

## **Charlottesville Active Living by Design Social Marketing Plan**

The Active Living by Design Partnership<sup>1</sup> in Charlottesville conducted qualitative research in the spring of 2005 to explore public perception and usage of Charlottesville public spaces for physical activity. The Partnership's goal is to determine ways to increase and enhance physical activity as a component of daily living for personal, health, environmental, or recreational reasons.

In March 2005 a professional qualitative researcher conducted a series of focus groups among adult residents of Quality Community Council (QCC) neighborhoods to better understand the factors that influence physical activity, use of public spaces and ways to promote active living in public spaces.

### ***Summary of Key Findings***

The Partnership found that those who engage in physical activity do so for the following reasons:

- Health: mental, physical, weight control
- Opportunity to socialize and be with friends, children, grandchildren
- Participation in a work-sponsored low-cost fitness program/facility
- Necessity, e.g. walk the dog, get to Downtown
- Pleasure

Those who did not engage in or enjoy physical activity cited the following reasons:

- Embarrassment (i.e. poor body image)
- Guilt (failed attempts to exercise or lose weight)
- Poor health
- Lack of time/competing demands or interests
- Negative perception of physical activity, i.e., not fun
- Limited personal experience with being active

Those who take advantage of public spaces, such as parks, identified the following attributes:

- Pride in parks/city
- Diverse programming
- Ability to be outdoors
- Accessibility by bus or car

Those who had negative perceptions of public spaces (particularly parks) mentioned the following:

- Safety concerns (e.g., poor lighting, pedestrian access, unleashed dogs)
- Lack of cleanliness/orderliness, especially in bathroom facilities
- Feeling encroached by outsiders/others who use neighborhood parks and pools for organized sports or classes.

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<sup>1</sup> Alliance for Community Choice in Transportation (ACCT), Charlottesville City Parks and Recreation (P&R), Martha Jefferson Hospital (MJH), Quality Community Council (QCC), Rivanna Trails Foundation (RTF), Thomas Jefferson Health District (TJHD)

Some participants enjoyed specific public spaces but did not associate them with physical activity; others were simply unfamiliar with different parks and public spaces, for instance, the Rivanna Trail.

### *Communication Campaign*

A Partnership objective was to develop a research-based communication campaign based on social marketing principals that promotes physical activity, especially in public spaces. While it initially targets residents of QCC and surrounding neighborhoods, the campaign has potential spillover to residents of other communities who either live, work, shop and/or recreate in the greater Charlottesville area.

We identified the following four goals for our communication campaign:

1. *Physical Activity is valued by the community*
2. *More people from targeted low-income neighborhoods increase their physical activity*
3. *Use of public spaces for physical activity increases*
4. *Public spaces are viewed as part of one cohesive system, linking our community and connecting destinations*

Given the list of influences and barriers identified through its research, the Partnership decided that all messages/visuals associated with a campaign should focus on positive reasons for being active that came directly from focus groups. In addition, it would meet the following criteria:

- Feature local residents of different ages, backgrounds, sizes
- Feature adults enjoying different types of physical activity
- Include a personalized message, not unlike a testimonial
- Feature local recognizable public spaces (e.g., city park, Rivanna Trail, school playground) as great places for activity *and* people-watching
- Inspire and challenge

Our initial concept to be tested is the “Why Do I....?” campaign. For, example, below the question, “Why Do I Walk?” one of the following answers would appear below a photo of a local resident(s) walking in a recognizable public space (e.g, park, Downtown Mall, Rivanna Trail):

- To be with my grandchild.
- To clear my mind
- To spend time with friends
- To control my weight
- To keep up with my dog
- To get out of the house
- To be a model for my kids
- Because it makes me feel good

This is followed by a tag line, (e.g., Move...and Shape Your Future”) and a logo. [See Appendix for mock-ups of idea]

This concept needs to be developed and field-tested on representatives of the same neighborhoods from which focus groups were derived to ensure that a multi-media campaign (e.g., bus cards, posters, flyers, TV ads, radio ads) would be memorable, clear and persuasive.

The tagline and logo will be used as the umbrella for any number of physical activity programs throughout the community and not just limited to this campaign. As we expand the partnership, we envision a wide range of agencies creating physical activity programs under one identity, significantly broadening our collective impact.

### ***Changes to Support Active Living***

Another objective of the qualitative research was to identify realistic changes that can be made to increase the appeal of public spaces based on identified needs. The following are suggested actions that Partners have committed to either explore or implement, as individual agencies/organizations or in collaboration with others.

1. To address embarrassment, guilt, lack of experience with physical activity:
  - Expand upon/replicate the “QCC Walks!” walking club to include routes that connect sidewalks with trails, parks, schools, and key destinations (QCC, ACCT)
  - Create and support a program to recruit and train neighborhood/church/social club leaders to facilitate and lead local walking groups (ACCT, QCC, P&R, RTF, TJHD)
2. To address health issues:
  - Classify programs as “fitness/health/wellness” in marketing materials (P&R)
  - Offer “post-rehab” and “gentle” programs, e.g., swimming (P&R, MJH)
  - Have on-site nurse available to health/wellness program participants (P&R)
3. To address safety fears and facility issues:
  - Conduct and publicize neighborhood walkability audits (ACCT, QCC)
  - Improve pedestrian safety at intersections (QCC)
  - Establish and promote buddy times through RideShare database (ACCT, RTF, P&R)
  - Increase “eyes on the street” (QCC)
  - Upgrade park bathroom facilities and their maintenance (P&R)
  - Develop outreach program to dog owners to encourage leashing of dogs (P&R)
  - Improve lighting and post # to call if problems – (P&R)
4. To increase appeal of, and familiarity with, public spaces:
  - Publicize when ball parks and pools are open to public; i.e., not programmed for organized sports or classes (P&R)
  - Increase signage, urban blazes and maps for routes/trails:
    - Within parks
    - Connecting parks and/or trails to sidewalks
    - Connecting public spaces and key destinations, e.g. Downtown Mall, UVA Corner (P&R, ACCT, RTF)
  - Add bird lookouts in parks/trails (RTF)
  - Create incentives to visit different parks and trails (P&R, RTF)

- Create customer amenities/features, e.g. healthy concession carts for walkers (P&R)

### **Greater Involvement**

Based on the qualitative research, the Partnership identified steps that can be taken to both “grow” the Partnership through involvement of other agencies or organizations, such as the YMCA, Police, Charlottesville City Schools, University of Virginia, etc. This will depend, in part, on future funding and feasibility/sustainability of ideas, which include:

- Publicizing all physical activity events and programs under the umbrella of the Active Living campaign (name/logo to be developed).
- Developing a clearinghouse of all local physical activity opportunities.
- Developing and/or promoting worksite walking programs and incentives.
- Developing physical activity prescriptions to be handed out by health care providers and clinics.