



***Healthy People in Healthy Communities: Adams, Clay, Nuckolls and Webster Counties***

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For Immediate Release

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**Health Department Promotes Mental Health through Physical Activity**

During the month of May, the district health department for Adams, Clay, Nuckolls and Webster counties is promoting physical activity to improve mental health. May is Mental Health Month and National Physical Fitness and Sports Month.

“So much of what we do physically impacts us mentally – it’s important to pay attention to both our physical health and our mental health, which can help us achieve overall wellness,” said Michele Bever, executive director for the South Heartland District Health Department.

Bever said that the health department would like to raise awareness about the connection between physical health and mental health – for youth and adults. Bever explained that, “a healthy lifestyle can help to prevent the onset or worsening of mental health conditions, as well as chronic conditions like heart disease, diabetes, and obesity. It can also help people recover from these conditions.”

According to Brooke Wolfe, health promotions coordinator at the health department, “getting more active can boost your mood, sharpen your focus, reduce your stress, and improve your sleep.” She suggests to try setting a goal to meet the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s physical activity recommendations. For youth, this means 60 minutes of moderate physical activity each day. For adults it means 150 minutes of moderate physical activity each week plus muscle-strengthening activity on two days each week.

Wolfe suggested several ways that individuals can be more physically active and be in a better mental state. “Finding a reason to laugh, going for a walk with a friend, meditating, or playing with a pet can go a long way in making you both physically and mentally healthy.” she said.

Being motivated and finding the time to be physically active might seem like a challenge, but Wolfe said that finding a motivating partner, such as a pet or a good friend, can help. Kim Creech, a counselor at Hasting’s Lincoln Elementary School, said that making physical activity

part of her daily routine makes her feel good and has helped her through several tough life situations. Creech, an avid biker/runner, meets up with friends every morning to get her workout in and states, "Running is my therapy and makes me feel good about myself."

Creech is a past *Girls on the Run coach* with elementary age girls. According to the Girls on the Run website, this program empowers girls to be joyful, healthy and confident using a fun, experience-based curriculum which creatively integrates running.

"Being active makes you feel good about yourself and when you feel good about yourself you often have a better mental state. This is the message I shared with my *Girls on the Run* girls every year," said Creech.

Creech, who is also a wellness team member at Lincoln Elementary, encourages students to "vote with their feet" to encourage movement in the class room and promotes the use of brain breaks to get everyone out of their seats, moving and refocused.

Bever said that "living a healthy lifestyle may not be easy but can be achieved by gradually making small changes and building on those successes." She encourages South Heartland residents to try to find a balance between work and play, strive to navigate the ups and downs of life, and take a path that focuses on both mind and body. "In May, take a step down this path that leads toward better physical and mental health," she said.

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