

Adopting Shared Use Policies to Address Physical Inactivity in Under-resourced Neighborhoods in Cleveland, Ohio

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SUMMARY

Access to opportunities for physical activity is important for everyone to be in good health. However, there is an unfair burden of poor health in under-resourced, low-income communities, specifically among populations of color, youth and older adults. Often times these communities do not have access to safe, affordable, and convenient places to be physically active. Facilities such as churches, schools, and community centers often sit empty and can be used for active living activities. The adoption of shared use policies in safe community spaces can increase resident access to facilities and opportunities for physical activity. On Cleveland's east side, the HIP-Cuyahoga REACH team worked with a variety of community sites to implement shared use policies.



CHALLENGE

Facilities are often locked because of concerns related to costs, vandalism, security and maintenance. Liability fears can affect shared use partnerships and can cause hesitation in opening facilities after hours due to concerns regarding the legal risks associated with injury or property damage. However, there are many protections available to organizations to help limit and manage the risks. Additionally, there are challenges with sustaining physical activity instructors and with marketing the active living opportunities to residents.

SOLUTION

The REACH Community Fellows (CF) identified and created a list of potential facilities in the seven priority REACH neighborhoods. Community Health Ambassadors (CHAs), residents from those neighborhoods, provided input regarding safety, accessibility, and community buy-in of the facilities. After "ground-truthing" potential sites, 44 facilities were deemed eligible. All 44 sites were approached and asked to sign a shared use policy; 7 of these sites were Wraparound Schools (a strategy for organizing the schools and the community's resources for student success). The HIP-Cuyahoga shared use agreement was adapted into a "policy" based model to set the foundation for organizations to be open to community-based programming. This helped to address the issue of liability that many sites struggled with by creating an organizational policy, instead of a binding third-party agreement. In addition, the Ohio General Assembly recently passed legislation supporting school districts in opening their facilities for community use in 2015. Although the Cleveland Metropolitan School District is protected by this legislation, most schools did not have the additional resources to implement a shared-use policy and introduce physical activity programming. However, REACH CFs worked with targeted Wraparound Schools to assist with developing programming for students, their families and the surrounding community.

"Shared Spaces" has been one of the coolest opportunities we have had here. It truly aligns with our mission as a Wraparound School by inviting the community into our school and extending our school into the community.

-Lowell King, Wraparound Coordinator, FDR Academy

RESULTS

Since 2016, 23 sites have signed a shared use policy; 7 of these policies are within the Cleveland Metropolitan School District in 3 high school buildings and 4, K-8 buildings. These schools have used their gymnasiums, cafeterias, hallways, libraries, and classrooms and have turned them into spaces for a variety of exercises such as Zumba, circuit training, walking clubs, and line

Instructors who lead these activities are from the community and were connected to the schools through the CHAs. CHAs assist with marketing and spreading the word to the community about these opportunities. The success of the policies at the schools is due to the Wraparound Coordinator as the point-person for programming. These schools are designed to host activities for their students, families and surrounding community. Sites, like churches, often times do not have additional staff to put time/effort into developing programming.

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SUSTAINING SUCCESS

The network of CHAs has been instrumental to the process of identifying and recruiting shared use (SU) spaces, connecting instructors to sites, and even being the instructors themselves. Currently, sites have been meeting with CHAs to complete SU action plans, assisting them in identifying practical ways to utilize their shared use policy. Since the CHAs live in these neighborhoods, they hold a unique perspective and the policy-holders see the connection between HIP-Cuyahoga and its goal to increase physical activity opportunities for communities. Currently, the CHAs are working on a model that would rotate physical activity programming across all 23 policy holders. For example, a resident who is a master trainer for Qi Gong, a traditional Chinese exercise, will offer his time to train other residents to expand the programs in their respective neighborhood SU sites, resulting in sustainable shared use programming for the community.

“When I think of shared spaces, I see it as a place where wellness can happen. These sites give us that opportunity to ask [residents] 3 questions: (1) Did you see me?, (2) Did you hear me?, (3) Did I make a difference while you were in my presence?. If they answer yes, the real meaning behind shared spaces was achieved.”

**Delores Collins aka Ms. Dee,
Community Health
Ambassador**