

Implementation of Statewide Walking Program to Improve Active Living in Rural Communities

Everybody Walks! SD

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ABSTRACT

Purpose/Objective: Everybody Walks! SD walking program strives to positively influence the health and wellbeing of participating residents living in rural South Dakota communities with populations of 3,500 or less.

Rationale: Rural communities have higher rates of preventable conditions such as obesity, diabetes, and injury, and higher rates of related high-risk health behaviors such as smoking, physical inactivity, poor diet, and limited use of seatbelts (Biskeborn, Kristin, 2008 and McCormack, L.A., and Meendering, J, 2015). Public health approaches are needed that make healthy options available, accessible, and affordable for all Americans (Biskeborn, Kristin, 2008). Wellness coalitions consisting of multi-sectoral partners are essential for grass roots changes, especially in rural communities with limited access to resources. Wellness coalitions facilitate the creation of healthier environments and are key to the successful implementation of public health approaches in South Dakota.

The Burke Wellness Coalition in Burke, South Dakota (population 604) is a positive example. Spring 2016 the Coalition assisted with the creation of Burke Walks!, a rural walking pilot program that is free and open to the public. Creative, location solutions to specific community culture, geography, climate, and needs are necessary when addressing rural active living. Bringing rural community members and stakeholders together can help initiate conversations and positive changes in communities (Yousefian Hansen, A. & Hartley, D., 2015). Burke Walks! provides an approach that fosters social connectivity and equitable access for very remote, rural communities. Surrounding communities wanted to know how they could get their 'walks' too, which initiated the Everybody Walks! SD walking program being launched statewide 2017, targeting populations with 3,500 or less.

Description: Everybody Walks! SD focused effort is the identification of walking advocates within the 4 targeted rural SD communities (Hermosa, Wall, Clark, and Centerville), who are trained to organize, implement and evaluate on-going walking events (safe, bi-monthly, theme-based, 2-mile walks) within their rural SD communities.

Evaluation: A detailed evaluation plan has been implemented for the Everybody Walks! SD project, which includes tools for data collection. A Community Readiness Assessment instrument was facilitated through phone interviews prior to the Everybody Walks! SD walk coaches' training. Four community stakeholders were interviewed in each of the four communities. Focus group data collection is planned for 6 months, 12 months, 18 months and 24 months which will include three focus groups: program walkers, walk coaches who attend the train-the-trainer program, and self-professed community walk advocates that did not attend the DDN train-the-trainer program.

Conclusion: Observing community readiness, along with focus group data collection, will offer clarification on outcomes related to the community walk coaches and community walk efforts.

PROGRAM

Everybody Walks! SD was designed for remote, rural South Dakota communities with populations of 3,500 or less with a goal to increase physical activity, social connectivity, and community capacity. In addition, the program strives to increase the number of walk advocates that work towards improving walking infrastructure in rural South Dakota communities.

The walk program uses the Community Readiness Model (CRM) (figure 1). It's a model for community change that integrates a community's culture, resources, and level of readiness to more effectively address an issue (figure 2). Readiness is the degree to which a community is prepared to take action on an issue. (Oetting, E., Plested, B., Edwards, R., and Thurman, P.J., 2006).

Everybody Walks! SD training materials are provided to each participating community. Follow-up maintenance materials and support are provided to each community for 18 months.

Everybody Walks! SD Program Structure

Walk Coaches:

- Two walk coaches from each participating rural communities are trained.
- Walk coaches are the over-arching coordinators in each community.
- Walk coaches should be community stakeholders who are willing to work to establish the structure needed within their community to implement the program.

Walk Ambassadors:

- Once trained, community walk coaches identify and train 24 walk ambassadors from each of their communities on how to facilitate bi-monthly, theme-based, 2-mile walks.
- The walk ambassadors work in pairs to facilitate 2 walks during the month of their choice.
- An annual planning guide and check-list, as well as other program tools, are provided for program organization.

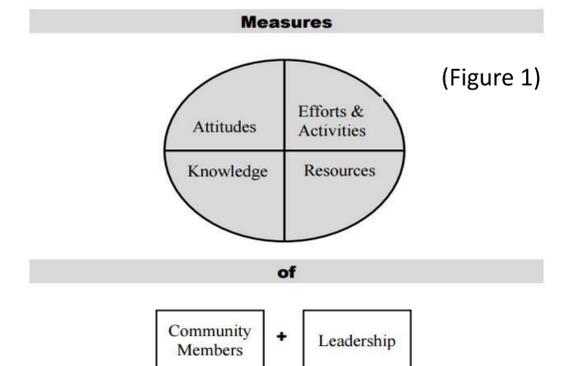
Isolation, lengthy travel distances, and a lack of transportation opportunities may be the largest barriers to being physically active in many rural areas. Rural areas have higher poverty rates, particularly among children and elderly. Everybody Walks! SD is a rural walking program that promotes free community walks for everyone. There are no fees, age requirements, or special equipment needed to participate.

The Community Readiness Model (CRM): A model for community change that integrates a community's culture, resources, and level of readiness to more effectively address an issue.

The CRM assesses a community's readiness on 5 Key Issues:

1. Community Knowledge of the Issue
2. Community Knowledge of Efforts
3. Community Climate
4. Leadership
5. Resources

The Community Readiness Model (CRM)



The Community Readiness Model defines 9 stages of readiness. Readiness levels for an issue can increase and decrease. The amount of time to move to a higher readiness level can vary by the issue, by the intensity and appropriateness of community efforts, and by external events. (Figure 2)

