

## Walking as a Practice Case Study Keep Moving Walking Clubs - Massachusetts Councils on Aging

Government agencies that encourage people to adopt a practice of walking can foster significant communal benefits. When residents walk regularly, they live healthier lives, they are better connected to one another, and they are better connected to their streets and communities. With the Keep Moving Walking Clubs of Massachusetts (a program of the State's Councils on Aging Department) and WalkBoston working throughout the state, walking programs and pedestrian advisory go hand in hand in Massachusetts.

There are currently 85 active walking clubs in the Keep Moving program and the vision is to establish groups in all 351 Councils on Aging communities across Massachusetts. The walks generally take place in spring, summer, and fall seasons, occur weekly or monthly in each community, and are 1-3 miles in length. Each new community is required to send interested volunteers to a Keep Moving Walk Champion training, which provides them with the tools and resources they needed to lead a club.

In an exciting new development is a focused "Walk Advocacy" training for Keep Moving Walk Champions is offered through a partnership including WalkBoston and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Executive Director for the Keep Moving Fitness Program, Mary Kay Browne explains, "We want our walking community to better understand the built environment. We want them to help feed advocacy work locally. Our walkers are routinely taking to their communities by foot to run errands and for recreation and would be effective advocates for making places safer and more enjoyable for walking."

In 2014, the program launched their first annual "Go the Distance 1 Mile Walk Challenge," which involves a prepared kit with week-by-week goals, a public relations plan, poster templates, and raffle surprises. Mary Kay adds, "The walk champions pick the one mile route, advertise it, and organize a one day event. It's about celebration and having fun. It was a great success and we'll hope to do it every year!"

The Keep Moving Walking Club program occasionally awards stipends to clubs for additional promotion and walking group design, and some walking clubs have extra tools like maps that showcase community walking routes, amenities, practical destinations, and local business sponsors. Finally, there is a growing focus on indoor walking clubs (in tracks, gyms, and malls) to keep the activities moving year-round.

**Action Item:** Start thinking through the steps to start your own walking club! In Massachusetts? Be sure to get involved with a club nearby and consider signing-up for their next training!



*At the Center of it All*

- Founded: 1979
- Headquarters: Easthampton, MA
- Website: [www.mcoaonline.com](http://www.mcoaonline.com)
- Mission: The Massachusetts Association of Councils on Aging and Senior Center Directors, is a non-profit membership organization, whose mission is to support the independence of adults 60 and older by advocating for programs and services to meet their needs, promote the growth and quality of Councils on Aging and senior centers and strengthen the professional skills of Council on Aging staff.
- Walking as a Practice typology: Personal Health and Connection