



Lending a Helping Hand

District Agent is Key to County's Free Diabetes Education Program

OSKALOOSA, Kan. – When health officials in this northeast Kansas town saw the incidence of diabetes and related health problems rising – particularly among kids in the community – they knew they had to spring into action.

In 2011, registered nurse Crystal Van Houtan and practitioner Renie Stephan won a federal grant to hold a free, monthly health clinic at the Jefferson County Health Department. They would handle medical checkups, but turned to a trusted partner for diabetes outreach and education.

Enter Meadowlark District extension agent Cindy Williams.



Meadowlark District Agent Cindy Williams

“It took just one phone call to Cindy and she was very willing to come and give us a hand,” Van Houtan said. “She has got a lot of passion about diabetes and has been instrumental in our coalition, as well as supporting and

presenting at diabetes support group meetings.”
Notes Stephan: “I’m a healthcare provider, so I spend a lot of time treating diabetes. But (Williams’) extension piece has allowed us to help the person learn



Registered nurse Crystal Van Houtan credits K-State Research and Extension for providing diabetes education in Jefferson County.

more about how to cook those types of foods; how to look at food in a different way. Cindy has been able to do that for us and help those participants.”

Williams once had broader responsibilities in Jefferson County, some of which were not in her primary area of interest. But as Meadowlark District agent, she’s been able to specialize on what citizens say they want and take those programs more often to all counties in the district.

“I have more of a concentrated effort to spend in these particular areas, and I can focus just on one or two areas, rather than three, four or five,” she said. “What we’ve noticed being in the district is that once one county has a program, the other counties want it as well.”

Williams’ time was not paid for by the diabetes coalition’s grant; it was part of her service through the Meadowlark District. The group is continuing to seek ways to offer the free clinics and education throughout the extension district.