

Building Community Health in Parks

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SESSION DESCRIPTION

Everyone seems to understand that parks are a good for health and that park agencies play an important role in community health. This session identifies the evidence-based data that support this general perception and proposes aggressive approaches and research to further place park and recreation agencies at the heart of the effort to build healthy communities in America. Hear the hard facts on the health benefits of parks.

Session focused on the ability of park and recreation agencies to provide opportunities for health promotion and disease prevention within communities. An interdisciplinary and collaborative project is underway at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana to address these issues.

Obesity has become a pandemic in the United States with negative effects on adults and even worse implications for youth. Viewing health holistically in terms of physical, cognitive, social, economic, and environmental factors is imperative to successfully reaching people, via national efforts such as the Healthy People 2010 and Healthy People 2020 movements. People need to get out in the parks and be involved in opportunities which can decrease the detrimental effects of increased sedentary behaviors for a majority of the general population. Defining impacts locally and regionally however becomes more difficult without a consensus on the meaning of "community." Park and recreation agencies have the opportunity to affect change by planning and promoting Active Living which incorporates involvement in most activities and does not rely on competition since it encourages lifelong engagement. Indiana University's Recreation, Park, and Tourism Studies department is working in Bloomington, Indiana along with the City of Bloomington Parks and Recreation Department, faculty from multiple disciplines, and cooperation with organizations such as GreenPlay to assess the existing needs of the community and build or

improve human and community capacity. The initial goal of the project is to create a toolkit which will then be applied and tested via three other Indiana communities in the near future.

SESSION LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Understand the many ways in which parks and recreation agencies are central to creating health benefits for a community.
- Describe research and methods that can be implemented to document park and recreation agency impacts on health in order to use this information to promote parks as a critical healthy contributor to your community.