A Year of Walking

America Walks and the Every Body Walk! Collaborative are excited about the great work carried out to date by our community partners as part of our first-ever round of micro grants awarded last year. The grants, issued in the wake of the U.S. Surgeon General’s Call to Action to get America walking, helped to fund an array of creative projects that are getting people moving. These range from walking maps to help people see the possibilities for walking in their neighborhoods to a campaign to get employers interested in the benefits of walking at the workplace to an initiative that gets patients walking as they wait for their medical appointments.

Response to our first call for proposals was inspiring. The ten funded projects were chosen from over 500 applications submitted from just about every part of the country. Interest in our second round of micro grants, announced earlier this month, has already surpassed that of last year.

Below is a sample of the great work being done by grantees to make America a great place to walk.

**Norwalk Health Department Maps Its Way to a Healthier Community**

The Norwalk Health Department in Norwalk, CT, along with AmeriCares Free Clinics, Inc. and other community partners, successfully updated and printed eight of the city’s NorWALKer walking route maps. These maps, available in print and online, include routes for more than a dozen locations across the city and range in distance from half a mile to 3 miles. In addition to walking routes, they feature information on the background of the location, special features and amenities, notes on vegetation in the area, and, where applicable, essential information about operating hours of parks and other venues.

In June, the city released its new maps at a launch party that raised awareness about the NorWALKer program and featured community walks using some of the redesigned route maps. The city next plans to launch a community-based walking program that makes use of the routes.

**Latino Kids Health Finds New Opportunities to Get People Moving**

The health center in Montebello, California implemented a “Walk While You Wait” program to encourage patients waiting around for medical appointments to use this time to go for a walk. These 30-minute walks are led twice each month by a health center staff member. Participants are offered water, motivational tips and information about the benefits of walking.

The program has attracted participation by patients of all ages and abilities and helped to raise awareness about the benefits of physical activity in preventing chronic disease in a community that suffers from a higher-than-average rate of obesity. The health center is currently planning a 5k community walk to reach a broader population with these messages.
Walla Walla County Department of Community Health Takes Steps for Empowerment

Volunteers in Walla Walla County, Washington, recruited 15 Latina women from a low-income neighborhood to participate in a walking club with the aim of increasing the physical activity of the women while helping empower them to bring about broader change in their neighborhood.

The group walks together multiple times each week for sessions ranging from 45 minutes to an hour, convening at a local track where they can be together even if walking at different paces and where their children can play at the center while their moms keep a watchful eye. The women have received incentives as enticement to keep up their activity, including digital pedometers, water bottles, t-shirts and refreshments and a pair of walking shoes for the winner of a recent steps competition.

Through a partnership with the local YMCA, the women, many of whom were interested in weight loss and health improvements, received baseline health and weight assessments and met with a trainer to discuss long-term fitness goals.

The health department also partnered with Walla Walla city’s Community Development Block Grant program to organize a walking audit in which walking club participants offered important feedback on housing issues in their community, along with concerns about lighting, stray dogs and sidewalks that might dampen interest in walking.

The Kanawha Coalition for Community Health Improvement (KCCHI) Gets Down to Business in West Virginia

Building upon the success of the Kanawha Coalition’s 2015 Take the Stairs Kanawha County! campaign, KCCHI launched a worksite training program to engage employees in encouraging more walking through a worksite training program that challenged employers to encourage walking at their workplaces and to become more educated on the benefits of walking to employers’ bottom lines.

As part of this project, KCCHI hosted a regional training attended by 11 area employers who were given resources on how to start walking groups at their offices, ways to improve the environment for walking and the benefits of walking. KCCHI next intends to give a prize for the companies that submit an action plan enumerating changes they want to make to make their workplaces more conducive to walking.