



As the Lerner Center for Public Health Promotion at Syracuse University developed the Monday Mile program, a community health initiative focusing on increased physical activity for Syracuse residents, they discovered that an important population from their community was missing: individuals with intellectual disabilities (ID). This realization in mind, the Lerner Center partnered with key organizations in their community and reached out to members of the disability community to redesign the Monday Mile program to be inclusive of people with disabilities, including ID. Now, the Monday Mile program serves the entire Syracuse community giving everyone the same opportunity to improve their health.

THE PROBLEM

There is a disconnect between the individuals who would most benefit from health resources and their ability to access them.

BACKGROUND

In 2012, the Lerner Center for Public Health Promotion at Syracuse University, with the support of the Syracuse Mayor and County Executive Offices, created the Monday Mile program to encourage residents to become more physically active and sustain healthy behaviors. The Center partnered with the Parks & Recreation Department to design one-mile walking routes in local parks in order to promote walking as a way of being physically active, and ultimately improve the health of the community.

One of the goals of the Center is to ensure that the programs it develops reflect the needs of the entire community, including individuals with intellectual disabilities (ID). Data collected suggested that there could be a positive health outcome for individuals with ID utilizing this program. As the result, the Center worked to address previous barriers to access to ensure that the updated program would be inclusive and representative of the whole of the Syracuse community.

SOLUTION

Following the realization - upon the prompting of a colleague to re-assess the programs accessibility - that the Monday Mile was not inclusive of those with ID, the Monday Mile program was updated in the following ways:

The Center formed a partnership with the Fitness Inclusion Network and State University of New York Cortland's Inclusive Recreation Resource Center (SUNY IRRC) to assist with making the Monday Mile more accessible. The SUNY IRRC developed an assessment tool that trained community members can use to measure inclusion and accessibility of recreational sites from various aspects such as physical, programmatic and social inclusion. This tool allowed parks partners to assess whether programming is designed to support people with ID and physical disabilities, and if their policies and operational procedures reflected the populations they serve.

Prior to mapping out routes and creating signage, the Center invited community residents from various settings (including community board meetings, parent teacher association meetings, and independent living centers) to ask for their input. The team conducted focus groups of individuals both with ID and physical disabilities to discover their preferences when it came to finding their way on the routes, the need of signage, and what information they wanted on the signs.

CHALLENGES

As is the case with designing and implementing any community health program, the team had to overcome certain challenges including:

- **Communication.** The Center continues to work on finding new ways to market this program to diverse audiences and to learn more about how people receive information, as well as the communication channels to which people are most receptive;
- **Measuring Impact.** The Center is working on creative ways to measure the impact of its program and inclusion on improving the health of all the residents in the community;
- **Accessibility.** Harsh winters create accessibility problems for the community, especially those with physical disabilities. However, the center is working with partners to consider all-weather locations to relieve this barrier.

BENEFITS

Since the introduction of the Monday Mile program, benefits to the greater Syracuse community have been substantial. Having created a program that is inclusive of those with ID has led to a happier, healthier, and better integrated community in whole. Without intentional inclusion, socially isolated members of the community can lead to a host of health issues for and a loss of community. The Monday Mile provides a resource for people to connect and foster community relationships.

Furthermore, becoming inclusive has had great benefits to the organization itself. The Center is now able to better connect with and understand the community it serves. Leah Moser, Assistant Director of the Lerner Center, notes “This [process] has been beneficial to us in giving us another perspective for how we approach our work. It has expanded our partnerships with other organizations in the community and given us a new lens through which to understand the public health challenges in our community.” As an inclusion champion, the Center looks forward to sharing their experiences with partners locally and nationally to advocate for new ways of working with inclusive communities.

One of the most surprising benefits was local organizations connecting with one another. The local organizations are involved through sharing information about the program to their networks and communities, and providing feedback to the Center on the program.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Engage the community.** The Center worked closely with people in the community to learn about where they were already exercising and being active.
- **Establish key partnerships.** The Parks department was an obvious partner, but the Center found unique perspective by partnering with non-traditional partners. Such organizations may bring up beneficial viewpoints that the team hadn’t previously considered.
- **Educate.** The Center has embedded inclusion training into the work of their graduate students to better prepare the next generation of public health professionals.
- **Reach out to diverse organizations.** Through its partnerships and connections, the Center found surprising advocates.
- **Sustainability.** The Center engaged communities about the sustainability of the program right from the start. They considered the full spectrum of possibilities from how the community promote the Monday Mile, to who would maintain the signs and how this aligned with other priorities they are addressing.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

More information about the Monday Mile can be found on their website.

The Monday Mile is also part of a larger national effort, the Monday Campaigns of which their Center's funder is the Founder & Chairman. Read more about the National Campaign.

Want to bring the Monday Mile to your community? Use the Monday Mile Tool Kit and the How to Create an Inclusive Walking Club

QUESTIONS?

If you are interested in learning more about this program or how you can apply some lessons learned to your own organization, please contact Leah Moser, Assistant Program Director at Lerner Center for Public Health Promotion, lemoser@maxwell.syr.edu.