilot program could also be an important site for targeted nutritional campaigns oriented to highlighting lunch or snack choices that are both convenient and healthy.

Healthy Food Choices

Local government and Public Health has few opportunities to influence resident’s choice of food – except through restaurants and fast-food outlets and the survey results encourage looking at both policy changes and guidelines to encourage healthy choices.

Menu Labeling



The indication of which menu choices are ‘healthy’ was one of the few nutritional strategies with broad support across the county. It is recommended, therefore, that Public Health (perhaps through its Food Safety program) work with local restaurants to develop and institute a common set of icons or other visual cues for identifying healthy menu choices. This would have two effects – the direct one of informing the restaurant diner and the indirect one of encouraging restaurants to add healthy choices.

Encourage Food Outlets to Expand Convenient, Healthy Choices

Convenience is clearly a key factor guiding the food choices of survey respondents, so expanding the number of convenient foods that are also healthy could be a powerful strategy for improving overall nutrition for county residents. Grocery stores and markets can be encouraged to expand their offerings of “grab and go” fresh foods; and can be encouraged to locate these quick and healthy options at the front of their stores for in and out customers. The Health Department can also applaud those fast food and other restaurants which have taken steps

to add healthy choices to their menus or to include healthy substitution options (such as applesauce for French fries).

Support Farmer's Market on Camano

Camano residents currently must travel to Mount Vernon if they wish to shop at a Farmer's Market. The Health Department could work with a Camano community group to assess the feasibility of basing a Camano Farmer's Market on Island County property at the Far Springs County Park, and to support the development of a viable farmer's market to serve the Camano community.

Taking Action

The planning effort and the pages the plan are written on are of no real value unless the Healthy Living Plan leads to action, even if incremental. The recommendations are therefore re-capped here, grouped by the organization or group, which it is hoped will take the lead in implementation of these recommendations. It should be highlighted, however, that these are community-driven and community-based recommendations, which will take work and enthusiasm by local government, school districts, parks, businesses, community groups and individuals to carryout.

Island County & Cities of Coupeville, Langlely, and Oak Harbor

1. Sponsor a Walkability Conference to bring together private and public partners, to share best practices, tools and plans, leverage funding opportunities, and encourage community participation.
2. Develop regulations and guidelines for the provision of trails and sidewalks in any new housing developments.

Island County

1. Develop and maintain a countywide website with information about trails, events, and cost-effective ways to be active. This can be done in partnership with other public and private agencies and businesses.
2. Continue publication of the activity guide and trail map developed originally by WHIM.
3. Provide leadership among large employers in the County by developing, piloting and evaluating a two-year work-place physical activity program. This might be done in partnership with Whidbey General Hospital.
4. Support expansion of convenient, healthy food options at markets and restaurants.
5. Support the addition of a Farmer's Market on Camano Island.

*Island County
Public Health*

1. Sponsor a conference for child-care and pre-school providers, in partnership with the early childhood education providers in Island County, to educate and engage providers in the issues and strategies of physical activity and nutrition for infants and toddlers.
2. Work with restaurants throughout the County to develop and use a common set of icons or other visual cues for identifying healthy food choices on their menus.

*Parks and
Recreation
Departments*

1. Expand the variety of activities available, in particular for adults.
2. Take the lead in organizing and informing the public about youth scholarships for participation in sports and the 're-cycling' of sports equipment for the use by families with limited means.

School Districts

1. Explore the possibilities of implementing innovative school lunch programs that provide only healthy food choices and engage students of all ages in the raising and preparation of healthy food.
2. Increase the level of required physical education at all grade levels and partner with the Parks and Recreation Departments or other organizations to provide increased after-school physical activity opportunities.
3. Use annual parent-orientation to educate parents about the importance of nutrition and physical activity on their child's well-being, and the normal physical and social/emotional developmental changes to expect.

*Local Community
Newspapers*

1. Create a regular "healthy living" column designed to raise consciousness of physical activity and healthy eating issues and options in Island County.