



Making it Better  
CREATING A HEALTHIER COMMUNITY TOGETHER

## Outreach Workers Promote Safety and Physical Activity at North Minneapolis Parks

**Did You Know?**

Your neighborhood park is a great way to get physical activity. Walk your dog, play on the playground with your kids, or join a sports team – there's something for everyone!



### Overview

For many people in Minneapolis, parks provide free open space for recreation and physical activity however, not all residents feel comfortable using their parks because of the perception that some are unsafe. In order to address the issue of safety as a barrier to neighborhood park usage, the Minneapolis Department of Health and Family Support (MDHFS), as part of the Communities Putting Prevention to Work initiative, partnered with the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) to hire a team of outreach workers at three North Minneapolis parks, an area of the city with high rates of poverty and violence, and low levels of physical activity.

Through a variety of activities and interactions, the outreach workers focused on engaging youth and adults around each park, connecting them to park programming and encouraging them to regularly visit their neighborhood parks for physical activity. Outreach workers also conducted surveys with neighborhood households near each park to learn more about their perceptions of safety and park usage. In addition to this direct outreach, MPRB offered five Family Festivals at the parks during the summer of 2011. These events were physical activity-focused and geared toward families and young children in order to attract people of a variety of ages to the parks.

## Results and Accomplishments

At the end of the project (October 2011), 70% of residents surveyed reported that they thought their parks were 'more safe' or 'about as safe' as last year. This number fell from a high of 93% of respondents in July 2011, possibly as a result of violence that occurred near some of the parks in late summer. Despite this, 52% reported using their parks either daily or weekly and surveys indicated that the parks were frequently used for physical activity – respondents most commonly reported using their parks for things like walking, playing sports, using the playgrounds, and swimming. In addition, the Family Festivals were well attended with over 200 people at each event and were successful in attracting a wider variety of ages to the parks.

## Synergies

According to the Prevention Institute's 2010 report, *Addressing the intersection: Preventing violence and promoting healthy eating and active living*, "Violence and fear of violence cause people to be less physically active and spend less time outdoors." This project highlights the importance of the intersection between violence prevention and obesity prevention: concerns about personal safety may prevent residents from using their parks for physical activity, biking and walking in their neighborhoods, or even accessing healthy foods at nearby stores and farmers markets. Obesity and violence prevention are ongoing priorities for both MDHFS and MPRB, and both agencies will continue to search for points of intersection in this work.

## Future Plans

MPRB places a high priority on ensuring that community residents see their neighborhood parks as safe and accessible. Increasing park use is an important element of increasing park safety. As future funding allows, park outreach workers will continue to be a visible presence at city parks, especially those in North Minneapolis, and in the community to help promote events and programs and to improve perceptions of safety.

Plan For additional Park Safety and Utilization reports and resources, please visit: [http://www.minneapolismn.gov/health/cppw/dhfs\\_parksafety](http://www.minneapolismn.gov/health/cppw/dhfs_parksafety)

For more information, contact:  
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