



# Parks Build Healthy Communities: **SUCCESS STORIES**





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## **DISCLAIMER**

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## FROM THE CEO



Research doesn't lie — our country is in a health crisis. Sedentary lifestyles and poor nutrition have contributed to the more than one-third of adults and approximately 17 percent of children in the U.S. being obese. How do we as a nation collectively inspire healthier lifestyles in America? The answer is clear, parks and recreation.

Parks and recreation are powerful catalysts for physical activity and engagement. At the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), we support a membership that is fostering change at the local level — reducing barriers to health and wellness, and decreasing chronic disease and obesity among youth and adults.

Since 2009, NRPA worked with 44 communities across the U.S. to enact strategies focused on improving access to healthy food, increasing opportunities for physical activity and alternative transportation, and decreasing tobacco consumption. Programs such as Action Communities for Health, Innovation, and EnVironmental changeE (ACHIEVE) and Communities Putting Prevention to Work, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, have enabled us to support local park and recreation agencies as they build healthier communities across the country. Some powerful examples include:

- Healthy vending machines provided at 26 park sites in Miami-Dade County, Florida, to ensure parks users had access to nutritious snacks and beverages;
- An 8.7 mile path constructed in Kauai, Hawaii, to provide open-access, alternative transportation for residents and tourists;
- Smoke-free and tobacco-free parks implemented in seven communities, impacting 390,000 people; and
- "Safe park zones" developed in two communities that offer special traffic protections while passing parks and recreation facilities to make areas safely accessible, impacting 140,000 people in those communities.

This publication collects the best and most successful strategies over the last three years that have proved effective for building healthy communities through parks and recreation. Our hope is that the case studies offer valuable insights for others seeking to take a stand and become leaders in their community for fighting the battle of obesity and other health issues that are challenging our country.

By sharing this information, other communities can replicate these successes and make new innovations to improve the quality of life in their local areas. They can also further demonstrate the power parks and recreation has for inspiring and creating a healthy, and prosperous nation.

Sincerely,

**Barbara Tulipane, President and CEO**  
NATIONAL RECREATION AND PARK ASSOCIATION

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## ABOUT ACHIEVE & CPPW

Action Communities for Health, Innovation, and EnVironmental changE (ACHIEVE) and Communities Putting Prevention to Work (CPPW) are federal programs supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) that empower local park and recreation agencies to bring together local leaders and stakeholders to implement policy and environmental changes that promote healthier lifestyles and reduce the risk of chronic diseases such as obesity, diabetes, arthritis, cardiovascular disease, stroke, and cancer. These programs use a five-phased approach, or “community change process,” to create impact in local communities:

1. **Commitment** involves assembling a team, or coalition, of community members to address key issues and establish partnerships with other agencies. Coalitions represent community leaders from a variety of sectors including schools, businesses, public health, policymakers, and other key community policy and decision makers to assess, plan, and implement strategies that address the issues that are most relevant to the local areas.
2. **Assessment** involves gathering data and input on what the community needs. Assessment also provides a way for the community’s voice to be heard. The coalition conducts a health assessment that not only provides them with a snapshot of the policy and environmental change strategies currently in place, but helps them understand the overall needs of their community.
3. **Planning** is the natural progression from assessing community needs. Using information available from the assessment process, the coalition takes action to develop a Community Action Plan for change.
4. **Implementation** is executing the Community Action Plan that provides an overview of the objectives and action steps the coalition plans to undertake to improve the health of their community.
5. **Evaluation** is woven throughout the community change process and answers key questions: Are you implementing the right strategies? Are you creating the measurable impact envisioned?

For more information on ACHIEVE and CPPW, and to access resources available for the community change process, please visit [www.nrpa.org](http://www.nrpa.org) or [www.achievecommunities.org](http://www.achievecommunities.org).



## THE COMMUNITIES

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- Arlington Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources, VA
- Annapolis Recreation and Parks, MD
- Bismarck Parks and Recreation District, ND
- City of Casper Recreation Division, WY
- Chicago Park District, IL
- Corpus Christi Parks and Recreation Department, TX
- Davenport Parks and Recreation, IA
- DC Parks and Recreation Department, DC
- City of Fort Collins Recreation Department, CO
- Grand Forks Park District, ND
- Greenville County Recreation District, SC
- Hamilton County General Health District, OH
- City of Hastings Parks and Recreation Department, NE
- Kauai Parks and Recreation, HI
- City of Helena Parks and Recreation, MT
- Indiana State Department of Public Health, Vanderburgh County, IN
- City of Jackson Recreation and Parks Department, TN
- La Mirada Community Services, CA
- Longview Parks and Recreation, WA
- Louisville/Jefferson County Metro Government, KY
- Lynnwood Parks, Recreation and Cultural Arts, WA
- McMinnville Parks and Recreation, TN
- Miami-Dade County Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces, FL
- City of Miamisburg, OH
- Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, MN
- Montgomery County Parks and Recreation, AL
- Morris County Park Commission, Morristown, NJ
- Neptune Township Recreation Department, NJ
- Newport Recreation Department, RI
- North Miami Parks and Recreation Department, FL
- O'Fallon Parks and Recreation, MO
- Philadelphia Parks and Recreation, PA
- Pierre Parks and Recreation, SD
- Pipestone Park and Recreation Department, MN
- The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, Prince George's County, MD
- City of Rock Hill Parks, Recreation and Tourism Department, SC
- San Antonio Parks and Recreation, TX
- City of Spearfish Parks and Recreation, SD
- Tulsa Parks and Recreation Department, OK
- Van Buren Township Parks & Recreation, MI
- City of Waupaca Parks and Recreation, WI
- West Virginia Department of Health and Human Services, Mid-Ohio Valley Health District, WV
- City of Wilsonville Parks and Recreation, OR
- Yuba City Parks and Recreation Department, CA





## COLLABORATION BUILDING

# Taking an Indoor-Outdoor Approach to Improving Community Health

*“When it comes to collaboration, people often jump to the final question — ‘do we want to do this?’ Instead, we focused on information gathering first and decision making second. With the right information, the question became, ‘what is the best thing to do together?’”*

PARK DISTRICT STAFF MEMBER

Casper, Wyoming is home to about 55,000 residents; it is a small city with 42 parks, an indoor ice rink and a “small but developing” system of trails. And, Casper, like many communities in the U.S., is struggling with poor health statistics, an epidemic of chronic diseases including obesity, and a lack of coordination between public agencies. The independent spirit of Wyoming plays into this as well — this is very much a state in which political will opposes changes that can be interpreted to be limiting individual rights.

A unique group of local leaders, including the parks and recreation department, the local hospital, the health department, the YMCA, and local business leaders banded together to improve the health of the community. The parks department took the lead and recruited other members. The group originally targeted workplace wellness and smoke-free spaces as two goals. However, they met considerable resistance from other local agencies who were more accustomed to competing for resources than they were to collaborating. In an effort to change the culture in Casper, representatives from various entities converged for a summit and agreed to work together for joint funding. To foster the new relationships, e-mail updates were sent out to the group every other week, and a newsletter was sent once a month. Other agencies have since asked to be part of the group and membership continues to grow as the momentum of the group is inspiring to others.

The collaborative has made good progress in promoting worksite wellness. The city has hired a wellness director, and employees can get paid time off to attend health talks or to take walks during the day. The local hospital has made similar advances for its employees. The hospital is supporting the overall effort. They recently purchased two full-page newspaper ads to support a no-smoking ordinance and endorse local workplace wellness programs.

The smoke-free ordinance has met with heavy opposition. Despite efforts from a local lobbying group that has focused on the worker health issue (bartenders and waitresses should not have to be exposed to secondhand smoke) the City Council was under pressure from businesses to exempt private clubs. In June, 2012, the City Council passed an ordinance outlawing smoking in public places including the clubs.

While the collaborative expects this ordinance to be appealed, the passing is a huge step forward in a community that is traditionally very protective of individual rights. They plan to persevere and use the influence of local citizens to keep working towards better health.



## Out of Tragedy Comes Opportunity — How the Great Flood of 1997 Helped Build a Wellness Center

Nearly all of Grand Forks, North Dakota, was evacuated in 1997 because of severe flooding. The physical devastation was on a grand scale, as was the economic and emotional toll of this disaster. But rebuilding the town became an opportunity for new partnerships and a new vision for the community. When local leadership had the opportunity to come together to tackle community health by making improvements in the infrastructure and environment of Grand Forks, those leaders understood the value of partnership.

The information gathering stage of this project began with number crunching. If 30% of the population will use an indoor recreation center during the winter, how many square feet of center would be needed in Grand Forks?

An aging YMCA center provided indoor recreation opportunities for residents of Grand Forks. This site was focused on families, offering classes and opportunities for recreation to people of all ages. However, the site was small and looking worn. The community could support an additional wellness center, but it would compete with the YMCA, potentially diverting funds from this important local landmark and alienating a set of key community stakeholders.

A partnership that originated following the aftermath of the 1997 flood developed a plan to build a new wellness center south of Grand Forks. This site would be large and modern, offering indoor courts, classes, and a hockey rink. With a strong desire to build this facility without using tax revenue, the team committed to a (successful) \$22 million capital campaign.

The work of the collaborative focused on how to create a workable, and profitable, plan for the two centers (the YMCA and the new center run by the City Parks and Recreation Department) to exist as true partners. The CEOs of both groups decided that offering reciprocal membership to both clubs was the answer. Once the new building is complete, people in Grand Forks can now use either the YMCA site at the north end of town, or the new City site on the south end. Membership at one center is membership at the other.

This remarkable partnership came out of tragedy, and was possible through a clear and compelling vision to create an infrastructure for health and wellness as well as economic development for the region. It also required diligent work to remain engaged, and to remain committed to a collaborative process. Grand Forks turned this vision into reality because of the hard work of volunteers and local leaders. The power of commitment to the cause of a healthy infrastructure and for local coordination can be fueled by the success of the shared wellness centers.



## COLLABORATION BUILDING

# City of La Mirada Evolves to a Culture of Wellness

A detailed community assessment and input from a variety of local stakeholders allowed the city of La Mirada, California to set lofty goals for improving health. With plenty of room for improvement locally, a collaborative group targeted workplaces as a site for beginning a culture change.

The coalition included strong senior citizen involvement by virtue of two members with close ties to the local senior center and the “meals on wheels” program. Schools and businesses were also represented along with city entities such as public health and parks and recreation departments. The partnerships included just the right mix of people who had great vision and people who could get the work done.

Their first target was vending machines, which were perceived as an easy way to get started. The coalition soon encountered challenges to this plan. “The changes were too abrupt” according to one member of the collaborative. Food was spoiling and the vendors were unhappy about a decrease in revenue. Not only were patrons not buying the healthy options, they were not buying anything at all.

So the coalition regrouped and chose another strategy. Creating a culture of wellness in the community could begin more incrementally at worksites. City personnel implemented a weight loss challenge, while members of the collaborative worked within their own organizations to promote healthier food options at meetings, encourage walking and stretching during breaks, and promote and increase the use of free health club facilities already available to all personnel.

At the same time, the coalition tackled smoking in public parks. A smoke-free park initiative would support this change in culture while creating some community buy-in for more environmental changes. Initially, the road to smoke-free parks was challenging. La Mirada found that the community, bolstered by influential nonprofits, like the American Cancer Society, increased their momentum to adopt smoke-free parks after the issue of smoking bans became political. A smoking ban spearheaded by key community stakeholders and residents is now before the city attorney.

Perhaps the most lasting legacy of the work in La Mirada is the establishment of relationships within the public and private sector. These new partnerships came together with a purpose: to make sustainable changes to the community in order to improve health for the long term. La Mirada is hopeful that their successes in worksite wellness and establishing smoke-free places has created a lasting sense of community and combined strength.

*“You rarely see a dozen doughnuts around here. It’s really been a change to the whole culture of the organizations.”*

CITY OF LA MIRADA STAFF MEMBER



## When Things Don't Go According To Plan — A Team in Tulsa Recommits to Community Health

A group of committed, concerned people in Tulsa, Oklahoma organized a partnership to address their community's health. The Parks and Recreation Department, the Children's Campfire Organization, YMCA, and the local health department collaboratively assessed the needs of their city and identified employers as a target audience for environmental changes. The team identified six objectives, all laudable and all supported by research:

- Increasing opportunities to engage in physical activities.
- Providing subsidized memberships to gym facilities.
- Establishing a health and wellness committee.
- Implementing healthy vending.
- Providing healthy food at meetings.
- Creating designated breastfeeding places.

Just as the team was building momentum toward implementing these objectives, a core team member suddenly passed away and the leader of the team accepted a new position that precluded further involvement. The shock of losing two key leaders was felt both personally and professionally throughout the partnership, jeopardizing their ability to move forward. The project seemed doomed for failure, despite the good intentions of the team.

However, this is Tulsa, where people have a history of persevering together to get things done. An idea emerged to make their reach more modest but also more achievable: Start change within and create healthier workplaces for organizations represented by the people sitting at the table. The team was re-energized by the realization that by making the scale smaller, they could still achieve their objectives. By turning inward to create these environmental changes, the team could learn from the experience of implementing change in large organizations. From the ashes of the original project, they could create success and momentum and then turn to the community to expand their reach further. Success followed quickly with this new plan, improving the offerings in the vending machines, opening up the gyms to employees, and designating rooms for breastfeeding women.

Opportunity knocked as the group was working on their own environments. The initial wellness work done at the partner organizations had built the capacity of the team to improve health at other worksites, in schools, and in neighborhoods. This experience enabled the team to expand their partnerships and secure a large grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to work with large employers on worksite wellness — the very goal initially established by the team.

*"There is a history of collaboration in our community; not with everyone, but with most of the major players."*



## COLLABORATION BUILDING

# Developing Relationships is First Step to Success

Van Buren Township has big plans for a healthier community, and is building the partnerships that are crucial to success. The Michigan township with a population of about 30,000 has developed several long-term health-related goals, including improving school nutrition, laying more sidewalks to encourage walking, and designating park areas as smoke-free. The Healthy Lifestyle Coalition (HLC) is an unusual group, including several large companies who were surprisingly interested in the work. Coca-Cola, which has a local bottling plant, and the University of Michigan have stepped up to offer help, as has Wal-Mart. The local newspaper, the *Belleville Lake Current*, has added a healthy lifestyles section, written by a member of the HLC. For the companies, backing a local cause can be mutually beneficial, as it is good marketing as well as “the mother of all good causes.”

Initially, the HLC targeted schools for multiple goals — improving the connectivity of local schools as well as the quality of food offered. The investments in infrastructure, including sidewalks, crosswalks and linked paths are sustainable ways that this coalition can improve health in the township. However, building ties with the city planning department has been more of a challenge. The coalition hopes that, like other partners, the planning department will be motivated by the dire health statistics for residents of Van Buren.

*The key to making changes is having one or more champions from inside the system: a person inside the school food services, or an ally in the planning department, or an enthusiastic principal. These individuals carry a lot of weight, and can be powerful motivators when the work gets difficult.*

The coalition’s biggest success so far has been with improving the quality of food offered at the schools. The food service supervisor, who was already making strides in improving food choices before she was approached by the coalition, has been a strong ally in the township’s wellness program. Although money for schools is spent on teacher development and not food service staff development, her commitment has resulted in positive change. She is getting the students to start eating healthier, and the coalition is working on getting information to parents on healthier eating.

Building commitment to the goals and activities of the HLC has been an important first step for the group. Revisiting the commitment and finding new partners takes administrative time as well as a strong network of individuals. The HLC in Van Buren is poised, with a strong team and a set of good lessons learned, to have a positive impact on their community.

## COLLABORATION BUILDING



# A Unique Partnership in Yuba City Provides Recreational Summer Camp to 1,000 Children

The local school district and the parks and recreation department in Yuba City faced challenges that seemed unrelated. The school needed funds to install a playground at an elementary school and maintain the grounds. The recreation department provided a summer camp to local children at local parks, but weekly changes to the location of the camp created confusion among staff and families. A creative solution was found that helped both groups and paved the way for a long-standing and mutually beneficial partnership.

The parks department agreed to fund both the improvements and ongoing maintenance at the school playground site. In return, the school district provides a site for the summer camp, ensuring consistency for families and staff. As a result, enrollment in the summer camps has risen dramatically, from 724 participants in 2008 to over 1,200 youth in 2011.

The camps are active, providing participants with access to the local pools, water parks, and other recreation activities. They also provide free breakfast and lunch through the federal migrant-education program.

A partnership that was at first limited to a joint-use agreement between the schools and the parks has since expanded to include a larger group of stakeholders. The local hospital is now on board, providing wellness prescriptions enabling obese children to participate in a 6 week program at the public pool. One member of the collaborative has worked to remove chocolate and strawberry milk from the school lunch menu. The larger group, including the hospital and local businesses, is also looking at ways to improve access to fresh food and outdoor activities for a high-risk population in one low-income neighborhood and to provide health education to parents.

Creative solutions to local issues that impact health now have a platform from which they can be launched. With key leaders as part of a formal coalition, any individual has the opportunity to advocate for policy and environmental changes that can impact long term health. The diversity of the coalition — public health department, parks and recreation, local hospital, local businesses and police chief — assures that there is an audience for any change a member is willing to take on.

*"I'm a strong believer that things happen because of a personal passion, a personal relationship."*

PARKS AND RECREATION REPRESENTATIVE



## INCREASING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

# ACCESS TO PARKS AND PARK SAFETY Hastings Takes to the Streets

When a group of civic leaders in the City of Hastings, Nebraska, decided to develop an infrastructure of sidewalks and trails to encourage walking and biking, they ended up with an education in planning, zoning, and engineering. This group included city council members, the mayor, public employees, local business representatives and leadership from local non-profit organizations. They liked the idea of “Complete Streets” — making streets accessible to walkers, bikers and public transportation users as well as cars. Hastings’ new Complete Streets plan calls for extending the current 5.2-mile hike and bike trail another 2.8 miles. Decrepit sidewalks have been targeted for repaving, and every street addition and improvement is accompanied by the installation of ADA-compliant ramps and cut-outs. The plan is being brought to the City Council and should be adopted by Fall 2012. Backers of the plan are making efforts to be more visible in the community in order to garner additional support.

The big challenge has been to change the decision-making process for roads projects. In the past, the engineering department made decisions and presented them to the City Council for a “rubber-stamp” approval after bids are received. There was no real opportunity for input. Taking a new approach, the group is working with the necessary agencies to create a Complete Streets committee, which will include one member each from the City Council, the utilities board, and the planning and zoning commission. The committee will work directly with the street department to make sure non-motorized transportation is considered in all future projects. The group will be involved early in the process so hike and bike connections can be considered as projects are being prioritized.

*Changing the way engineering projects are reviewed and approved is a major change to the infrastructure in Hastings. A new process will have a lasting effect on the community.*

Thanks to these efforts, the thought process on such projects has changed: Now, when a project is proposed, the City Council discusses Complete Streets before it moves forward. In addition to a change in process, the city has approved construction of more than 10 miles of bike/walking trails, and the local college is closing a large through-street to encourage walking and biking on campus.

One of the important components of the success in Hastings is the involvement and commitment of local leaders. The collaborative that proposed the Complete Streets plan includes two City Council members and the mayor. There is little opposition at high levels of local government. Because the City Council is making it a priority, city administrators and engineers are showing less resistance to the plan overall. Change has been slower at the utilities commission, but there have been signs of reception to the new plan there as well.

Looking at construction and infill projects through the lens of walkability and bike-ability is a culture change for Hastings. But, for the most part new trail infrastructure was only necessary for connections between existing partial trails. The local planning group, with leadership from the City Council, is now able to think strategically about the best use of public funds for completing streets locally.

## ACCESS TO PARKS AND PARK SAFETY

# A Free Ride in Helena Links Youth to Local Activities

The community of Helena, Montana has plenty to do, but until recently, the local transit infrastructure made getting to trails, pools, and parks difficult. A collaboration between the parks and recreation department, public health department, public transit, and other community stakeholders sought to improve access to the trail system and ended up creating a free trolley system for youth.

The original plan was to add new stops to the existing routes, but this proved to be just the beginning. The transit director was wary of adding stops, as this changes the timing of the routes, but suggested creating a new, separate route specifically for activities for youth. A key partner — the executive director of “Youth Connections,” a nonprofit organization committed to creating safe spaces and partnerships with the youth of Helena — emerged as another leader in this effort. The collaborative learned that access to the trail system was not about the trails themselves, but about getting to the activities.

In June 2012, a trolley system was created that takes youth (no adults allowed unless they are supervising) to the trails, the pool, the parks, the library and a host of other activities for free. The local collaborative hired a chaperone to collect statistics on ridership while creating a culture of safety and respect on board the trolley. While the system is new, ridership is increasing and there are already stories of success.

The trolley runs five hours per day, and has stops identified based on feedback from users and other stakeholders. The trolley will run from mid-June to mid-August, to coincide with school holidays and the local recreation program for youth in the city. By extending the route into the county, the collaborative was able to receive funds from the county for its operation.

The collaborative views the trolley as a starting point for creating a culture of health for the community. As more people use public transportation, they begin to care more about the quality and availability of services locally, creating momentum for more involvement for improving the infrastructure of the city.

The new partnership with the local transit authority created opportunities for the parks and recreation department to be involved in the long-term planning for the future of transit in Helena. The members of the collaborative will have a seat at the table when new plans are drawn up for the public transit system in the city and county. This will help assure that this culture of health — promoting wellness in all areas of planning and environmental change — keeps going in Helena.

*“The Aquatics Director told me about a young woman who had been part of the diving program for the past two years. She was going to have to give up diving this summer because she had no way to get to the pool. But, now, she rides ‘Rec Connect’ to the pool for free.”*

PARKS AND RECREATION STAFF MEMBER



## INCREASING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

# ACCESS TO PARKS AND PARK SAFETY

## Minneapolis Increases Park Use Through Youth and Family Engagement

*“The StreetReach staff served as a visible adult presence to the community and provided supervision for youth.”*

MINNEAPOLIS PARK AND RECREATION BOARD 2012 STREETREACH REPORT

If a community believes its parks are unsafe, even those who wish to use them will stay away. This was the case in Minneapolis, Minnesota, particularly around the city’s Northside parks.

To increase park use, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) expanded its StreetReach program, in which staff engage directly with people living in and near the proximity of strategically targeted parks. Designed to reach individuals ages 10 to 21, StreetReach connects youth to positive activities, and links them to available community resources and programs. Ultimately, StreetReach seeks to improve safety perceptions and increase multi-generational park use.

In 2010, with assistance from the Minneapolis Department of Health and Family Support, MPRB identified neighborhoods with the highest levels of violence in the city. Three parks were chosen in which to focus program efforts: Fairview, Folwell, and North Commons. The health department developed door-to-door surveys, which were subsequently conducted by seven members of the StreetReach staff to assess park use and safety perceptions. The surveys assisted the staff in building relationships and gaining trust with community members, which led to community buy-in and support for park-related activities.

In 2011, the partners expanded StreetReach’s focus to include families with young children. Program staff conducted door-to-door outreach to invite residents to Family Festivals held in each of the three intervention parks. Because the program operated concurrently with ongoing healthy eating initiatives in Minneapolis, healthy food options

were provided for attendees, which at one festival exceeded 300 people.

Initial impact surveys show that park attendance increased. In a pre-post survey conducted in June and October 2010, 76 percent of survey respondents indicated they felt their parks were “more safe” than in the previous year. Respondents who indicated that the parks were safer most-often cited increased presence in the parks as a reason, sometimes specifically mentioning StreetReach Staff. Additionally, eight percent of respondents of surveys taken at festivals indicated they had never been to that particular park prior to the event.

*According to the 2012 StreetReach report, StreetReach staff indicated in formal debriefs that “they felt that they were most successful working with youth when they made themselves accessible without forcing interactions...it was important for youth to see them regularly and in a variety of venues.”*

According to MPRB, building a relationship with the health department was key to the program’s successes. MPRB also acknowledges the support provided by the Minneapolis Youth Coordinating Board and the Peace Foundation.

StreetReach continued to encourage increased park use and opportunities for physical activity in the three intervention parks through summer 2011. Expansion of the program is expected contingent on funding.

*“When the outreach staff went out and did the actual door knocks, I think there was an empowering sense in the community.”*

MINNEAPOLIS PARK AND RECREATION BOARD ON THE STREETREACH SURVEYS



## BIKEABILITY AND WALKABILITY

# Mayor's Fitness Council Gets Corpus Christi Rolling Down a New Trail

Most cities vie to be “first” in something, but when Corpus Christi, Texas was named the “Fattest City in the United States” in 2010 by Men’s Health Magazine, city leadership sought to quickly shed the pounds (and the title) by establishing a Mayor’s Fitness Council to promote healthier lifestyles.

While amenities are plentiful, including a beautiful marina and the Gulf waters, multiple barriers exist for accessing them. Existing hike and bike trails are in limited segments, separated by many miles of very busy streets. Texas has a strong “car culture” that does not consider bicycles a legitimate form of transportation and acts of harassment against bicyclists are common — consequently, many people in Corpus Christi perceive bicycling as “too dangerous.”

The Mayor’s Fitness Council (MFC) included representatives from Corpus Christi Parks and Recreation, a school district superintendent, a County health director, the city planning department, and others. As the MFC was discussing options to get Corpus Christi moving, a convergence of opportunities led them to the right path: Improving bike-ability and walkability. The Council was able to tie this goal into the regional visioning for the Coastal Bend to transform Corpus Christi into a more bike and pedestrian friendly and sustainable community. They were able to secure funding through the Bold Future Initiative and TARP (Troubled Asset Relief Program) funding for sustainable energy. In conjunction with the TARP energy assessment, the city decided to do a mobility assessment and included hike and bike priorities explicitly in TARP.

Initially, it was challenging to involve citizens in this effort because of the strong car culture. The MFC engaged the help of a local bike shop owner to generate interest in a non-motorized transportation plan. The bike shop owner became a community champion for the effort by helping to sponsor a town hall meeting, negotiating access to space, donating prizes to support the hike and bike plan effort, and disseminating information through his highly vested network of bicyclists.

At the town hall meeting, researchers demonstrated how Corpus Christi’s current sprawling, car-centric layout had a high cost to Corpus Christi in the form of current and future demand on utilities. Plans for new multi-use development and multi-modal transportation were presented to the public. Between the buzz generated by town hall meetings and other opportunities for citizen input, the City made an additional commitment to develop a hike and bike Master Plan by Spring 2013.

This enthusiasm has spread to include public-private partnerships and volunteer opportunities to support expansion of existing trails and development of new trails. Next steps for the project include linking neighborhoods to schools and developing unused easements along drainage ditches for hike and bike trails. Creative thinking and engaging many types of stakeholders is helping to create a culture of walking and biking for Corpus Christi. As citizens, local businesses and local planning efforts converge, the momentum to impact the health of this community is picking up. A proposition that includes \$1.5 million for hike and bike trail development will be on the ballot for voter approval in November 2012.

*“Moving around Nueces County in anything other than a motor vehicle is difficult.”*

RESIDENT



## INCREASING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

### BIKEABILITY AND WALKABILITY

## Pedestrians Kick Up Their Heels in Morristown

Two staff from the Morristown Parks and Recreation Department took a walk on The Green with an official from the city's tourism bureau. They were seeking ways to promote physical activity in Morristown; making sustainable and lasting changes was important. They considered potential stakeholders and government officials who could be brought together for collaboration, including engineers, police, and the school district. They set up an initial meeting — and every person who was invited attended.

The Green is a historic park, a beautiful place that was not considered particularly accessible. So, the group had a challenge — how to make improvements to an existing space, keeping the charm but modernizing the walkways and bikeways. A group came together in the fall of 2010 with the goal of improving pedestrian access. This group called “Shared Responsibility” was headed by the Morris Park Commission. Coalition members include representatives of local, county and state government agencies, businesses, non-profits, public health and law enforcement. To name a few, there's Alliance for Morris County Parks, Morris Area Wellness Partnership, Morristown Medical Center, TransOptions, The Seeing Eye and Morris County Tourism Bureau. Soon thereafter, the group took a walk and identified challenges to pedestrian safety and general walkability in the city. Recommendations included crosshatching crosswalks to increase

visibility and improving crosswalks that had been designed with paving stones but proved to be difficult to maintain. The group looked at an over-arching walkability plan for the city and recommended narrowing a street to discourage vehicular traffic and replacing bricks with flat pavers to reduce tripping.

By November, rack cards and posters had been created with the “Shared Responsibility” logo, and on Election Day, they were given to businesses around The Green. Signs were provided and posted at entrances and exits of all parking garages. A local newspaper printed a two-page story with photographs, which greatly increased awareness of the campaign.

Once the improvements were in place, the original group worked with Bike/Walk Morristown, a local group that promotes bicycling and walking. Bike/Walk Morristown agreed to work with city officials and sustain the effort that was already well under way, and the original group moved on to other projects. Through the initial project, a local group of walking and biking advocates stepped forward to continue the work around advocating for these environmental changes.

Bringing the right people to the table, having regular meetings, and sharing information with everyone on the committee resulted in quick success. The group also created a template press release, which aided with positive media coverage.

*“Walkability matters. It brings the community together. When people are out about and walking, there is more opportunity to interact, to be engaged in their community. There's so many benefits to that.”*

PAM FISHER, TRANSPORTATION EXPERT



## BIKEABILITY AND WALKABILITY

# Mobile and Versatile-Use Bike Racks Support Alternative Transportation

When local leaders in Vanderburgh County, Indiana, sought to increase physical activity as part of the Community Health Initiative, they realized the problem of traffic congestion at large community events could be solved as well. And the solution they found was as simple as a bicycle rack.

*Vanderburgh County has identified reducing child and adult obesity as a high priority. Approximately 28 percent of county residents are obese. County and city agencies are working with the Welborn Baptist Foundation to convey the message that small changes in daily routines can lead to substantial improvements in health and wellbeing.*

Recognizing that many public parks were not bicycle-friendly, the Evansville Parks and Recreation Department worked with the Welborn Baptist Foundation to install more than 50 stationary racks at strategically identified parks in the area. As a result of the project, bike racks are available at every park managed by the department, increasing opportunities for alternative transportation and physical activity, and encouraging more park-oriented bike use.

While the additional bike racks addressed one issue in Vanderburgh County, the creators realized a separate solution was needed to encourage alternative transportation at large community gatherings. Events such as the popular Evansville Fall Festival attract upwards of 150,000 people annually — requiring a large number of bike racks for a short period of time. The county realized that installing an adequate number of stationary bike racks in all pertinent public event locations would not be practical or cost effective.

The solution: portable bike racks.

The Welborn Baptist Foundation joined forces with the City of Evansville and the Vanderburgh County Health Department to make temporary bike racks available for use at event sites. The racks have a travel-friendly and easy-to-install design — making it convenient to match need with the ebb and flow of events throughout the year.

To increase public awareness of the initiative, an option for the portable racks was added to city permit applications. When filing permits to hold events on city property, organizers can request racks to be installed free of charge. Area bicycling clubs have acted as champions for the racks, and have supported and promoted their use for local events.

*The portable bike-rack efforts were maximized by building on the relationships already in place from other health-related initiatives.*

Project creators note the ease with which the initiatives were implemented, and credit a spirit of cooperation in the county due to other collaborative efforts to improve health and wellness. Other related projects such as healthy vending and improved signage for walkers are contributing to achieving the county's goals of a healthier and more active populace.



## INCREASING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

### EXERCISE AND PLAY

# Philadelphia Transforms Existing Programs by Encouraging Physical Activity

When it comes to serving the community's youth, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, has plenty of programs in place within its system of 150 recreation centers. Nearly 3,000 children participate in more than 90 formally structured afterschool programs throughout the city. In the summer, that number quadruples, with close to 11,000 youth attending day camps. Program participants primarily include African-American and Hispanic youth from lower-income families, which reflects the city's demographics.

But, despite this level of engagement, half of Philadelphia's children are overweight or obese. How can existing programs be improved to positively engage youth in healthy behaviors?

The Philadelphia Parks and Recreation Department partnered with the Philadelphia Department of Public Health to improve the quality and quantity of physical activity, and increase access to healthy food, in the city's summer and afterschool programs. The result was the development and implementation of a new set of standards and general procedures, titled "Healthy Physical Activity and Nutrition Guidelines — Philadelphia Parks and Recreation — Afterschool and Summer Programs."

The *physical activity* guidelines promote the following:

- Supporting the well-being of youth by ensuring daily moderate to vigorous physical activity.
- Supporting the well-being of youth by limiting non-work screen time.
- Providing a safe environment for play and physical activity.
- Providing equitable opportunities for all youth to participate in quality play and physical activity.
- Ensuring that safe, fresh drinking water is available to youth at all times, indoors and outdoors, including trips off-site during program hours.

*Guidelines were developed based on capacity surveys of existing practices and needed resources, and the early learning and successes of the Get Healthy Philly partnership. Also informing the process were the Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities Out of school Time (OST) Partnership and the National AfterSchool Association (NAA).*

The parks and recreation department took action by modifying the staff's administrative roles to fit the new guidelines, including more personal engagement with kids and more structured play. These new roles required staff education and training, resulting in what the department notes as "leader skill sets that have been enhanced, and have boosted morale during a time of challenging budgets." Charts are used to measure the hours of physical activity being conducted at program sites.

The initiatives created through the physical activity guidelines have shifted focus to outdoor, community activities and prompted unique partnerships to leverage collective resources. As noted by the Philadelphia Department of Health, "Everything is neighborhood and community driven."

Philadelphia Parks and Recreation has identified future leaders within the staff and recruited them as "train-the-trainers" to support program sustainability and transform the culture of the department. According to the Philadelphia Parks and Recreation Department, "Staff are very enthusiastic about the new interaction and activities provided by the new guidelines, and the children have reacted positively because they are getting physical activity in a fun way."

*"The kids kind of teach us how to play. They actively participate...not even realizing how much physical activity they are getting because they are enjoying [themselves]."*

PHILADELPHIA PARKS AND RECREATION



## EXERCISE AND PLAY

# Outdoor Fitness Equipment in Parks Brings Accessibility to San Antonio Communities

To combat the high rates of chronic disease and obesity prevalent in San Antonio, the San Antonio Parks and Recreation Department collaborated with the San Antonio Metropolitan Health District to leverage existing park and recreation facilities, and increase opportunities for physical activity.

One improvement made to the built environment in San Antonio was the installation of outdoor fitness stations in 28 city parks. The stations include equipment specifically designed to help individuals increase strength, improve balance and flexibility, and engage in cardiovascular conditioning. Signs accompany the fitness stations to ensure safe and proper use.

Park locations were chosen based on their unique features and suitability; the stations are spaced evenly along designated trails or grouped together in the form of outdoor “gyms.” The fitness stations are intended to serve all the residents of San Antonio; however, a majority of the stations are strategically located in underserved neighborhoods with the highest rates of obesity.

*To help promote the new fitness stations, an instructional video narrated by Mayor Julian Castro was posted on the Find Your Balance Web portal — a website providing fitness resources, nutritional information, and health tips for San Antonio residents and visitors.*

While the original goal was to install stations at 14 parks, the equipment was so well received by residents that plans were implemented for an additional 14 installations. Currently, San Antonio has fitness stations at 30 parks throughout the city.

*San Antonio’s hotter climate allows residents to use the fitness stations year-round, providing a free alternative to joining a traditional gym.*

The partners attribute project success to top political support. Mayor Julian Castro facilitated an enthusiastic collaboration with the Mayor’s Fitness Council to publicly promote the fitness stations. High use of the equipment has been recorded, and a user survey conducted in partnership with a local community college yielded positive responses from residents. Project leaders hope the success of the project will continue to inspire new opportunities and programs to promote healthy lifestyles in San Antonio.



## INCREASING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

### SCHOOL PROGRAMS

## Get Those Kids Moving — Bismarck Injects Movement into the School Day

In 2010, the National Association for Sport and Physical Education suggested activity be offered throughout the school day to help meet national recommendations for an hour of physical activity daily for children. The Association encouraged schools to schedule physical activity breaks, including physical activities during academic classes, to create opportunities for students to be active between classes. The rationale for physical activity breaks during the school day is that it increases mental alertness by providing children and youth an opportunity to be active and take a break from sedentary activities in the classroom (e.g., sitting, reading).

Bismarck, North Dakota, took this advice and ran with it, developing a unique local collaborative that produced their own videos to get the kids moving during their school day. Some unexpected partners helped make this a truly professional job. The local public access television station donated time, space, and editing assistance. The local university donated student time for filming, producing and editing, and children at all the local elementary schools competed to be part of the second round of videos. The five-minute videos are posted on YouTube and can be used by teachers to “wake up” their classrooms by providing short activity breaks for students.

What began as a Mayors’ task force to improve health for both cities evolved into a community coalition to allow for more flexibility. While many coalitions limit themselves to creating a vision for change, this one was not content to just propose an idea and hope that it happens. They are a ‘working coalition’ with members who are willing and able to roll up their sleeves and work on the particulars of an idea.

At meetings, the group has regular progress reports on the details of particular goals. Each sub-group provides information on the status and challenges of implementing a public health goal. This creates a sense of accountability within the group, but also allows for ideas to come from unexpected places. For example, the local schools wanted to increase fruit and vegetable consumption among students. All around the country, schools are adding salad bars, planting gardens and providing nutrition education to slow the epidemic of childhood obesity. In Bismarck, the school nurses program decided to create enthusiasm for healthy eating by linking food choices to the rainbow. Each day, students were asked to wear a particular color to school: red on Monday meant the students were offered strawberries, blue on Tuesday, blueberries. And the kids ate it up (pun intended). In fact, the class with the most participation got to film their own “Burst of Activity” video and have it posted.

Creative thinking, a willingness to get the details done, and an enthusiastic and unaffiliated coalition have begun the long work to make healthy choices easy in Bismarck.

*“Anyone could do it, even without [video production] technology. Just use a flip camera.”*

SCHOOL REPRESENTATIVE



## SCHOOL PROGRAMS

# The Walking Bus Keeps Kids Healthy and Safe on Their Way to School

How is it that more children at Lynnwood Elementary School are ‘taking the bus’, but the community has the strongest walk-to-school program in the state? That’s because it’s a walking bus, a series of pick-ups along the routes to school where children can join a supervised group to get to school.

This innovative project started with a dynamic and influential physical education teacher. A class unit on “safe walking” introduced students to pedometers and children set goals to walk to specific destinations. With support from their classroom teacher the students continued to log their steps at recess. The Safe Walking unit was kicked off with National Walk to School Day in the fall. If streets are safe for walking, parents feel comfortable with their children walking to school.

The following spring, Lynnwood Elementary piloted a “walking school bus” for kids to walk to school and home together safely, with designated “drivers.” Vests, hand-held stop signs and whistles were purchased for the “drivers.” Routes, including points where children could be picked up on the bus, were established with help from the city’s public works department. For the pilot, the walking bus ran one day per week; in the fall, the school plans to run the walking bus more days and encourage more children to participate.

With the Safe Routes to School program successfully established, infrastructure improvements are now underway on a block-long section of road bordering the school. The block has no sidewalks and is used as a cut-through between two busy roads. It is currently lined on each side with drainage ditches, making it unsafe for walking or biking. Improvements will include sidewalks, road striping, and bike lanes.

Lynnwood has been able to create a successful partnership with the school largely because the PE teacher and the principal, who are supporters of Safe Routes, gained the backing of other teachers and the parent-teacher association. The surrounding neighborhood has welcomed the project because sidewalks are desperately needed in the area. This is yet another example of the importance of leadership in implementing a culture change.

In the fall, Lynnwood Elementary plans to continue its walking program and add a focus on bicycle education, including bike rodeos and bike helmet education. The program goal is to see an increase in the number of students walking or biking to school over the next 18 months, and to gather measurable data on improvements in student health and behavior.

Environmental improvements are also a piece of sustainability to keep kids out there by making the routes safe and walkable. The short-term plan is champions in the school. Long-term sustainability comes from seeing that success. In 2011, the team was awarded a \$250,000 Safe Routes to School grant. Lynnwood’s proposal was ranked #1 in the state. The work of this enthusiastic collaborative will continue with the commitment and enthusiasm of local stakeholders.



## INCREASING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

### TRAILS AND SIGNAGE

# Signposts for Physical Activity Open Paths in Davenport

*“We had the infrastructure, but people just weren’t using it. We had to make it easier for people to make the healthy choice.”*

PARKS AND RECREATION STAFF MEMBER

Imagine running with your preschooler in a jogging stroller on a long path that winds along a beautiful, tree-lined river. Suddenly, your reverie is broken by a small voice “Daddy, I have to go to the bathroom.” You are stunned — you have no idea where to find a bathroom and you are not carrying toilet paper. Or imagine being a person who has been told by a physician to walk a mile every day to improve a serious health condition. You do not even know what a mile “looks like” unless you are driving — how can you possibly follow this advice? These stories would end here in many cities across the US — but Davenport, Iowa is not just any city. A group of concerned citizens tackled this issue by creating signposts so residents and visitors could take full advantage of the beautiful outdoor paths.

The tangible goal, to provide signage along the urban and river-walk trails, provided a rallying point for Davenport’s coalition team, creating early success and collaboration. Two steps were important to the process. First, the team physically walked the trails, paying attention to the locations of bathrooms, parking lots, and scenic spaces. They took note of who was using the trails: families, runners, bikers and walkers. And, they looked at the paths in relation to other areas of interest such as schools or parks. Second, the team engaged stakeholders early in the process. Groups of cyclists provided information and support to the project because they were part of the project from the beginning; running groups and other interested residents provided support and ideas.

The change to the physical environment was immediate and improved the usability of the paths. The process also created new partnerships and new relationships that could grow as the project moved forward. A local bank has hosted art shows in a building near the trail. The local community foundation helps clean this site. Some local businesses saw the effect of getting people moving on the trails and have started a ‘stair walking’ campaign internally and with other businesses.

Policy momentum has also proved important for the trails. The governor of Iowa launched a campaign to make the state the healthiest in the nation, and this along with the First Lady’s “Let’s Move” campaign created momentum and attention on physical health. Davenport was able to capitalize on this momentum to raise the profile of their efforts to improve trail usability.

Replication of the successes from Davenport requires communities to start small and concrete, then grow and nurture partnerships. Opportunities for more policy and environmental changes have been plentiful since the inception of this team, and the team is able to assist its partners in pursuing these opportunities while growing the local relationships. Creating opportunities for partnership and success while also thinking broadly about healthy behaviors were key to establishing a sustainable model for improving health.



## TRAILS AND SIGNAGE

# Development and Improvement of Trail System Keeps Kauai Moving

Kauai, Hawaii, is engaging in extensive efforts to address a decline in health of local residents due to sedentary lifestyles and unhealthy eating habits. As part of the Mayor of Kauai's vision to encourage and promote physical activity, the Kauai Parks and Recreation Department is collaborating with the Kauai District Health Office, Kauai Path, Inc., and a collection of other organizations — local, county, and federal — to develop Ke Ala Hele Makalae, a coastal multi-use path for biking, walking, and running. As of mid 2012, 8.7 miles of the trail were complete. The partners have a long-term goal for the path to stretch 25 miles and serve as an open-access, alternative transportation connection across the east side of Kauai Island.

*A goal of the multi-use path is to provide an alternative route between destinations along the east coast of Kauai, and decrease car usage and traffic congestion among residents and tourists.*

Ke Ala Hele Makalae encourages physical activity among all local residents, with a focus on low-income families, children, the elderly, and the native population of Kauai. Additionally, the path is intended to serve the large amount of tourists that, most days, comprise approximately 25 percent of the island population. The partners say local hotels have been supportive of the path project because it provides a resource for staff and guests, and allows for alternative access to the properties. Hotels frequently promote the path — helping project partners expand the reach of their marketing efforts.

Kauai Parks and Recreation is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the path, such as keeping vegetation under control and monitoring usage; however, community members, organizations, and hotels volunteer to “adopt” portions of the path to enhance and maintain its beauty and appeal.

One unique challenge of this project is the presence of many ancient Hawaiian burial grounds along the island's coasts. To keep the project moving forward, Kauai Parks and Recreation engaged in an early collaboration with state and federal agencies to develop written guidelines for how to appropriately handle and navigate construction around the burial grounds.

### Critical components of a successful initiative:

1. Community buy-in.
2. A champion who believes the project is worthy, and will push it to be successful.

With the understanding that the path can serve as a venue for a variety of events, the park and recreation department partnered with Get Fit Kauai to host a “Mayor-A-Thon” in order to promote multiple path uses and test management best practices. More than 1,000 people participated. Many other organizations and community groups have also used the path for races, fundraisers, and walking events.

Kauai's health improvement efforts have reached hundreds of thousands of residents and tourists, and creators attribute this success to partnerships. “Common goals allow more opportunity for professional and community involvement,” states the Kauai District Health Office. “Combining efforts and sharing resources have created a greater focus on the development and extension of the multi-use path project.”

*“The more the path gets used by different people, the stronger the support. People are becoming more aware of the need to be healthier to live longer. The path just strengthens these ideals.”*

KAUAI PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT



## INCREASING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

### TRAILS AND SIGNAGE

## Sign and Wayfinding Project Connects the Louisville Community with Its Public Trails

Louisville, Kentucky, Metro Parks is working with local and national partners to develop a 100-mile trail system that will encircle the city — linking parks and neighborhoods to civic and cultural attractions, and providing healthy transportation options for residents. The project is a centerpiece of Louisville’s CITY OF PARKS initiative, launched in the mid-2000s to expand and improve parkland and environmental education.

Currently, 23 miles of the Loop are complete. When finished, the trail will consist of a network of shared-use paths, soft-surface trails, bike lanes on roadways, stream corridors, parkways, and transit routes spanning five distinct physiographic regions in Louisville and Jefferson County.

Metro Parks recently engaged in a Sign and Wayfinding project for the Loop to encourage use, and help visitors navigate the landscape safely and conveniently. The plan includes new distance and mile markers, directional signs, trailhead signs, and trail identity signs. Signature markers and orientation signs identify nearby communities and attractions to encourage exploration, and QR codes provide a way for visitors with smart phones to acquire more information.

*In partnership with the Metropolitan Police Department, Metro Parks established a Trail Watch program to educate cyclists on the safety of the Loop, encourage use and promotion, and provide information on how to identify and report maintenance issues. More than 60 individuals participated in the first training.*

The project highlights the diverse topography of the area, which includes the hills, flats, parks, and wetlands of the Ohio River Valley, Shale Lowlands, Knobs, Limestone Belt, and Floyds Fork regions. Interpretive signs will provide lessons on natural and cultural history, along with a map of the Loop.

The Loop will also feature public art to enhance neighborhoods and parks. By educating children and adults about Louisville’s unique features and building an appreciation for the trail, creators hope to develop devoted trail stewards.

*The Sign and Wayfinding project promotes health and wellness in Louisville by:*

- *Identifying connections from adjoining neighborhoods to promote ease of access.*
- *Enhancing physical fitness opportunities by identifying mile markers and distances to help users measure activities.*
- *Promoting greater safety and improved emergency access.*

Collaboration has been key in improving access and increasing use of the Louisville Loop. Critical connections were forged in 2009 through the Mayor’s Healthy Hometown movement, which brought integral groups together at one table to set strategic direction for the project, and develop trail design specifications and guidelines. Partners include the Mayor’s Office, Louisville Department of Planning and Design, Louisville Metropolitan Police Department, Louisville Bicycle Club, Kentucky Transportation Cabinet, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and City Department of Public Works.

Ultimately, partners believe the Louisville Loop will be a valuable source of alternative transportation for the entire city — reducing traffic congestion, improving air quality, connecting neighborhoods, and improving health and wellness.



## TRAILS AND SIGNAGE

# Miami Takes a Long-Range View in Developing a Physically Active Community

Many urban areas were not designed with an eye for encouraging recreation and fitness. Indeed, this issue is inherent in much of the infrastructure in the U.S., creating significant barriers to park access and utilization.

The Miami-Dade Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces Department is developing a Parks and Open Space Master Plan to reduce park inequity and increase physical activity. The 50-year vision seeks to reduce both current and future barriers to health and develop a comprehensive framework for a more livable county. Miami-Dade County estimates an 80 percent increase in population by 2060 — from 2.5 to approximately 4.5 million people.

*In addition to parks and trails, the Open Space Master Plan integrates many other public spaces conducive to physical activity and recreation.*

The plan follows principles for equity, beauty, access, sustainability, and seamlessness. The goal is to create a connected system of open spaces that encourage walking and incidental exercise, including parks, natural areas, and cultural amenities that are linked by greenways and blueways, streets, bike paths, and trails. Along with the plan, the county updated its urban design manuals to further promote physical activity.

The park and recreation department is focusing efforts on neighborhoods with the greatest overall disparities in health and park access. An extensive analysis was conducted to identify underserved areas for the formulation of policies and acquisition plans. The ultimate vision is for each resident to be able to access a park within one-quarter mile of where they live.

*Miami-Dade Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces is collaborating with 35 partner municipalities, as well as a host of other partners and agencies, to develop and implement its 50-year master plan.*

Due in part to the plan, Miami was one of only 12 metro areas in the country selected for the Red Fields to Green Fields program. The national research effort analyzes the effects of acquiring financially distressed properties and converting them to public parks and adjacent land “banked” for future sustainable development.

To develop and implement the Parks and Open Space Master Plan, the Miami-Dade Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces Department is supported by the Miami-Dade Health Department and a variety of other agencies. The partners hope their activities will help address current and future gaps in recreation programs and facilities in the county, and lead to a healthier, more active, and more sustainable future.

*“Libraries, museums, schools, government buildings, transit stations, and other civic and institutional places offer numerous opportunities to create new public spaces for festivals, arts and crafts shows, green markets, and other civic activities that bring communities together.”*

MIAMI-DADE ON THE PARKS AND OPEN SPACE MASTER PLAN



## INCREASING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

### TRAILS AND SIGNAGE

# A Network of Walking Groups Keeps Rural Pennsylvania Moving

*“WalkWorks identifies and promotes safe walking routes; establishes guided, community-based walking groups; impacts local policy to increase access to safe walking routes; and helps schools develop walk-to-school programs.”*

PENNSYLVANIA WALKWORKS

Engaging in physical activity can be a challenge in rural areas, where sidewalks are scarce, fitness facilities are limited, and there's little access to public transportation. In western Pennsylvania, many residents are confronted with this issue on a daily basis. To combat this, the Pennsylvania Department of Health and the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health created WalkWorks, a group-based walking program implemented in six counties: Cambria, Crawford, Greene, McKean, Venango, and Washington.

Local partners for this effort include the following:

- Center for Rural Health Practice at the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford.
- Crawford Health Improvement Coalition.
- Greene County Human Services.
- Conemaugh Memorial Medical Center.
- Oil City Area YMCA.
- Washington County Health Partners, Inc.

According to program creators, WalkWorks “encourages sustainable physical activity through the built environment, social supports, and healthy lifestyle behaviors.” The initiative focuses on coordinating and maintaining a network of walking groups composed of community members of all ages and abilities, many who have not traditionally engaged in regular exercise. The WalkWorks partners created the program with the understanding that increasing opportunities for physical activity will lead to the adoption and maintenance of more active and healthier long-term habits.

To launch WalkWorks, locations for walking routes/trails were identified, and outdoor kick-off events were held in each community. As an incentive in Greene County, a local insurance provider offered new walking shoes and athletic wear to participants. An extensive media campaign was conducted to market the program and encourage participation.

*When implementing a program such as WalkWorks, it is important to understand the process is fluid, and plans are subject to change. Flexibility and cooperation of stakeholders, and program planning are critical to achieving success.*

Twenty-eight walking routes — marked by signage at trail entrances — are included in the WalkWorks network. Walking-group participants receive a packet with registration and trail information, a history of the surrounding area, and maps of each of the routes. And what if weather does not cooperate? Some of the WalkWorks partners have created indoor instructor and DVD-based walking programs.

WalkWorks has resulted in the establishment of walking groups throughout the six participating counties. In Greene, 350 students from two elementary schools engaged in The Mileage Club, an in-school program where students track and receive incentives for miles walked. Administrators cite the success of WalkWorks — noting the permanent walking groups created, and the long-term increase in physical activity they have observed with local residents.



## TRAILS AND SIGNAGE

# Once the Water Recedes... Pierre Poised to Make a Trail a Playground

A collaborative group of local leaders in Pierre implemented a program for physicians to provide “wellness prescriptions” to their patients — children, adults, and the elderly. One tangible part of this program was a physical map of all outdoor recreation activities available in and around the city. A group that included the public health and recreation departments as well as the largest private employer in the town, the local hospital, and school personnel worked on completing and linking trails, providing more access to trails and promoting the use of existing trails to residents.

As the group was looking at the map, however, they noticed a large space where no trails, playgrounds, pools, or other wellness infrastructure was available.

A plan quickly emerged to provide creative new physical activity experiences in an underserved area of Pierre where a new trail section was being developed. The idea of a “play trail” emerged as the ideal solution to fill the activity void. Like a playground, this trail would have structures upon which children and adults can play. A play trail differs from the traditional playground by spreading activities over a distance, providing opportunities for walking or running between the structures. The idea is to keep families moving together, rather than have children play while adults sit and watch.

Unfortunately, the innovative play trail project and work completing the existing trail system infrastructure were both derailed by a catastrophic flood. While members of the collaborative were evacuated from their homes due to the water, some sections of trail were literally underwater for several months.

The flood brought the work to a standstill. In addition to 3 members of the wellness collaborative moving out of town for new career opportunities, several other members were directly or indirectly affected by the flood. The City of Pierre, which is also the state capital, shifted priorities to address immediate and pressing concerns around clean up and economic recovery from the flood.

But as the waters recede in Pierre, the city fully intends to build the play trail as well as developing the infrastructure of the city. The community is already engaged and excited about the planned trail. An unanticipated byproduct of the flood was the realization by community members of just how important recreation trails and parks are to their sense of overall well-being.

The same spirit that keeps Pierre working despite the flood was evident even before this event. As the group worked to implement improvements in the local school lunch offerings, they were told ‘no’ by the school district. Instead of giving up, the group went to the PTA and asked for partners to implement a pilot program. Once word got out that some schools had a nutrition program for students, parents began demanding it at their own schools. The Parks and Recreation representative summed up their tenacity like this: “when one door slammed, we just looked for a window”. Whether the issue is better nutrition or improved access to recreation trails, wellness advocates in Pierre are determined to be successful regardless of the obstacle.

*“It was a powerful visual — to see a map of recreation activities with, literally, nothing — across a large space.”*

PARKS AND RECREATION STAFF MEMBER



## INCREASING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

### TRAILS AND SIGNAGE

# Collaboration is Changing the Way San Antonio is Encouraging Healthy Lifestyles Among Its Citizens

*"We have seen an incredible willingness for the city [agencies] to work together in a way they have never done...and how critical it is to involve all these partners to make a difference in the health of the city."*

SAN ANTONIO METRO HEALTH

Increasing physical activity is attributed often to two things: access and knowledge. For San Antonio, Texas, there is a third factor — collaboration — and it is changing the way residents are getting, and staying, active throughout the city.

As part of a comprehensive effort to reduce San Antonio's high rates of obesity and diabetes, and promote healthy, long-term behavioral choices among residents, the San Antonio Metropolitan Health District (Metro Health) and San Antonio Housing Authority (SAHA) created walking and biking trails at four public-housing sites with approximately 4,000 residents. The trails were designed to provide residents with safe, convenient environments for exercise and recreation.

The sites were chosen out of 61 possible locations, with a target focus on low-income families, seniors, and people with disabilities. Additionally, fitness stations were constructed at three of the four trails. To serve as many residents as possible, trail access was made available to the surrounding communities through a shared-use agreement.

*Unlike in many U.S. cities where public-housing populations are predominantly transient, SAHA sites house permanent residents, who are seeking to improve their local quality of life.*

The trails were created in conjunction with another Metro Health/SAHA initiative, Ride to Own, in which bikes were provided to working individuals residing in SAHA communities in an effort to increase physical activity and encourage alternative transportation. The program enhanced the need for safe, convenient areas for residents to use their bikes, unencumbered by cars and pets. To earn bikes, individuals were required to take a bicycle safety class and bicycle maintenance class, and log a specific number of organized community rides.

After a successful pilot program, Metro Health partnered with SAHA to make 1,000 bikes available. An additional 216 bikes were made available through the San Antonio Parks and Recreation Department.

Collaborative efforts continue to yield positive results across San Antonio. In a partnership with three area school districts, Metro Health is finalizing improvements on six school tracks, which are also available to the local communities through shared-use agreements. Additionally, Metro Park has partnered with San Antonio Sports to create joint-use SPARK parks (community fitness parks) at local schools.

The partners are conducting formal surveys to determine the overall impact of the trails and Ride to Own program; however, informal responses have been favorable. New trails have been established by the park system to further promote bike use, and future plans include the creation of community walking and bicycling groups.



## TRAILS AND SIGNAGE

# New Signage and Maps Make Trails and Parks More Accessible in the Mid-Ohio Valley Region

A notable feature of the Mid-Ohio Valley region of West Virginia is the vast collection of trails that wind through the area. The North Bend Rail Trail, American Discovery Trail, and network of trails along North Bend State Park are well-known destinations for hiking, biking, and family outings for thousands of people.

In an effort to increase physical activity among youth and adults, the West Virginia Recreation and Parks Association (WVRPA) worked closely with the Mid-Ohio Valley Health Department (MOVHD) to promote and improve the regions trails. One key initiative — implemented to support safer and more user-friendly trail usage — was the adoption of consistent signage throughout the six Mid-Ohio Valley counties of Calhoun, Ritchie, Wirt, Pleasants, Wood, and Roane.

*Partnerships and public meetings with coalitions representing a wide variety of sectors were critical to obtaining community buy-in and support.*

*Project leaders are taking steps to ensure continued collaboration for long-term success and maintenance of the trail initiatives.*

In partnership with a multi-sectoral team, MOVHD and WVRPA are developing a plan establishing a comprehensive trail marking and identification system. The plan includes signs for every type of trail usage, with markers for trailheads, parking and staging areas, landscapes, interpretive and historical information, difficulty level, and way finding. Additional signs help people differentiate between destination trails, loop trails, and trail systems, and kiosks at strategic locations provide maps and interpretive information.

*Upfront communication and education helps instill a sense of ownership among community members.*

MOVHD and WVRPA have collaborated closely with a variety of partners, including the State Department of Highways, the North Bend Rails to Trails Foundation, and a host of regional park entities. To maximize outcomes, MOVHD is also collaborating with a variety of community partners, achieved in part through the development of the Change the Future West Virginia Coalition — in which all six Mid-Ohio Valley counties are represented.

The trail team is working with each of the participating counties to implement the signage plans. Fifty-six kiosks and 248 signs have been delivered; project leaders expect final installation for most of the signs to be complete by the end of 2012. The final signage plan will be presented for official adoption by each of the counties in the near future.

While many of the activities implemented by the trail signage project are focused on families, children, and underserved populations, the project is slated to directly impact more than 105,000 trail users. Ultimately, project creators hope to improve the quality of life for all residents and visitors in the Mid-Ohio Valley region through increased trail access and alternative transportation options, and increased opportunities for physical activity.



## IMPROVING NUTRITION

### BREASTFEEDING INITIATIVES

## Newport Makes Strides in Workplace Breastfeeding

When Newport did an assessment on how well its community was encouraging breastfeeding, it discovered an ironic discrepancy: Newport Hospital holds the prestigious Baby Friendly designation for providing extensive support and education around breastfeeding initiation and continuation, but once new mothers returned to work they encountered significant challenge from worksites that did not support breastfeeding. Federal law requires accommodations for breastfeeding, and Rhode Island state law is even stronger; still, many worksites were unaware of how easy it is to comply with legal obligations.

Newport Hospital has long promoted breastfeeding with clients in its Birthing Center and breastfeeding support group, but had not directly addressed worksite accommodations. A grant from a local benefactor, Van Beuren Charitable Trust, funded a lactation consultant nurse to promote and support breastfeeding for the first six months of life. With this additional resource, the hospital could then provide more direct support for working mothers who were breastfeeding.

Direct advocacy for worksite breastfeeding occurred through a partnership between the lactation consultant from the hospital, the Rhode Island Breastfeeding Coalition and a private company Healthy Mothers, Happy Babies. This team eschewed a heavy-handed approach in favor of encouraging dialogue with businesses regarding the law, and distributing an educational pamphlet titled "The Business Case for Breastfeeding."

*The lactation consultant was able to provide detailed information to one nursing home employee so she could enable her employer to comply with the state laws.*

The human resources director of the Newport Wal-Mart was interested in this work, not only to encourage good health and prevent obesity, but also to make sure the company was complying with state and federal law. The group did a presentation for her, and eventually every Wal-Mart in Rhode Island was brought on board. This was a significant inroad, as Wal-Mart is one of the biggest employers in the state. In addition, the typical population of Wal-Mart employees may not otherwise have a high level of support for breastfeeding and they may not realize they have workplace breastfeeding rights.

The hospital's breastfeeding support group for mothers who had given birth in the hospital has taken on an additional component: educating mothers and their employers about the law. The group has long encouraged self-advocacy, and now new moms know that the hospital, their pediatrician and the state will support them should they need to request breastfeeding accommodations in the workplace.

Other communities wanting to encourage breastfeeding and educate people about applicable labor laws are urged to partner with their local hospital. Hospitals "have so much influence over new moms" and tapping into this influence is a way to build momentum around breastfeeding in the community.



## BREASTFEEDING INITIATIVES

# Rock Hill Making Breastfeeding Good Business

Sometimes breastfeeding is a hard sell; it's private, it's political, and employers do not see a tangible benefit. A Rock Hill, South Carolina, coalition is helping its community develop a comfort level to discuss family-friendly policies and programs that provide lactation support for employees to address childhood obesity, employee retention and health care costs.

The coalition in Rock Hill includes a representative from the Parks, Recreation, and Tourism department, as well as the public health department and a representative from the South Carolina Breast Feeding Coalition and local businesses. Their long-term goal is to increase the number of worksites that provide breastfeeding accommodations. To that end, coalition members are bringing city and business leaders together to discuss the business value of supporting breastfeeding. Their work is done in conjunction with the York County "Eat Smart, Move More" campaign.

At a recent workshop, *Creating A Workplace Supportive of New Mothers — A Business Case for Breastfeeding*, representatives from the local coalition partnered with Eat Smart Move More York County and local lactation consultants to share statistics and update businesses on best practices and labor laws regarding breastfeeding. The meeting focused on breastfeeding as a way to reduce obesity rates and thus ultimately reduce health care costs for employers. Employee morale, productivity, and retention were also emphasized.

The workshop targeted worksites with which the coalition had existing relationships, such as the faith community, a local Native American community, and the local school district, which, like most school districts, has a high percentage of female employees.

*Framing breastfeeding as both an economic and health issue creates a dialogue in which people are more comfortable. What business can't support a reduction in health care costs?*

After the presentation, the participants in the workshop began small-group discussions on workplace issues that could arise and how to address them, including sufficient break time and a private location to pump breast milk. Discussion included educating all employees on the health and economic benefits of breastfeeding. A human resources director participating in the workshop mentioned that providing breastfeeding support allows a company to market itself as family-friendly.

### *Four steps to a supportive worksite:*

- 1. Support — create a policy and environment supportive of a family friendly worksite.*
- 2. Time — allow flexible break time and duration to support breastfeeding.*
- 3. Education — provide information about the health and economic benefits of breastfeeding.*
- 4. Place — provide a clean, secure area for new moms.*

As labor law requires breastfeeding support in the workplace, many companies had been looking forward to the workshop and arrived ready to learn about implementation. The team plans to conduct the workshop again in the fall. Businesses that participate in the workshop are eligible to receive up to \$1,000 to establish a lactation room.

The unique focus on economics, as well as health, will make inroads into a traditionally tough audience. The coalition in Rock Hill is confident that by bringing partners to the table, and creating a dialogue about breastfeeding, the community will be able to make some long term changes to confront obesity.



## IMPROVING NUTRITION

### FARMERS' MARKETS

# DC Brings Healthy Foods to District Parks Through Farmers' Markets

As people in the U.S. become more aware of the benefits of eating locally grown food, interest in farmers' markets is on the rise. Many individuals believe public parks are ideal locations for these vendors, noting convenient access for local residents, and increased public awareness and utilization of park facilities.

Before 2010, it was illegal to sell food on city parkland in the District of Columbia (DC). This changed with the passage of the Healthy Schools Act, which outlined new regulations regarding nutrition, physical education, and the promotion and support of sustainable farming and locally grown food. Upon passage of the act, many people expressed interest in opening farmers' markets on public park property; however, there was no established permit process in place, creating challenges for both vendors and the city.

*The standardization of the farmers' market permit process is part of DC's citywide effort to provide increased access to fresh and healthy foods in all communities in DC.*

The DC Department of Health (DOH) collaborated with the DC Parks and Recreation Department (DPR) and DC Hunger Solutions to establish a standardized way in which farmers' markets could obtain permits to bring their produce to residents at local parks. After engaging in extensive research — including surveying the city's existing farmers' markets — DOH compiled a report to provide information to DPR about the industry, and recommend a formal set of guidelines and procedures.

One guideline proposed the establishment of an appropriate scale-based fee structure, adjustable based on the number of vendors within a particular market. The guidelines also recommended permission for vendors to perform power washing at their discretion, rather than weekly. As a precondition for a permit, vendors would be required to obtain a letter from the commissioner of their local Advisory Neighborhood Council.

The DPR agreed with the guidelines proposed by DOH, and adopted them across all DPR parks in the District. To date, there are four farmers' markets operating on DPR property — some of which are now providing healthy food access to residents with the highest rates of chronic disease and obesity in DC.

Looking forward, organizers hope to develop a communications plan and increase promotions for the farmers' markets. Additionally, the partners recognize the critical need to reinforce the process within relevant agencies, to ensure guidelines are consistently and properly applied.

The partners cite the Healthy Schools Act as instrumental in increasing access to healthy food for all the residents of DC. Additionally, they credit the open lines of communication established between the District and federal agencies as critical to the adoption of the farmers' market guidelines. They believe this spirit of collaboration will have great impact moving forward in future endeavors.

*"Every day in the District of Columbia, nearly one out of eight households struggles with hunger, with uncertain or limited access to, or ability to buy, nutritionally adequate and safe food."*

DC HUNGER SOLUTIONS WEBSITE



## FARMERS' MARKETS

# Planting Health in a Food Desert

Jackson, Tennessee is a city of disparities, like many metropolitan areas. When leaders from local businesses, schools, public health, and parks and recreation looked at the physical environment of Jackson, they were eager to make changes in blighted parts of the city.

So they hit the streets, walking neighborhoods in the blighted parts of the city. They mapped grocery stores, compared prices for fruits and vegetables, and found access to healthy food lacking in this area. What they realized was that the city-run farmers' market was a magnet for middle to higher income families, but was not being used by lower-income residents of the immediate neighborhood. It was, essentially, in the middle of a food desert. Ideas converged, and a proposal was developed to use that market as a launching point for more inclusive health initiatives in the city.

This collaborative viewed the farmers' market as not just another source for people to buy fruits and fish, but as an opportunity to expand knowledge and enthusiasm for changes to the environment that can have lasting impacts on health. Cow milking, canning, food preparation and other cooking classes are now offered with the help of a financial commitment from the Mayor's office.

### *A multi-tiered approach to confronting a food desert:*

- *Use an existing venue.*
- *Create incentives for selling healthy food.*
- *Apply for funds to allow farmers to take Food Stamps.*
- *Talk to everyone about your project.*

But a market isn't an everyday solution to healthy eating. Consequently, the corporate office of nearby convenience stores was approached with an idea to offer fruit at the registers. Low cost food was procured from local farmers and the beer got crowded by bananas. A representative from the Chamber of Commerce said, "If a business can see a financial benefit, they will come on board."

One of the most surprising and effective partners in this collaborative was the local Chamber of Commerce. This business group noticed that a nearby city was winning bids for businesses to locate in their area. One theory was that the nearby city had better infrastructure — more trails and walkable places — as well as better health statistics. The healthier city offered lower health insurance rates to businesses, increasing the competitiveness of that city.

The Chamber then got to work. They canvassed luncheons talking about the poor health statistics in Jackson. They used every opportunity to talk up the link between economic development and health, and they promoted the farmers' market. Consequently, the market has become a social and economic hub for the community. Attendance is up 300% at the Saturday market, with people parking blocks away and lingering at outdoor coffee stands while their children play and sample local produce. A new fitness center is in the works across from the market.

This unique and vibrant partnership between public agencies, the Mayor's office, business leaders, farmers and food vendors has created a hub for healthy choices in downtown Jackson, a strategy that creates the potential for lasting change.



## IMPROVING NUTRITION

### FARMERS' MARKETS

# North Miami Mayor and Parks Department Share Goals

*"When you feel good about yourself, you feel good about your community"*

NORTH MIAMI MAYOR DE PIERRE

When a new mayor took office in North Miami, he wasted no time bringing physical fitness to the forefront of his community's consciousness. He promoted a monthly mayor's bike ride and made it known that workplace wellness was on his agenda. This coincided with efforts by a local collaborative to make environmental changes to reduce obesity in the community. What could have been a single program has turned into a movement with multiple objectives and a life of its own.

Simultaneously, staff at the North Miami Parks and Recreation Department started a "weight watchers at work" program, the results of which were soon visible to all staff. The program evolved into regular meetings about nutrition and healthy meeting options — and the leaders' own personal weight-loss successes helped recruit new participants.

With the momentum from these two events, the mayor's strong support and the successful weight loss and nutrition program, a local collaborative was confident in proposing some healthy projects for the community: underwriting the launch of a farmers' market on City Hall grounds, and a healthy vending program.

The farmers' market is well loved by city workers, who can walk out their office doors to buy fresh produce and lunch rather than drive somewhere for fast food. A park and recreation department staff member sends out an e-mail blast the morning of the market to tell city employees what is being featured that day, including lunch specials and a vendor list. The market holds food demonstrations to highlight healthy meal options, and a spice vendor teaches people how to reduce sodium intake by making use of other spices instead. While it began as a four-month trial program, city workers are pushing to have it extended beyond June and possibly year-round. Vendors are hoping for a longer market season as well, since they have had great economic success there.

While the healthy vending program was initially a challenge, the coalition looked to other municipalities for examples and used them as a selling point. They took advantage of lapsing contracts with vending machine companies to review the fare offered, and make revisions. With a few champions, this coalition was able to start a culture change in the community by promoting healthy options and a different way of thinking about nutrition and exercise.

*Tapping into existing events as a way of marketing the health collaborative provides good marketing for the work of the group.*

And as North Miami participated in the "All American City" competition, they were able to use the work of this local coalition as a selling point for the city as a whole. The community is so proud of the work done by the group, new unique partners are joining. Participants from the public library, local physicians, as well as public employees are signing on to the goals and the work of this group. The Mayor is a strong and vital advocate for the work of the coalition, bringing together groups to change a culture of unhealthy food choices.



## FARMERS' MARKETS

# Prince George's County Bringing Food and Stakeholders to the Table

The concept of “food deserts” has become a catch phrase for the movement to improve the nutritional health of communities. But the ease of this phrase belies complicated problems that create and sustain a lack of access to healthy food in neighborhoods. Food deserts are generally lower income neighborhoods where fresh fruits and vegetables are not available or are prohibitively expensive. In Prince George's County, Maryland two communities are working together to address the environmental, economic and physical causes of their own food desert.

The approach in District Heights and Capitol Heights is twofold: 1) teaching children the importance of fruits and vegetables while providing experiences growing food and 2) starting a farmers' market to provide access to fresh fruits and vegetables. A coalition of local leaders including the public health department, local business leaders and the parks & recreation department are working together to achieve these goals. Their campaign, “Healthy Heights,” has enlisted the owners of some markets to be part of the solution.

The coalition teamed up with an elementary school principal to plant a school garden with fruits, vegetables and herbs. The kids tend the garden and participate in nutrition activities to learn about the food they are growing.

This initiative has hit some roadblocks, but the coalition continues their commitment to implementing a market. Originally in a mall parking lot, the market was asked to move. This reduced their visibility and sales dropped. Farmers were required to have liability insurance, which many of the farmers did not want to purchase. Farmers also were not certified to accept WIC and food stamps, but about 1,400 people in the market's target neighborhoods rely on those programs. For people to be able to buy fruits and vegetables at the market, they must be able to use their food subsidies to do so.

Some solutions came from unexpected sources. The new farmers' market location under consideration is a prime location at the corner of two busy roads, but the corner was overgrown with bushes and brush. The local news station got on board and had goats brought to the corner to eat away the brush to support the resurgence of the farmers' market. The coalition has applied for a grant enabling vendors to accept food stamps and WIC.

*The new collaborative in Prince George County is “On the Rise”, building relationships and successes one step at a time to improve the health of their community.*

Despite the details and the roadblocks to the market, the county's collaborative has already expanded to include representatives from public works, social services, the planning department, the City Council and the University of Maryland extension. Getting the partners to the table together has been helpful, and the networking aspect is gaining momentum. As progress and motivation ebbs and flows, the original coalition keeps their focus on the impact of their work and on motivating their partners to look for creative solutions to local problems.



## IMPROVING NUTRITION

### HEALTHY VENDING

## Chicago Vending Machines Turn a Healthy Profit

When Chicago Park District (CPD) representatives decided to transform their vending machines to offer healthier snack options, they worried that sales would decline after the initial switch. Little did they know that revenues would triple within 13 months.

Discontent with a previous vendor led to a contract lapse and a subsequent lack of availability in snack vending machines of any kind in the parks for 18 months. A health coalition of key leaders in Chicago established a goal to not only make vending machines available throughout the City parks, but to stock the machines only with healthier snacks that are lower in sodium, sugar and calories.

The team researched healthy vending guidelines from a variety of sources including the American Heart Association and Fit Pick (an initiative of the National Automatic Merchandising Association) to determine what should be included in a new vending contract. Another community that had been successful in implementing healthy vending suggested that the best approach was to implement snack options that are 100 percent compliant with accepted nutritional guidelines, and ban unhealthy options. When unhealthy options were present, consumers continued to choose those, diluting the effect of including healthy options.

To prepare workers for the vending changes and to encourage healthy eating, the park district held workshops, including community taste tests and product comparisons to allow consumer choice in the content of the vending machines. In April 2011, the district adopted a healthy vending policy and unveiled the first healthy snack vending machines as a part of a citywide rollout in 97 locations.

The Parks Department inspired other organizations to change their vending options. The City of Chicago is implementing a similar healthy vending concept that is planned for the end of 2012. The CPD Department of Revenue is in the process of revising current beverage vending to implement healthier options.

One challenge the CPD faced was when certain staff members, who preferred unhealthy snacks over healthy options, talked the vendor into placing noncompliant snacks into the machines. To overcome this challenge, the vendor has been required to follow the rules and policies of the contract, and fines are applied to any noncompliant snacks that have been placed. Another challenge has been keeping the machines properly stocked. Sales were more brisk than expected and the machines were not stocked often enough, so the vendor missed out on potential sales increases. CPD and the vendor are working extensively on a communication process with the parks to ensure that the machines are stocked in a timely fashion.

The CPD strongly encourages other park communities considering making the switch to healthy vending to look at other jurisdictions' vending contracts. Chicago's vending contract is a public document and easily accessible via agency website. In addition, building relationships has been crucial in the success of the CPD healthy vending policy. Once a comfort level among partners is established, conversations can take place in a less bureaucratic setting. Eventually, healthy vending partners ended up inviting each other to events which allowed for networking on other projects. A CPD staff member suggests that this networking has been essential to their influence: "[The] relationships that we've built — once you build that, it's easier to talk about things that need to get done." The local health coalition, with the success of the healthy vending project under its belt, is now poised to make more changes to the infrastructure in Chicago.

*"Our partners shared a common interest — encouraging participation in the events that promote health and fitness."*

CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT STAFF MEMBER



## HEALTHY VENDING

# Fort Collins “CanDo” Implements National Nutrition Model with Local Flavors

A large collaborative in Fort Collins, Colorado is poised to change health through research-based models for nutrition education, health promotion, and healthy vending. The Coalition for Activity & Nutrition to Defeat Obesity (CanDo) includes a large local hospital system, the Recreation Department for the City of Fort Collins, community members, and a local Food Environment Task Force.

The coalition initiated local changes by first reviewing healthy eating initiatives from other communities and researching national models for food labeling. The coalition identified elements from campaigns such as “Go, Slow, Whoa” and “Shape Up Somerville” that would be a good fit for Fort Collins, developing an evidence-based nutrition campaign with a local flavor.

The coalition is testing the local approach within their own membership, with plans to expand to other organizations. The Poudre Valley Health System and the City of Fort Collins Recreation Department are piloting food environment changes. The pilot involves an array of options, customized to fit the particular environment of each participating organization. The hospital is working on vending machines with healthy options, a pricing structure that reduces the cost for healthy items compared with unhealthy items, and explicit labeling of healthy choices. The recreation program is planning to implement healthy vending and healthy concessions at target locations, and is raising awareness in city-sponsored youth sports regarding proper hydration and healthier snacks. The recreation department is also working to change the philosophy in cooking classes to incorporate healthier cooking methods and recipes in the classes.

The credibility of CanDo’s efforts has been bolstered by having Poudre Valley Health Systems on board. The participation of such a high-profile health-related community leader has garnered interest across the community. Several organizations are eagerly awaiting the results of the pilot to begin implementing similar changes. The Fort Collins Museum & Discovery Science Center would like to introduce healthier offerings in its museum cafe, and the Salud Health Clinic (which serves mainly Latino families) intends to implement the healthy vending concept.

### How CAN-YOU?

- *Get the right people at the table.*
- *Be patient.*
- *Get examples from other communities (don’t start over).*
- *Be opportunistic.*

Momentum is building around the coalition’s clear vision for a better local food environment. The initial success in the pilot program has enabled CanDo to obtain additional funding to substantially expand their reach in the community. This grant will enable the coalition to continue working on the culture change necessary to confront obesity.

*“Our whole mission is obesity prevention — if we can change the food environment to make healthy eating easier, it’s the only way to be successful. Every step we can make to make healthy eating easier, we know we’re moving in the right direction.”*

RECREATION DIRECTOR FOR FORT COLLINS



## IMPROVING NUTRITION

### NUTRITION PROGRAMS

# Healthy Snack Options in Miami-Dade Support Improved Nutrition to Reduce Childhood Obesity

As part of the Consortium for a Healthier Miami-Dade, the Miami-Dade Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces Department is striving to decrease rates of chronic disease and obesity in the county. With the understanding that food options in parks can be just as important as access, Miami-Dade has implemented a healthy vending policy to encourage both physical activity and healthy diets among the city's residents.

*Miami-Dade's healthy vending policy was conceptualized as part of an effort to identify small changes with the highest potential to impact community health.*

The policy involves the installation of healthy vending machines in which the food must meet predetermined criteria for nutrition. The vending machines were installed in phases at parks in underserved neighborhoods identified as having high rates of chronic disease and obesity. Two target groups include Miami's Hispanic population and large Haitian population.

As of late 2011, 26 sites were operating the machines, serving more than 10,000 children between the ages of 5 and 17. Altogether, 52 healthy vending machines — 26 for snacks and 26 for beverages — were installed at the park sites. The department has indicated that the vending machines are not just popular with kids, noting much adult utilization. The ultimate goal of the Miami-Dade parks and recreation department is for 100 percent of vending machines operating at Miami-Dade park sites to offer healthy food options.

Miami-Dade is also working with concessionaires in parks to make healthy food more available. The concessionaires participating in this partnership have agreed to reduce serving sizes while adding healthy food choices.

*Keys to program success:*

- *Identify areas with the greatest need.*
- *Determine small changes with big impact.*
- *Get early buy-in from the community and local leaders.*
- *Move forward in phases.*

To ensure success of the project, the parks and recreation department is collaborating closely with the Miami-Dade Department of Health. Additionally, 159 other organizations participate in the Consortium for a Healthier Miami-Dade. According to the department of health, the "diverse group of consortium members provides capacity and access across the county that is essential in delivering the strategies to accomplish the deliverables." Miami-Dade also notes the close collaboration with other local partners to ensure success of the vending project.

The healthy vending and concession policies will ultimately reach more than 500,000 community members in Miami.

*"This work has many facets: change in behavior, recognition of the issue, politics... but at the end of the day it is community driven, [it's about] the communities that mature and sustain the efforts that help drive change."*

MIAMI DADE PARKS, RECREATION AND OPEN SPACES ON THE HEALTHY VENDING POLICY



## HEALTHY VENDING

# O'Fallon Gets Healthy — How a Small Group of People Can Make a Large Impact

*“Of course we got some comments from parents... ‘my kids don’t eat that’ or ‘the lunches are too expensive’. But, in the end, we won most of them over.”*

CITY COUNCIL MEMBER

A partnership in O'Fallon, Missouri wanted to address growing rates of childhood obesity among their population. Childhood obesity has numerous causes and groups with the best of intentions can get bogged down in the details: Do we build open spaces or change vending machine options? Do we improve school lunches or implement a smoking ban at local parks? But the partnership, which included schools, public health and parks and recreation leaders, had no problem choosing their first target: improve school lunches.

School district food systems can be difficult to navigate. Layers of local, state and national laws governing the types of food offered can create confusing systemic challenges to school insiders and outsiders alike. The details of contracts with particular vendors and the timing of contract renewals or RFP releases create further obstacles to timely change. But having a high-level advocate for change within the school system in O'Fallon created both the institutional will and the momentum to make significant changes to the quality of food offered to children at school. With strong internal leadership support, O'Fallon's Fort Zumwalt School District implemented dramatic changes such as offering whole wheat pasta and French fries once a week instead of every day, contracting with local farms, and creating colorful guides to help schoolchildren make healthy food choices.

Flexibility and creativity in approach have been key to expanding the O'Fallon partnership's success beyond the lunch line. While the insider approach was hugely successful in the schools, different tactics were required to accomplish other goals. For example, the group wanted to assess support for a bicycle helmet law for children. This proposal was met with resistance from local law enforcement, who were concerned about how to monitor compliance. The alternative approach used was to build urgency for a helmet law through data on youth injury rates from outside the community. The partnership has also supported groups working to create tobacco free spaces by providing information and resources regarding health impacts of tobacco.

To ensure sustainability, the coalition in O'Fallon has been deliberately focusing on empowerment and encouraging community voice rather than implementing a specific set of public health programs. And this will be the legacy. Community groups who now understand how, why and when to raise their voices will be able to make lasting changes in their environments. A new community health-focused collaborative, the “St. Charles County Partners for Progress”, has expanded beyond the core to include businesses, public employees, and community members committed to long term impacts on health, wellness, and a robust local economy.



## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

# Initiatives “Fit2gether” to Promote Healthy Eating and Economic Development

Sometimes it takes a physical path to help all the pieces come together for a healthier community. The 52-mile Great Miami River Trail has become a cornerstone for Miamisburg, Ohio as they seek to impact chronic disease within their city.

The City and local businesses are investing in improvements to access the river and to develop a destination park along the trail with the intention of creating economic opportunities locally. Long term plans to reduce the rates and impact of chronic disease by making sustainable environmental changes in Miamisburg is led by an innovative partnership between local government, the school district, the hospital, business leaders, the faith-based community, public health at county and state level, and some private schools. This group has quickly launched a number of initiatives, calling their group Fit2gether.

One of the most promising of these systems-level changes was to identify and promote healthier options for dining. While keeping abreast of national legislation to require multi-outlet restaurants to label their menu options, the local group is creating local interest in this type of labeling for restaurants and food outlets. The concept is elegant: most restaurants, concession stands, and vending machines do have healthy options, they are just difficult for patrons to identify.

The partnership is working with local restaurants to label “healthier options” so that consumers can easily make the healthy choice when they are buying a meal. This also supports local economic development plans to become a destination for health-conscious bicyclists, runners, and walkers to stop for a meal as they enjoy the 52-mile Great Miami River Trail.

The heightened local awareness of the economic and health benefits of the recreation trail has created synergy to build a community wellness center, which would fill Miamisburg’s need for physical activity opportunities during inclement weather. “Having indoor recreation and exercise opportunities would provide the facility for year round physical activity for all ages and abilities, physical therapy, and athletic development” said one coalition member from the local parks and recreation department. This dream may soon become a reality. The coalition has leveraged their Fit2gether efforts and was awarded a grant from the Ohio Innovation Fund to cover the costs of the wellness center’s feasibility study.

*“Our local restaurants are interested in working with us because they want to be known as the place for a healthy choice.”*

PARKS AND RECREATION STAFF MEMBER



## Montgomery Improves the Health of Citizens and Recruits Local Businesses to the Cause

After a 2010 Gallop Poll declared Montgomery, Alabama, the most obese city in the country, the community took a long look in the mirror and decided to change what it saw. An epidemic of this proportion required a multi-pronged and long term approach to changing the infrastructure of Montgomery.

Poor health has an economic cost, and the mayor was worried that businesses would be deterred from locating in the area for fear of the high health care costs associated with obesity. He was therefore committed to changing the culture and creating healthier expectations. The mayor chose the Director of Montgomery's Department of Public Relations and External Affairs to be the Health and Wellness Czar. Choosing someone whose role in the community includes attracting businesses and promoting investments in Montgomery to lead a public health initiative made clear that these two causes are closely linked. The Regional Planning Commission committed additional staff time to study what could be done to lower the obesity rate.

A related group that included the business leaders, parks and recreation representatives, the YMCA, the school district, and the public health department made a plan to increase physical activity in after-school programs and to make local roadways more bike-friendly. The region now sports sixty-two "Share the Road" signs to raise driver awareness of walkers and bikers along roadways. The Montgomery Metropolitan Planning Organization's Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan update includes thirty-two draft bicycle routes and thirty-four draft connector routes, and the county passed an ordinance requiring a minimum clearance of three feet when overtaking a cyclist.

This was strongly supported by the community, which had long called for making the area safer for pedestrians and cyclists.

The mayor and the planning director have a long-term goal to use physical activity and nutrition-related infrastructure changes to make the area one of the most progressive cities and counties in Alabama. They are well on their way: The 2012 Gallup Poll dropped Montgomery from 1st to the 15th most obese city, and the city's obesity rate has declined from 34% to 30.9%.

Regional business and public partners have come on board because these efforts to create a healthier culture feed into their own marketing goals. Water trails, bicycle routes, and walking trails create opportunities for tourism and put money into the local economy. The Health and Wellness Czar believes this is the beginning of a new chapter for Montgomery, announcing "We successfully won the right to host a cycling competition with participants from eight states, which will bring 300-500 people here as tourists. The reason we were chosen over Atlanta and Nashville was our cycling-friendly traits. Now in addition to encouraging people to be helpful, we are realizing a financial dividend as well."

*"We are working to rebrand Montgomery and the region as a healthy, progressive place to live that is mindful of good nutrition and physical activity being part of everyday life and institutions such as schools, hospitals, worksites — that is our 5-yr goal to rebrand in that way."*

CITY OF MONTGOMERY'S HEALTH AND WELLNESS CZAR



## PARK PRESCRIPTIONS

# Annapolis Fills Physical Activity Prescriptions for Kids

Physical fitness is just what the doctor ordered for kids in Annapolis, thanks to an innovative program backed by local pediatricians. A local health collaborative that includes the parks and recreation department and the public health department worked closely with two area medical groups to launch a program which involves prescriptions for physical activity through summer sports camps that can be filled free of charge or at a steep discount.

To get started, the department researched physical activity prescriptions online and found a group that had started a similar program in San Diego. Eager to not “reinvent the wheel,” the Annapolis team made some phone calls to learn more about the prescription program in San Diego. And what they learned helped inform their local team.

Pediatricians are at the front line of identifying obesity in children. Through conversations with physicians, the Annapolis health collaborative learned that while pediatricians were able to identify obesity in children, they were unsure how to address it. Information gathering was the first step: the pediatricians were given a list of resources to which they can refer parents and children. This included a map of parks, and a list of free and low-cost recreational activities for children.

The program relies on a “prescription model,” familiar and clear to both patients and physicians, in which children are prescribed physical activity at the local park to reduce their weight and maintain a healthy lifestyle. Prescription pads were created for physicians to use to provide detailed instructions to parents. These prescriptions listed activities, classes, and a help line where staff is prepared to help them through the registration process step by step. The Annapolis Recreation and Parks Department partnered with the Anne Arundel County Department of Recreation and Parks to provide children with more physical activity prescription options.

*A pink prescription recommends activities that are free; a green one shows activities that are available on a sliding scale.*

One physician’s office was so enthusiastic about the project that they volunteered to review patient records and contact families proactively rather than wait for annual physical exams. This approach is a remarkable coup for the Annapolis collaborative.

The Recreation and Parks Department also started a scholarship program to help families pay for the recreational activities for their children. Some key recommendations for other park and recreation departments looking to create a park prescription program include:

- Engage your physicians and describe to them the intent of the program and the role that they play.
- Make information readily available to physicians and to families once they call for help finding or registering for activities.
- Follow up with physicians regularly to ‘check in’ and answer any questions.
- Think about the timing of rolling out the program. Begin planning in the spring as there are more recreation activities available in the summer.

The Annapolis collaborative hopes to build on this initial momentum to become a more visible and active part of local efforts to reduce obesity. They have applied for a grant with the Mayor’s office which will both provide funds and publicity for the group.



## Drug Prescriptions Are Common, But How About a Prescription to Go to the Park?

When it comes to public parks, the District of Columbia (DC) boasts a layout enviable to many U.S. communities. In fact, regardless of neighborhood or socio-economic background, a majority of DC's residents live within walking distance of a park, recreation center, or swimming pool — giving rise to an environment conducive to physical activity. And yet, obesity is still prevalent. How can residents be encouraged to take advantage of park and recreation facilities?

The DC Department of Health (DOH) is collaborating with the DC Parks and Recreation Department (DPR) on Park Prescriptions, a District-wide anti-obesity program, where pediatric primary healthcare providers write “prescriptions” for patients and families to spend more time in parks and green spaces. The partners hope the program — adapted from similar models in the U.S. — will increase the amount of time kids spend engaging in physical activity, and induce long-term, healthy behavioral change in the youth population of DC.

*Doctors are utilized as a channel through which time in parks can be “prescribed” to youth in the community.*

As part of a park “prescription,” parents receive a toolkit tailored to each patient’s community and interest area — thus removing a potential barrier to park utilization. The kits provide park lists with quadrant locations, park maps, amenities lists, route information, and access points. The kits also provide suggestions for programs and activities, and recreational guides. While the program is designed to serve all community members, program leaders are specifically targeting residents in Wards 5 to 8 due to higher rates of obesity in those areas.

*While Park Prescriptions is focused on reaching children, program partners hope the initiative will indirectly help increase adult park use.*

To spearhead the program, DPR and DOH are collaborating with a variety of organizations, including the DC American Academy of Pediatrics (in connection with Unity Healthcare and the Children’s National Medical Center), the National Park Service (NPS), the National Environmental Education Foundation, and Children in Nature. Program leaders note the significance of building a stronger relationship with NPS, citing the fit between Park Prescriptions and the NPS Healthy Parks, Healthy People Campaign.

*Reviewing existing models and examples of success is very beneficial when planning to adapt a program to a new population and community, rather than reinventing the wheel. Identifying and involving as many major players as possible to an initiative is critical to ensuring successful implementation.*

The administrators of the program are working with a wide variety of other partners spanning multiple areas of influence to lend additional strength to Park Prescriptions and reach a broad and diverse population of children. They aspire to involve private organizations as they move forward, and are also seeking opportunities to promote the program and link to other agencies that serve the community’s youth. A large rollout and citywide promotion is planned for early fall 2013.



## PARK PRESCRIPTIONS

# Physicians, Concession Vendors and School Lunch Ladies: Working Together for a Healthy South Carolina

Across the country obesity rates have been increasing at an alarming rate, especially in our children. Recently a mom watched as her eight year old daughter was weighed and measured at the pediatrician's office. She knows that her child is "heavy" and but feels helpless on the best way to remedy the situation.

Luckily this child is in Greenville, South Carolina where they have LiveWell Greenville. LiveWell Greenville aims to make Greenville County a healthier place to live, work, and play.

Recognizing that physicians are a trusted source of information for parents, LiveWell Greenville trains doctors to counsel families on adopting healthy environmental and lifestyle changes for their children using a three-prong approach:

- **Peer-to-peer physician education — Educate doctors on the importance of height and weight measures at every visit.**
- **Motivational training — Train physicians to practice "motivational interviewing", that engage patients and parents in making concrete changes in their lives.**
- **Developing actionable information — Handing out park maps, writing prescriptions for parents to do physical activity with their children multiple times a week.**

Once these measures were in place LiveWell Greenville considered a bigger question: How do we improve the food environment in recreation areas and schools. Their solution came from an unexpected partner, Rhino Concessions a local food vendor that provides food in a variety of venues. Serendipitously, this business was interested in providing healthier fare for their customers. The new partnership worked to develop a "LiveWell-approved" bag lunch, including fruit, 100% juice, crackers instead of chips, and a sandwich. This bag lunch bears the LiveWell sticker — which in Greenville is now synonymous with healthy choices.

The group also teamed up with local schools to improve the quality of lunch offered to children. They applied for a grant to send every school lunch staff person in 11 schools to culinary school, where staff all learned from-scratch cooking and are now offering healthier breakfast and lunch menus. Eighteen more schools are on the docket for the coming year. This gives physicians the ability to encourage families to eat the school lunches, and to play at the at recreation areas because they know that healthy food options are available. Families are now empowered to make healthy choices because they have options. The healthy choice is the easy choice.

Focusing on the partnerships, opening doors, and opportunities during an economic downturn, and creating a clear communication strategy were important components of success in Greenville. The natural reaction when funds are tight is often to pull back, but this group did it differently. They created opportunities by truly working together, by focusing on vision and communication rather than pitting one programmatic idea against another, by nurturing ideas within their team that would benefit their whole community, Creating a common vision and letting stakeholders come up with and implement ideas has put Greenville, SC on the fast track to becoming one of the healthiest cities in the country.

## McMinnville Tackles Obesity Epidemic Through Prescriptions

The tiny city of McMinnville (population 18,000) is making efforts to shrink its citizens. In a region where obesity is a prevalent health concern, this community has targeted nutrition as a key area in need of improvement. A collaborative was formed between McMinnville Parks and Recreation, Warren County School System, and River Park Hospital to reverse local obesity trends.

The group found success by engaging local physicians to provide “wellness prescriptions,” which address the increasing number of individuals who are overweight and obese. As a result, patients and physicians will now work together to determine the specific frequency, intensity, time, and type of physical activity while establishing good nutritional practices like consuming more fruits and vegetables and fewer sugar-based beverages.

While this comprehensive wellness prescription program is still in development, McMinnville has already jump-started a similar initiative with the Get Youth Moving Project (GYM), a physician-referral fitness and nutrition camp offered by the McMinnville Parks and Recreation Department. External funding from Middle Tennessee State University enables McMinnville Parks and Recreation Department to administer GYM. The purpose of GYM is to provide a safe, effective, and enjoyable fitness and nutrition program for children that have been identified as being overweight or obese by their physicians.

Supported by a strong partnership with River Park Hospital, a registered dietitian guides the healthy food menu for young participants and teaches them about good nutrition practices. Local physical educators and wellness personnel create fun fitness activities for the duration of the camp. Guest speakers discuss such issues as chronic disease, anti-bully tactics, media distortion of body image, bike safety, and alternative sports opportunities such as archery. The children track their physical activity steps daily utilizing pedometers, and they receive both organized lap swim sessions and free time in the swimming pool each day.

With no vehicle transportation involved in the GYM initiative, the children enjoy walks to the farmer’s market to buy fresh produce and to the grocery store for a tour and discussion of good choices and label reading. They also discuss how to make healthy choices in the event that their family chooses fast-food dining. An additional positive aspect to the camp is free tuition for the children who are referred by a physician through joint efforts with the wellness coalition.

### *GYM’s Main Objectives:*

- 1. Reduce body mass index and increase physical fitness and wellness behaviors among participants.*
- 2. Increase support for healthy lifestyle habits from parents and family of participants.*
- 3. Enhance and expand partnerships between community stakeholders to combat the prevalence of overweight and obesity among children.*

The coalition has had periods of frustration, but focusing on small steps rather than incremental changes has helped keep momentum going within the group. Having a professional — in this case the strong support of a dietician as well as the support of other community health providers — has helped deliver the messages of healthy eating and healthy lifestyle choices.



## TOBACCO REDUCTION

# Arlington Protects Children at Play — Creating Smoke-Free Zones for a Healthier Environment

**The challenge:** Create smoke-free zones in a community where local governments have limited authority to regulate their environment and where tobacco is a \$61 million enterprise.

**The success:** 200 signs in 50 smoke-free places in Arlington, Virginia, new local partnerships to address chronic disease, and a collaborative environment ready to make more changes

A group of committed citizens in community-based organizations in Arlington decided to prioritize smoke-free parks as a key environmental change to create a healthier community. Initially, they chose to increase the number of smoke-free places from 0 to thirty within three years. However, the state of Virginia limits the power of local government via Dillon's Law. In practice, local governments have little power, except when specifically granted, to make local laws and regulations. It was therefore not legal for them to pass an enforceable local ordinance outlawing smoking in public places. In addition, the state economy is heavily dependent on tobacco.

### *Key Components of Success in Arlington:*

- *Engage the opposition.*
- *Be specific, start small.*
- *Understand your limitations.*
- *Be creative and deliberate.*

While the Arlington team was confident that the citizens of Arlington were ready for a ban on tobacco use, the county attorney was adamant that there could be no outright ban. A voluntary program, a “polite ask” was the most the community could implement. In addition, this program could not target all tobacco use; only smoking carried second-hand public health issues. Most decidedly, the group could not use the iconic “no smoking sign”. Determined to succeed in creating tobacco-free space, the group patiently embarked on a careful and deliberate messaging campaign, developing county attorney-approved signage that communicated that the social norm was to not smoke around children.

The partnership in Arlington began with few concrete ideas about which environmental changes could be implemented or how those changes would come about. As a representative of the parks and recreation department enthusiastically recalled, “I was impressed that so many people signed onto our team without knowing what the projects would be.” But through the deliberate engagement and the step-by-step process to create the smoke free places, the group has coalesced. They now have an understanding of the different agendas and priorities at play within the city, as well as the commonalities between stakeholder groups.

The goal of the project has been successfully completed and the Department of Parks and Recreation is looking forward to addressing smoking in park restrooms and entryways to Arlington County Government buildings as the next phase of community intervention and environmental change.



## Tobacco Free Parks in Longview Washington: Who Could Oppose That?

The community of Longview, Washington looked at the data; nearly 30% of pregnant women smoked during pregnancy, and rates for teens and adults were also high. Despite having a “Clean Air Act” that prohibited smoking in bars and restaurants, many places were still not smoke free. So when a team of collaborators looked at an area where they could make immediate changes to improve the health of people in their communities, they chose to implement a tobacco-free parks initiative.

They started with local leadership, asking the City Council to appoint a task force to address the issue. This task force conducted community surveys that asked citizens to vote for or against *voluntary* bans on tobacco use in public parks. A Cowlitz County staff member noted that “it was difficult for people to oppose restrictions on smoking near children”. More than two-thirds of people surveyed at parks, community events, health care facilities, and other public places supported some restrictions on smoking, especially around places where children play.

*Residents were asked to choose from the following options:*

- *Smoking should not be allowed in public parks where children play.*
- *Smoking should not be allowed at any parks.*
- *There should be no restrictions on smoking in public.*

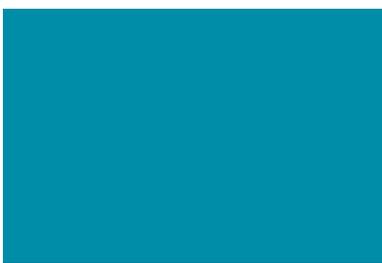
In addition to the survey, the task force enlisted groups of youth to collect cigarette butts found at local parks. This highlighted the trash and health issues around public smoking in a strikingly visual way.

With the data and the buckets of used cigarettes found in playgrounds, the City Council passed a ban on tobacco use in all parks, with a few designated smoking areas at larger sporting venues. The local newspaper came out against the two-year ban, proclaiming that a “nanny state” was in effect in Longview. However, local park officials reported a decrease in smoking in parks over the two year period, in some cases up to 30% less. There have been no complaints to the health department, law enforcement, or the parks department. Given the positive impacts, the local coalition looked at other public places where a smoke-free environment would be important.

The community gardens seemed like an obvious choice, as did the library grounds that hosted the annual Squirrel Fest. But the message had to change from a focus on children. Creating a tobacco-free public space would require changing the social norms around the venues where smoking was acceptable. At the Community Gardens, the message was about food tasting better without smoke; at the Squirrel Fest it was about smoking around families (both human and non-human). A new community survey was conducted and 77% of the respondents supported expanding the ban on tobacco use in these public places. The people were definite about what they wanted.

As a result of the tobacco free parks, this group has now become focused on environmental changes, rather than health programs, as the way to have long a term impact in their community. As one member of the coalition said, “People do good things without fanfare. Heroes are everywhere and they don’t all do it for glory.”







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