Incorporating Health Activities into the Friends of the Park Agenda: A Health Program Plan Framework

Hayley Hamilton

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ABSTRACT

Incorporating Health Activities into the Friends of the Park Agenda: A Health Program Plan Framework

By

Hayley Jeffers Hamilton

July 21, 2017

INTRODUCTION: Rates of chronic disease continue to increase every year, affecting one in every two U.S. adults. Healthy lifestyle behaviors can help prevent chronic disease. Parks have a vast opportunity to contribute to public health by providing places and resources for people to get active. Despite all the health opportunities that parks provide, research finds that park users do not entirely capitalize on the potential health benefits of parks because most park users participate in sedentary recreational activities. As a support system for their local park, established park organizations like Friends of the Park have the capacity to engage the community in health activities and improve the health of residents.

AIM: The Friends of the Park program is a network of park groups in Metro Atlanta that have a goal of improving their local parks and neighborhoods. The purpose of this capstone project was to create a framework for the Friends of the Park groups to utilize when looking to add health activities to their agenda.

METHODS: This project involved consulting Park Pride and Friends of the Park groups to build a health activity resource guide. A detailed literature review was completed, and meetings were held with each group to gain feedback on the framework.

RECOMMENDATIONS: 1) Park Pride should encourage Friends of the Park groups to incorporate new health activities into their agenda. 2) Park Pride should offer health activity grants to ease the burden of cost when considering new activities. 3) Park Pride should build on this program plan framework by collecting information from groups already participating in activities.

DISCUSSION: Friends of the Park groups have a wide variety of needs and populations, and therefore should choose health activities that interest members of the group and the surrounding community. These activities will serve to improve the health of the area and improve the social ties of the neighborhood, creating a better place to live for everyone.
Incorporating Health Activities into the Friends of the Park Agenda: A Health Program Plan Framework

by

Hayley J. Hamilton

B.S., University of Georgia

A Capstone Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia State University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH

ATLANTA, GEORGIA
30303
Incorporating Health Activities into Friends of the Park Agenda: A Health Program Plan Framework

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Author’s Statement Page

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Hayley Hamilton

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Project Overview

Local parks have the opportunity to partner with other businesses and organizations for the purpose of improving the health of neighborhood residents. Friends of the Park organizations serve a vital purpose in local parks by providing an opportunity for residents to get involved and enhance their neighborhood park (Park Pride, 2017). The Friends of the Park program is an organization of park groups in Metro Atlanta, led by local park users, community businesses and leaders that have a goal of bettering their local parks and neighborhoods. Part of their core philosophy includes shaping the health of area residents (Park Pride, 2017). However, not all Friends of the Park groups are engaged in health activities, and many do not have the resources to go about adding health activities into their agenda. The purpose of this capstone project was to create a framework for the Friends of the Park groups to utilize when looking to add health activities to their events as well as encouraging groups of the value of these opportunities. The project involved the help of three local Friends of the Park groups in Metro Atlanta, who graciously provided their feedback and assistance on shaping the health program framework. Going forward, Friends of the Park groups can utilize this guidance as a part of the group resources to help incorporate healthy activities into their schedules.
Identification of the Problem

More than two-thirds of adults and nearly one-fifth of all children in the United States are overweight or obese (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2016). Rates of preventable chronic disease such as heart disease, diabetes, stroke, and cancer continue to increase every year, with about one of every two adults currently having a type of chronic disease (Ward, Schiller & Goodman, 2012). Risk factors for obesity include poor dietary habits, sedentary lifestyles, food and physical activity environment and of lack of education and skills. Obesity can lead to poor mental health, reduced quality of life, and early mortality due to chronic disease.

One way that chronic disease can be prevented is through healthy lifestyle behaviors (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS], 2015). Increased physical activity can improve body weight, reduce the risk of disease, strengthen muscles, improve mental health and mood, and increase life expectancy (CDC, 2016). Children need at least one hour of physical activity per day, while CDC recommends that adults get 150 minutes of moderate intensity or 75 minutes of vigorous physical activity per week (CDC, 2015; HHS, 2015). Despite the known benefits of physical activity, most Americans do not get enough. Fewer than half of all Georgians reported getting the recommended minimum amount of physical activity, with 27.3% reporting no physical activity whatsoever (CDC, 2016). Out of high school aged students in Georgia, only one-quarter reported getting the recommended amount of physical activity per day, with only one-third participating in daily physical education class (CDC, 2016). While high rates of obesity exist among all Americans, a disproportionately large number of African American and Hispanic Americans are obese. Socioeconomic status also has an influence on obesity and chronic disease, with lower income individuals having higher rates of obesity (CDC, 2016).

Role of Parks in Physical Activity and Health

The Surgeon General and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have called for an increase in community strategies to help increase physical activity in people’s daily lives (HHS, 2015).
Parks have a vast opportunity to contribute to public health by providing places and resources for people to get active (National Park Service, 2013). Parks provide facilities for recreation, walking, sponsored physical activities, and gathering spots for social events (Han, Cohen, & McKenzie, 2013). Spending time outside has been associated with increased rates of physical activity, decreased blood pressure, lower risk of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and a reduction in BMI. (McCurdy et al., 2010; Pretty, Peacock, Sellens, & Griffin, 2005; Lee & Maheswaran, 2010; Lee, 2011). For people who live within a half mile of a neighborhood park, about 14% of their moderate exercise and 50% of their vigorous exercise happens in the park (Han, Cohen & McKenzie, 2013). One study found that creating new places for or increasing access to spaces for physical activity in combination with outreach led to a 48% increase in physical activity among participants (Kahn et al. and the Task Force on Preventative Services, 2002).

Parks provide a variety of opportunities to improve physical and mental health (Buchner & Gobster, 2007; Payne, Orsega-Smith, Roy, & Goodby, 2005; Ho, Payne, Orsega-Smith, & Godbey, 2003; Hoehner et al., 2010). Research has shown that park users have better health status than non-park users. People who frequent their local park have a greater positive association of well-being with visiting the park and tend to be in better physical health than individuals who did not regularly visit parks (Lemieux et al., 2015). With relatively few Americans having a health club membership (International Health, Racquet & Sportsclub Association [IHRSA], 2011), the park is an important venue for people to participate in physical activity, especially in lower-income communities. Parks provide a place for people to walk, and research shows that people with access to greenspaces are more likely to walk. (Cohen et al., 2006; Cohen et al., 2007; Li, Fisher, Brownson, & Bosworth, 2005; Giles-Corti et al., 2005). People who could easily access a park or open space had a 50% greater likelihood of sticking to a walking plan than those who did not have good park access (Institute at the Golden Gate, 2010).

The natural settings of parks help to reduce stress and improve mental health. A study found that older adults who performed physical activity at the park reported improved mood after visiting the park (Godbey & Blazey, 1983). Another study found that visiting the park reduced anxiety and sadness among
park users (More & Payne, 1978). Runners reported decreased stress levels and depression when they completed their activity in nature instead of an urban setting (Institute at the Golden Gate, 2010). Residents who have greenspace near their home were found to have less mental fatigue, procrastination, and improved dealings with life problems than those without (Kuo, 2001).

Parks provide a location for children to play, which helps them strengthen their muscles, increase coordination, language skills, and cognitive abilities (Gies, 2006). Parks contribute to increased social capital, which improves community relationships and satisfaction, reduces crime, and creates a sense of place for residents (Lee & Maheswaran, 2010; Maller, Townsend, Brown & St. Leger, 2002; Richardson & Parker, 2011). Social capital is one factor that helps reduce population health inequality, making parks a vital resource in reducing inequality (Hawe & Shiell, 2000). Children can spend time with their family and learn social norms among the community (Mozur, 2016). Parks also help create more stable neighborhoods and community interactions, which lead to healthier residents. People who live in areas with a shared greenspace tend to have stronger social ties (Gies, 2006). Parks can increase a community’s sense of “collective efficacy,” or the residents’ feelings of belonging, which in turn builds trust and increases safety in the neighborhood (Sampson & Raudenbush, 2001).

Despite all the health opportunities that parks provide, research finds that the potential health benefits of parks are not fully capitalized (Lemieux et al., 2012; Maller, Townsend, Pryor, Brown, & St. Leger, 2005; Maller, Henderson-Wilson, Pryor, Prosser, & Moore, 2008). Recent studies show that most park users participate in sedentary recreational activities rather than physical activities. Cohen et al. (2007) noted that parks have an excellent opportunity to facilitate physical activity, but that this is not often the case. Joseph and Maddock (2016) found that park users participated in moderate to vigorous physical activity about 35-46% of the time during their visit, with approximately the same percentage of park visitors participating in physical activity in total. Children were more likely to be engaged in physical activity at the park than adults (Joseph & Maddock, 2016). In a study looking at urban parks in Los Angeles, the two most common activities were sitting or picnicking (Cohen et al., 2007). Another study across 10,000 park users in two cities found that almost two-thirds of people were participating in
sedentary activity, one-quarter were walking, and 12% were partaking in vigorous exercise (Floyd, Spengler, Maddock, Gobster & Suau, 2008). Children were about five times more likely to be engaging in vigorous activity than adults (Floyd et al., 2008).

The Trust for Public Land noted that the existence of a park does not necessarily lead to a healthier population and that many parks are not serving their purpose of increasing the health of their communities (Harnick and Welle, 2011). The research found that parks are not offering enough variety and choices for activity. They observed that adding a variety of facilities and spaces to the park can appeal to people with different skills and interests. The authors also noted the importance of advertising and marketing for activities, and how partnerships with private businesses can help ease the burden of cost for these measures (Harnick and Welle, 2011).

Han et al. (2015) observed a pilot program for free exercise classes in local parks. The results showed that offering the classes increased physical activity among park users. Without the classes, physical activity remained consistently low, indicating a need for more organized active programming (Han et al., 2015). The study demonstrated a two to three times increase in activity during the same time of day when these classes were taking place (Han et al., 2015). A study by Cohen et al. (2009) found that decreases in programming led to a significant decline in physical activity and park use, despite park facility improvements. These findings suggest that programming has a greater influence on physical activity than the state of the facilities. The Department of Health and Human Services reported that new research indicated that parks which provide more outreach activities and signage tend to have an increase in physical activity (Cohen et al., 2013).

In a study related to barriers to urban park use, Jackson (1996) found that participants preferred the option of the park “providing more activities” as a method of reducing barriers to park use, rather than options like facility improvement. Cohen et al. (2007) found that people were more likely to use specific facilities (i.e. basketball courts or baseball diamond) when organized and supervised activities were provided, indicating a need for more formalized activities. Overall, park use was significantly lower than
the capacity of the park, and the study demonstrated that advertising more events and activities could draw more people in to visit the park (Cohen et al., 2007).

**Community Diversity in Park Interaction**

Parks provide low- or no-cost recreational facilities for communities, making them an environmental factor in reducing health disparities among low-income populations (Tester & Baker, 2009). Obesity, diabetes, asthma and other chronic diseases are linked to physical inactivity, and these diseases disproportionately affect people of color and low socioeconomic status (Razani, Meade, Schudel, Johnson, & Long, 2015; Sallis, Story, & Lou, 2009).

These populations are less likely to report park use, and activity participation rates are impacted by demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. A study by Burk, Shinew, and Stodolska (2011) discovered that Latinos participate in less leisure-time physical activity at parks than other populations. However, a study of urban parks in Los Angeles found that low-income residents considered the park to be their go to place for exercise, with only a small percentage reporting the use of health clubs (Cohen et al., 2007). While residents believed that parks were their go to location for exercise, few people were participating in physical activity. Respondents suggested there was a need for more adult and youth sports, as well as improved walking paths to encourage more physical activity (Cohen et al., 2007).

Women, minorities, and older adults are less likely to be park users (Cordell, McDonald, & Teasley, 1999). A systematic review by Joseph and Maddock (2016) found that women and men were equally likely to visit the park, but men were more likely to participate in moderate to vigorous physical activity, indicating that women participate in more sedentary behavior at the park. In low-income minority communities in Los Angeles, there was a gender disparity in park use, with significantly more boys than girls participating in various physical activities (Cohen et al., 2007). This study also demonstrated the need for more opportunities for women to participate in exercise while also taking care of their children (Cohen et al., 2007).
Joseph and Maddock (2016) found that adults were more likely to use the park than children, but children were more likely to participate in physical activity. There was a very low prevalence of older adult presence at all parks studied, which suggests that older adults do not find as much value in parks as a means of physical activity (Joseph & Maddock, 2016). Cohen et al. (2007) found that the presence of a senior center near the park significantly increased the number of seniors in the park, suggesting a need for specialized programs or incentives for seniors.

Community Parks can provide targeted health activities for various populations to serve the purpose of improving the health of their residents. However, not all parks have the infrastructure or resources to provide health activities to the neighborhood. As a support system for their local park, established park organizations present an opportunity to engage the community in health activities and improve the health of residents.

Current Methods and Interventions to Address this Problem

Parks and recreation organizations across the United States have become more aware of the role that they play in better the health of their population. Different groups across the country have started a significant number of programs that seek to improve the physical and mental health of area residents. The following section outlines a few of the programs already in place and describes the goals and mission of their activities.

"Healthy Parks, Healthy People U.S."

In 2011, the U.S. National Park Service [NPS] introduced a strategic action plan called “Healthy Parks, Healthy People U.S.” The plan is described as “a global movement that harnesses the power of parks and public lands in contributing to a healthy civil society” (NPS, 2017). The purpose of the project was to evaluate the role that the National Park Service could play in health promotion and well-being of U.S. residents, as well as to create infrastructure and a strategy for health promotion. The movement has a goal of reframing parks and public land as a tool for improving health among Americans (NPS, 2017).
The plan introduces partnerships among parks and local organizations to promote health at these locations (NPS, 2017).

“Shape Up NYC”

The New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, in partnership with the New York Department of Health started the fitness initiative “Shape Up NYC,” which used exercise to promote healthy lifestyles and self-esteem. Local fitness professionals host a variety of classes in nearby parks and facilities belonging to New York City Housing Authority (Harnick & Welle, 2011). The classes are free to the public, no registration is necessary, and there are program locations all across the five boroughs (New York City [NYC] Parks, 2011). This program helps to reduce barriers to physical activity among low-income populations and promotes social opportunities for physical activity across New York City (NYC Parks, 2011).

“Play Mobile”

The City of Atlanta Department of Parks and Recreation in partnership with The Coca-Cola company introduced the “Play Mobile” in May 2017 (City of Atlanta, 2017). The Play Mobile is a van that travels to local area parks without recreation centers to offer free play for youth. The three-hour session includes activities such as fitness demos, games, arts & crafts, oversized board games, and non-traditional sports. The Play Mobile helps promote physical activity by bringing no-cost health programming to local parks (City of Atlanta, 2017).

“Park Prescriptions”

The goal of the Park Prescriptions movement is to create a stronger connection and partnership with parks and the healthcare system to improve the health of people across the U.S. (Institute at the Golden Gate, 2010). Despite the known evidence of the benefits of regular exercise, only 14% of healthcare providers reported giving regular exercise recommendations to their patients. The movement encourages physicians and other healthcare providers to introduce physical activity at local parks as a
method of prevention or treatment for various health issues that are the result of sedentary lifestyles and unhealthy diets (Institute at the Golden Gate, 2010). The goal is to not only increase physical activity among patients but also to increase public park usage and increase funding sources for public lands. Providers across the country are committing to the park prescription program, and even some insurance companies have committed to giving patients reimbursements for visiting the park (Institute at the Golden Gate, 2010).

“Get Moving Seattle”

Seattle Parks and Recreation created the “Get Moving” initiative, that funds and supports community-based obesity and active living programs through reimbursable grants (Seattle Parks and Recreation, 2016). The organization gives grants to local non-profits, small business, and community groups that provide opportunities for innovative and culturally relevant activities that promote physical fitness in underserved communities with a goal of decreasing health disparities. Grants awarded featured a wide variety of classes including cultural dance programs, goalball (a sport for the blind and visually impaired), ultimate frisbee games, and family fitness classes (Seattle Parks and Recreation, 2016).

“GirlTrek”

Girl Trek is a national non-profit public health organization that promotes walking among African American women and girls (GirlTrek, 2017). The organization uses walking as a method to encourage women to get more active in their daily lives. The members are also involved in local health policy actions to improve the built environment, access to safe walking locations, increase physical activity, and environmental protection. The members use the organization as an opportunity to get community members involved in advocacy efforts while leading a “civil rights-inspired health movement” (GirlTrek, 2017). They currently have over 100,000 women who have pledged to walk once per week and encourage their local community members to join them. They have a goal of reaching one million African American women by 2018 (GirlTrek, 2017).
“Green Gyms”

Green Gyms are a program based on the concept of using outdoor physical work to get light to vigorous physical activity, including trail-maintenance, gardening, conservation, and other nature-based activities (The Conservation Volunteers, 2017). Led by volunteers, the program is promoted as an opportunity for social activity, skill-building, and improving the local community (Institute at the Golden Gate, 2010). There are more than 100 green gyms across the United Kingdom, with local governments funding some of the programs. Local primary care providers and other healthcare industry practitioners are often strong advocates for the program, helping start and maintain the programs in their areas (Institute at the Golden Gate, 2010).
Friends of the Park Organizations

Friends of the Park groups are an organization of over 100 community park, greenspace, and trail groups in the City of Atlanta and DeKalb County (Park Pride, 2017). Friends of the Park groups are managed by Park Pride, a nonprofit organization that promotes the importance of neighborhood parks through greenspace advocacy, education, park design and park improvements. Formerly known as the Adopt-a-Park program, the Friends of the Park program was established in 2007 when parks across Atlanta identified the need for additional support for park maintenance (Ayanna Williams, personal communication, June 13, 2017). These groups now serve the purpose of strengthening neighborhood parks and communities by engaging individuals in local park development, beautification, and social activities (Park Pride, 2017). Each group includes members of park users as well as a leadership team containing volunteers that manage their group.

Groups may be involved in a wide variety of projects including park cleanup, park improvement, social events, and more. Board members must engage the community to recruit members, volunteers, and host activities (Park Pride, 2017). Groups are eligible for grants through Park Pride specifically for park improvement, tree planting, and community gardens. Park Pride provides material support for beautification projects and play equipment and will help with the setup of community gardens. Friends of the Park groups often fundraise for projects, but outside of the aforementioned grants are not given specific money to operate (Park Pride, 2017). Therefore, any purchases or events require the need for partnerships, fundraising, and sponsorships to provide financial support. Friends of the Park’s philosophy states that parks are a place to encourage mental and physical health (Park Pride, 2017). Some Friends of the Park groups already have established health programs in their agenda, but most groups are not engaged in specific health activities, indicating significant opportunity to extend in that direction.

Friends of the Park Groups Involved in the Project
During this project, I had the opportunity to engage with three Friends of the Park groups in Metro Atlanta. The goal in choosing these groups was to include a diverse set of opinions on incorporating health activities in the Friends of the Park agenda. Each of the groups consulted had a different population makeup as well as widely different park facilities, providing unique ideas on how to go about creating my health program plan framework. Below I have outlined background information and demographic data about each Friends of the Park group involved in the project.

The Friends of Collier Heights Park group was formed in 2007 by two local community members, Mrs. Harris and Mrs. Turner (R. Harris, personal communication, May 18, 2017). Collier Heights Park is located on the Westside of the City of Atlanta in the area of Collier Heights, where the I-285 and I-20 W meet. The surrounding neighborhood (Census Tract 13121008202) is 96.4% African-American, with 30.3% of residents under 19, 18.3% 20-34, 10.2% 35-44, 24.6% 45-64 and 16.6% 65 and up. The median household income of $27,346 (Neighborhood Nexus, 2016). The park is primarily used for recreation, school sports, the playground, and social events. Collier Heights Park is within walking distance of the local elementary school and is a focal point of the community with its shade, large trees, and outdoor space (R. Harris, personal communication, May 18, 2017). The Friends of Collier Heights group has planted trees, built community gardens, and added an exercise equipment trail to the park. These projects were funded through various grants. The group is partnered with Walmart and the YWCA to host a diabetes education class, and Wayfield food store has provided resources for various activities in the past. The park receives some funding from the City of Atlanta, but the rest of their activities and events are funded through grants and fundraising from Park Pride and the local community (R. Harris, personal communication, May 18, 2017).

The Friends of Briarlake Forest Park group was formed in 2015 by a group of neighbors (J. Hayden, personal communication, May 23, 2017). Briarlake Forest Park is located in DeKalb County, southwest of the intersection I-285 and I-85 N. The neighborhood (Census Tract 1308902170) surrounding the park has a population that is 84.3% white, more than half the population age 45 and
older, and the median income is $129,783 (Neighborhood Nexus, 2016). The Friends of Briarlake Forest Park was formed after the Briarlake Forest Alliance was able to convince DeKalb County to designate the area as park land. The land was proposed to be developed for new housing, but the community fought to preserve the large trees and area as a greenspace and to alleviate local flooding concerns (J. Hayden, personal communication, May 23, 2017). Today, the park features several miles of trails, a large forest containing many “old growth” trees, a volleyball/badminton net, and a historical house that is used for events. The park is home to a wealth of natural wildlife. Children love to play on the large fallen tree in the heart of the park, as well as utilize the community chest full of items for free play, such as soccer balls, croquet sets, and more (J. Hayden, personal communication, May 23, 2017). The Friends of Briarlake Forest Park have a vision for the park to remain in its natural state, foregoing more developed plans such as playgrounds, concrete paths, and organized sports facilities. The park’s master plan includes ADA compliant paths surrounding the park lawn, as well as removing ivy and other invasive species to finish up several additional sections of trail. The park currently receives funding from DeKalb County, Park Pride grants, and through community fundraising (J. Hayden, personal communication, May 23, 2017).

The Friends of Little Nancy Creek Park group was formed in 2008 (A. Wilke, personal communication, May 26, 2017). Little Nancy Creek Park is a small but quaint park in the heart of historic Brookhaven/North Buckhead, where the community consists of affluent families and working professionals (A. Wilke, personal communication, May 26, 2017). The neighborhood (Census Tract 13121010002) surrounding the park includes a majority white population (85.8%) with approximately 59% of residents above the age of 35 (Neighborhood Nexus, 2016). However, just south of the park there a small concentration of people aged 20-35 who are renters (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The average income of the area is around $150,599 (Neighborhood Nexus, 2016). Much like Briarlake Forest Park, the land for the park was set to become a new housing development, but neighbors and the North Buckhead Civic Association identified the land as a conservation site in 2006. The City of Atlanta purchased the
land for Little Nancy Creek Park in 2008, and they broke ground on the property in 2011 (Little Nancy Creek Park, 2017). The park includes a playground, small walking trail, tetherball poles, a large open field, and access to the Little Nancy Creek, where children often like to play. The Friends of the Park group is very active in hosting social events and activities like concerts, family fun days, and more (A. Wilke, personal communication, May 26, 2017). The park draws in visitors from all around the area because of the lack of direct access to other parks. The Friends of Little Nancy Creek group receives funding through Park Pride, the City of Atlanta, and independent community fundraisers (A. Wilke, personal communication, May 26, 2017).

Table 1. Overview of Selected Friends of the Park Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Name</th>
<th>Year Group Formed</th>
<th>Name of Park Served</th>
<th>Surrounding Neighborhood</th>
<th>Park Amenities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friends of Collier Heights Park</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Collier Heights Park</td>
<td>Collier Heights, Adamsville</td>
<td>Tennis Courts, Basketball Court, Baseball/Football fields, Playground, Life Trail, Pavilion, Recreation Center, Community Gardens</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Area Map of Park
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Friends of Briarlake Forest Park</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>Briarlake Forest Park</th>
<th>The Ponderosa/Northlake Mall Area</th>
<th>Soft walking trails, benches, climbing tree, community chest, lawn area, volleyball/badminton net, picnic tables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friends of Little Nancy Creek Park</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Little Nancy Creek Park</td>
<td>Historic Brookhaven, North Buckhead</td>
<td>Walking trail, tether ball pole, exercise equipment, large lawn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Neighborhoods Near Selected Parks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Park Name</th>
<th>Median Income</th>
<th>Age Percentage</th>
<th>Race Makeup</th>
<th>Parks &amp; Recreation Access Level (% of residents living with ¼ mile of facilities)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Little Nancy Creek Park (Buckhead Census Tract 13121010002)</td>
<td>$150,599</td>
<td>24.2% under 19</td>
<td>85.8% White</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>18.6% 20-34</td>
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<td>14.7% 35-44</td>
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<td></td>
<td>28% 45-64</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>14.5% 65+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Briarlake Forest Park (NE DeKalb Census Tract 1308902170)</td>
<td>$129,783</td>
<td>24% under 19</td>
<td>84.3% White</td>
<td>Not reported</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7% 20-34</td>
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<td>24.3% 65+</td>
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Methodology

To complete this project, I first contacted Park Pride, the umbrella organization for the Friends of the Park network. I reached out to Ayanna Williams, the Director of Community Building at Park Pride for permission to seek out various Friends of the Park groups. I asked Ayanna for suggestions regarding which groups would be best to contact, express a desire to reach out to a diverse set of parks. After being granted permission, I contacted each of the groups and inquired about meeting with them to gain feedback on the program plan framework. I completed a literature review of evidence-based data on the health benefits of park use and park activities. During the first month of the project, I held meetings with each group as well as toured the facilities of the different parks. The meetings consisted of anywhere from one to five Friends of the Park board members and lasted from thirty minutes to three hours. During these meetings, I asked a set of questions about each group and their activities (Appendix A). I recorded each conversation so that I could refer back to the responses as needed, as well as taking typed notes on the conversation. I toured the park and took pictures to document the environment and facilities of each location (Appendix C). Additionally, I spoke with Ayanna Williams to gather feedback on her ideas for Friends of the Park groups as a whole.

After the first meeting, I gathered information to put together a preliminary framework to share with the Friends of the Park Groups. After putting together the plan, I shared it with each of the consulted groups to gain feedback on the draft. Groups suggestions included adding an intro and table of contents. Groups recommended adding plenty of detail but keeping it brief. They also suggested adding ideas that
focused more on mental health, as well as improving the aesthetic of the guide. After getting feedback on the health program plan framework draft, I edited the plan to reflect the recommended changes. I added a cover page, intro, table of contents, and improved the aesthetic. I also reordered the activities based on what were the most sought after and included a few additional activities including “Green Gyms,” which focused more on mental health. Once the program plan framework was finalized, I put the plan into a template with color and graphics to increase interest in the product. I shared the product with Ayanna Williams for use on the Park Pride website.
Friends of the Park
Health Activity Resource Guide
2017

Created by Hayley Hamilton, M.P.H. Candidate ’17, Georgia State University
Welcome to the Friends of the Park Health Activity Resource Guide!

We all can play a role in improving the health of our communities. Friends of the Park groups provide a unique opportunity to bring together local community members, leaders, and businesses to build a better park and neighborhood. This health activity resource guide gives your Friends of the Park group the tools it needs to bring new health activities to your park. Because each group is different, this guide gives each group the freedom to choose activities that will interest and benefit their community the most. Together, we can build a better future for our families by getting more active, spending more time in nature, and improving our local neighborhood. Let your Friends of the Park group be a part of the movement to create a healthier community for everyone!
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Why should my Friends of the Park group incorporate health activities into their agenda?

Physical activity is an important way to help maintain health. Being active helps control your weight, reduce your risk of chronic disease, strengthen your bones and muscles, boost your mental health and mood, increase your life-expectancy, and improve your quality of life. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that adults get 150-minutes of moderate-intensity or 75-minutes of vigorous-intensity physical activity every week. Children should get at least 60 minutes per day. Even with all the known health benefits, less than half of all Americans get the recommend amount of physical activity, with more than one-quarter of adults in Georgia getting no physical activity at all.

Parks have a vast opportunity to contribute to public health by providing places and resources for people to get active. Spending time outside has been associated with increased rates of physical activity, decreased blood pressure, lower risk of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and a reduction in BMI. Parks that provide outreach activities tend to have an increase in physical activity among users. Despite these findings, studies show that communities do not take advantage of the potential health benefits of parks.

By being a part of the national movement to integrate park use and healthy activities, your Friends of the Park group has a significant opportunity to improve physical health, mental health and increase social ties of your neighborhood and community. Join us!

How to Use this Health Program Plan

- Your Friends of the Park group should use this guidance as a springboard for incorporating health activities into your agenda.
- Make it your own! Utilize the “How to Determine the Needs of Your Community” and “Best Practices when choosing an activity” section to figure out which programs are best for your Friends of the Park group.
- Branch off from one of the suggested activities- use the guidance to create your own ideas. Make sure to share them with other groups!

How to Determine the Needs of Your Community

- As each Friends of the Park groups is diverse in their location, community, and vision, the types of health activities that are best for each group are equally different. You should consider these questions when thinking about what types of activities would fit your group best:
  - **What is the population makeup of your local community?**
    - Example: Families with children, seniors, single young adults, etc.
  - **What activities would be a good fit for your park’s facilities?**
    - Example: Trail suitable for a walking club, large lawn ideal for a yoga class, community gardens for a gardening club, etc.
  - **What are the most common health-promoting activities that already take place at my park?**
• **Example:** Sports, walking, free play, exercise classes, etc.

• **What are the most popular health activities in your community currently?**
  - Example: Recreational sports, group fitness, walking, running, dancing, gardening, etc.

• **What are the community perceptions of how your park impacts health?**
  - Example: The community uses the park mostly for socializing; the community uses the park mostly for walking; the community uses the park mostly for children to play on the playground.

• **What resources do you have to implement these activities?**
  - Do you have funding to start new activities?
  - Is it necessary to fundraise for new activities?
  - Are there grants available for your group to support a particular activity?

• **How realistic is it for your group to organize this activity?**
  - Example: There are many local health clubs in the area surrounding your park, so starting a group fitness class would be fairly simple.
  - Example: A walking/running club would not work for your park because the trail is overgrown or there are safety concerns.

• **What partnerships does your group already have that could help you implement health activities?**
  - Example: Your group has worked with a local grocery store in the past; they might be willing to provide food if you host cooking classes.

• **What local partnerships would be easiest for your group to form?**
  - Example: One of your board members teaches yoga at a local studio; she might be interested in getting her studio to offer free classes in exchange for marketing the business.
  - Example: Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta has partnered with you for a children’s field day in the past; they might be a good fit to lead health education classes in the future.
  - Example: Your local doctor serves most of our community and is a regular park-user. He/she might be interested in starting a “Walk with a Doc” program to help promote physical activity and his practice.

• **What gaps in health activities are there in your community?**
  - Example: Your park has a set of tennis courts, and people want to learn how to play, but they are often not used because there are no organized clinics or matches.

• **What barriers does my group face in adding health activities to the agenda?**
  - **Heavy Traffic**
    - Does your park experience heavy traffic around the park that could make it inaccessible at certain times of day?
    - Does heavy traffic around the area create danger for park users?
  - **Safety Concerns**
    - What are the perceptions of crime in the area around my park?
    - Are there personal safety concerns related to using the park?
  - **Wildlife Concerns**
    - Is there any wildlife that could create a hindrance to health activities?
      - Example: Insects, snakes, stray animals, etc.
  - **Financial Constraints**
Example: The cost of permits for a class or activity.

**Best Practices When Choosing an Activity**

- **Gather feedback from local community members. You may wish to contact one or more of the following:**
  - Have your Friends of the Park Leadership team members narrow down their top 3-5 choices for health activities by consulting the section on “How to determine the needs of your Community.”
  - Hold an open Friends of the Park community meeting to ask neighbors which of the 3-5 activities would interest them.
  - Conduct a survey of Friends of the Park members or local neighbors to gather feedback on their top choices.
  - Conduct informal surveys by asking park visitors or community members in which activities would they be most interested.
- **Reach out to the appropriate organizers or partners to determine the feasibility of the program.**
  - Negotiate what each party would gain from the partnership.
  - Make sure that all necessary parties are on board with the idea before making a final decision.
  - Make sure the necessary permissions or permits are available for the activity.

**Planning and Implementing Your Chosen Health Activity**

- **Create a tentative plan for the activity/program.**
  - Start planning the specific details of the activity:
    - How often will the activity take place?
    - Who will lead the activity?
    - Who is in charge of ongoing communications for the activity?
    - How much will it cost to implement the activity?
    - What are the goals and objectives of the activity?
- **Establish funding for the chosen activity.**
  - Is funding available for the activity?
  - Will the activity require grants or fundraisers to take place?
    - If yes, make sure the funding is secure before proceeding with the program plan.
    - If applicable, determine how finances will be exchanged between parties.
- **Obtain any required permissions or permits from the Parks Department.**
- **Start spreading the word about the activity.**
  - Use email blasts, your Friends of the Park group’s website, social media channels, flyers, word of mouth, and other types of marketing to make sure everyone knows about the upcoming class, activity, or event.
- **Create a plan for ongoing marketing if necessary.**
  - Will marketing be handled by the Friends of the Park group or the partner organization?
- **Start the program/activity!**
  - Maintain ongoing marketing and communications about the program/activity.
  - Address any changes or needs for improvement.
After the program/activity ends, ask for feedback on the program.
- Determine the program attendance.
- Ask for verbal feedback on the satisfaction of the activity/program.
- If applicable, send out a post-program survey about the program/activity.

About the Health Activities Idea Bank

- This idea bank includes a list of activities that have been used by different park groups or that groups have suggested as potential opportunities for new health programs.
- A variety of Friends of the Parks group in Metro Atlanta provided feedback for this document. The goal of the plan was to include activities for a wide variety of Friend’s groups with varying populations, communities, locations, resources and needs.
- The idea bank is not an exhaustive list. Use this idea bank as a starting block for creating your own ideas. Share your ideas with other Friends of the Park group!

Health Activity Idea Bank

- Host a Walking Group at Your Park
  - Identify a local community member or leader that would be a good fit to lead the program.
  - Ask them to host a weekly walking group.
  - For this group, you can choose to target a specific population (i.e. seniors), or you can leave it open to anyone.
  - **Unique Walking Club Ideas:**
    - Host a Bird Walk with the Audubon Society
      - Does your park have lots of bird wildlife? Consider hosting a Bird Walk!
      - Atlanta Website: https://www.atlantaaudubon.org/field-trips
      - Contact the Audubon Society to ask if they will host a Bird Walk at your park.
    - Start a Dog-Walking Club
      - Is your park popular among dog walkers? Start a dog-walking club! Club members will come together to walk their dogs on a designated time/day. This event could also include socialization time for the dogs (especially if your park has a dog park) and/or playtime for children.
    - Start a Dog Walker Watch Program
      - National Website: https://natw.org/dog
      - A Dog Walker Watch is similar to a neighborhood watch program. The Dog Walker Watch program utilizes neighborhood dog walkers to be an extra set of eyes for local law enforcements officials. The program strengthens ties between law enforcement and the community while creating more awareness about neighborhood safety concerns.

• Use the program as an opportunity to keep an eye on the park as well as the neighborhood.

**Host a Nature Walk**
- Does your park have lots of trees, plants, and animals? Host a nature walk!
- Find a neighbor or environmentalist who is aware of the area resources that can lead the walk. Consider asking a local nature organization or university professor to host the walk.

**Host a Walk with A Doc Event**
- National Website: [http://walkwithadoc.org/](http://walkwithadoc.org/)
- Reach out to a local doctor and find out if they would be interested in hosting a “Walk with a Doc” program. During each session, a local doctor gives a short presentation on a health topic and then leads the participants on a walk.
- Share your goals of getting your community more physically active and aware of health issues.
- Plan a date/time for the walks - once a month is typically a good fit for this type of program.

**Start a GirlTrek Pledge**
- Organizational Website: [http://www.girltrek.org/](http://www.girltrek.org/)
- Start a local pledge! Girl Trek is a non-profit public health organization that promotes walking among African American women and girls. The organization uses walking as a method to encourage women to get more active in their daily lives.
- Invite community members to commit to walking in the park every Saturday morning. Expand the walking club to more days per week as interest increases.
- GirlTrek uses the walking club as a springboard for local policy efforts for physical activity, the environment, and safety. Expand the role of the walking club as the group grows.

**Partner with a Local Health Club to Host Fitness Classes at the Park**
- Local health clubs are an excellent partner for Friends of the Park groups because they can provide a service, while your group provides them with marketing. Another option is to seek out an independent fitness professional in your area.
  - First identify what type of classes fits your park population best: Is it Yoga? Boot camp? Pilates?
  - Second, identify which local health clubs or fitness professionals would be the best fit for a partnership. Does a member of your Friends’ group attend a particular gym that they love? Does someone in your neighborhood teach fitness classes?
  - Next, reach out to the management of identified health club or the independent fitness professional. Explain to them your goal of bringing fitness classes to the park in exchange for promotion.
  - Come up with a plan for how often/when/where the classes will take place. Come up with a plan for how your Friends of the Park group will promote the club.
- Spread the word through FOP and local communication channels. Make sure to include the health club’s or professional’s name in any communications.
- Hold the class! Make sure to get feedback on the trainer, classes, and the success of the program.

**Hold a Community Step Challenge**
- Set up a step challenge here: [https://stridekick.com/](https://stridekick.com/)
- Promote a step challenge! Challenge community members to complete a certain number of steps at the park in one month.
- Come up with creative giveaways for winners including Friends of the Park t-shirts, towels, water bottles, or more!

**Host a Walking Challenge with Nearby Friends of the Parks Groups**
- Set up a step challenge here: [https://stridekick.com/](https://stridekick.com/)
- Partner with other local Friends of the Park groups for a walking challenge.
- See which park group can post the most steps in a month!
- Each group contributes money or prizes to a pot, and the winning park gets to keep them!

**Host Health Education Class at the Park Led by Doctor or Health Educator**
- Is there a topic that is relevant to your local community such as weight loss, diabetes prevention/management, nutrition, or other ideas that could help benefit the people in your area? Reach out to a local doctor and see if they will hold an educational class at the park.
  - First, identify what topics would be best suited for your community.
  - Second, identify a local doctor, dietician, or health educator who would be available to teach the class. Insurances companies like Aetna or Kaiser Permanente often have community outreach programs and might be able to assist in finding an instructor.
    - Word of mouth for local doctors works well for finding the right person for the job. Just ask your community for names of their favorite providers.
    - Negotiate the partnership with the provider. Will they be paid through donations? Will they get free promotion for their practice? Come up with a way to thank them for their time.
  - Build activities and healthy behaviors into the class to make it more interactive.

**Host a Family Fun Day or Field Day**
- Family Fun Days and Field Days are a great way to get the whole family active!
- Park Pride will loan out a variety of play packages for different events. These packages include items such as hula-hoops, parachutes, potato sacks, tug of war ropes, flag football sets, Frisbees, soccer balls, disc golf sets, ring toss, basketballs, cones, stopwatches, and more. Visit their website for more information on your options for borrowing equipment.

**Hold Sports Activities at the Park**
- Does your park have fields that would work for particular sports? Enhance health-promoting activities in your area by creating neighborhood sports leagues!
• Host a Run Club at the Park led by Local Running or Outdoor/Athletic Store
  o Do you have a local running or outdoor/athletic store in your area? Do you have a good trail/neighborhood for a run? Reach out to management about the possibility of a regular walking/running club.
    ▪ Specialty Running Stores in Atlanta:
      • Big Peach Running Company, Bigpeachrunningco.com
      • Phidippides: Phidippides.com
      • Highland Runners: Highlandrunners.com
      • Road Runner Sports: Roadrunnersports.com
      • West Stride Running Store: Weststride.com
      • Fleet Feet Atlanta: Fleetfeetatlanta.com
    ▪ Outfitters Stores in Atlanta:
      • Mountain High Outfitters: mountainhighoutfitters.com
      • High Country Outfitters: highcountryoutfitters.com
      • REI: rei.com
      • Lululemon: lululemon.com
  o Choose a time that works best for your community- is it Saturday morning, weekday evenings? Make sure you choose a time that will draw the greatest crowd.
  o Draw up a partnership agreement with the retailer. Allow them to share promotional materials at each club event.
• Host a SilverSneakers Program in Your Recreation Center
  o National Website: https://www.silversneakers.com/learn/community-fitness/
  o Does your community have a lot of seniors? Do seniors need more opportunity and encouragement for activity? Does your park have a recreation center? Consider hosting a SilverSneakers Flex program! Bringing the classes closer to home will help get seniors in your community more active.
  o Contact Silver Sneakers to inquire about bringing classes to your recreation center.
  o Many Medicare plans qualify their members for free SilverSneakers programming. The program includes a variety of group fitness classes designed for Seniors.20
• Partner with Local Schools for Outdoor Activities at the Park
  o Partner with local schools to promote park use. Consider getting the school to host their activities at the park.
    ▪ Outdoor Classrooms
      • Talk to administrators about having science classes use the park for hands-on class experiences.
    ▪ School Festivals
      • Host school festivals in the park. Use the event as a fundraiser for the school and the Friends group.
    ▪ Field Day
      • Do you have a large field at the park? Encourage the school to host their field day at the park.
    ▪ Afterschool Programs
• Is the park close to the school? Encourage the school to host afterschool programs at the park.
  ▪ Sports Programs
    • If you park has the appropriate facilities, encourage the school to use the park for school sports programs.

• Create a Community Chest for Free Play
  o Fundraise or ask for donations for a community chest! A community chest is a box of items that encourage park users to be physically active. These items could include soccer balls, baseball/softball bats and gloves, tennis rackets and balls, croquet sets, Frisbees, footballs, volleyball, badminton racquets and birdies, and many more.
    o The chest is open and available to any park users at all times.
    o The group should monitor the chest regularly, and make sure to remove items that are broken or worn out.

• Create a Fitness Zone at Your Park
  o Fundraise for an outdoor gym! Fitness zones are a simple and accessible gravity and resistance weight system that can help promote general health through bodyweight exercise. Equipment is made for the outdoors and durable as well as theft resistant, as it is bolted to the ground. It is made for all people age 13 or older with any level of fitness.  
    o Learn more about The Trust for Public Land’s program here:  
      https://www.tpl.org/our-work/fitness-zone-area%C2%AE#sm.001in31rlcrdhey71026211ipp7ibd

• Invest in Senior Playgrounds for the Park
  o For more information: https://seniorplanet.org/playgrounds-for-seniors/
  o Do you have a large senior population in your community? Fundraise for senior playground equipment for your park!
  o Senior playgrounds include low-impact exercise equipment designed for seniors that are made to be fun and help keep them active.
  o Create a designated area in the park for the senior playground.

• Start a Park Hop Challenge with Nearby Parks
  o Park Hop example: https://livewellgreenville.org/parkhop/
  o Partner with other local parks to do a park hop challenge. Park Hop is a program where local community members’ complete different activities at multiple parks in the area. The goal is to fill up all the activities on the card.
  o Participants who complete the park hop challenge can win prizes!

• Host a Local Neighborhood Competition
  o Are there several large subdivisions that your park serves? Have a neighborhood challenge!
  o Get the different neighborhoods to compete in a variety of activities such as numbers of miles logged at the park, number of park visits, and more.
  o Award prizes to the top winners in each category.

• Promote Park Prescriptions among Local Providers
  o National Website: http://www.parkrx.org/
  o Get your local doctors to commit to writing park prescriptions for your park! Park Prescriptions is a movement of healthcare providers committed to recommending
physical activity at nearby parks and public lands as a method of disease prevention and treatment.\(^5\)

- Visit your local doctor or reach out to them via phone or email. Let them know about how your Friends of the Park group is interested in increasing physical activity and park usage among residents.
- Ask them if they are familiar with the park prescription movements, and share information with them if necessary. There are databases that help doctors locate appropriate parks. Inquire with ParkRx to see if your park is in the database.

- **Host a Health Expo**
  - Host a health expo or host health vendors at your park!
  - Invite vendors from local area retailers, providers, and other health organizations to come to the health expo.
  - Encourage the vendors to host a variety of events throughout the day including classes, walks, runs, cooking demonstrations, massages, and more.
  - Since planning a health expo can be rather time-consuming, considering requesting support from a local health insurance company, provider, or hospital for planning and funding purposes.

- **Start a Green Gym at Your Park**
  - Organizational Website (UK): [https://www.tcv.org.uk/](https://www.tcv.org.uk/)
  - Green Gyms are local programs that allow members to get physically active through a variety of tasks including gardening, trail maintenance, conservation, and other nature-based activities.\(^2^2\) If your park has a community garden or needs environmental improvements, this is an excellent opportunity to improve the park while helping your community get physically active.
  - The program involves regular events that are volunteer-led and adjusted based on the needs of your park location.

- **Bring Soccer in the Streets to Your Park**
  - Atlanta Website: [http://www.soccerstreetsatl.org/](http://www.soccerstreetsatl.org/)
  - Soccer in the Streets aims to provide access to soccer for all children regardless of race, gender, religion or socio-economic status. Their programs empower children through soccer, mentorship, employment programs, and character development programs.\(^2^1\)
  - Does your park have playing fields or a large lawn that is appropriate for soccer? Consider reaching out to Soccer in the Streets. Teams play their games at local parks and community centers. Invite the organization to partner with your Friends of the Park group. Make sure to gain permission from the City or County before starting a program at your park.

- **Host a Swimming or Water Aerobics Program**
  - Does your recreation center have a pool? Consider hosting a swimming program or water aerobics program!
  - Partner with a local health club or swim club to host classes led by a professional coach.

- **Competitive Geocaching**
  - Host a race that involves navigating and collecting items hidden in the park! Racers use GPS or other navigational techniques to locate hidden containers called “geocaches.” Racers collect prizes as they play!
  - Get more information here: [https://www.geocaching.com/play](https://www.geocaching.com/play)
- **Host a Running Race**
  - Partner with a non-profit or local running store to host a running event at your park.

- **Host a Cooking Class**
  - Does your park have a recreation center with a kitchen? Consider hosting healthy cooking classes!
  - Find a local community member or registered dietician to teach the class. The class can be held demonstration-style (the leader cooks for everyone) or as hands-on format (class members cook the meal themselves).
  - Reach out to local grocery stores, food vendors, or community farmer’s markets to ask if they will donate food items for the classes.

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**Resources for Park Improvement**

- **Community Park Audit Tool**
  - This tool helps parks identify the community’s needs and desires for the park, primarily related to the environment and facilities.\(^6\)

- **National Park and Recreation’s Commit to Health Resources**
  - NPRA has created a campaign that encourages parks and recreation sites to join a national movement for increasing physical activity opportunities, improving food access, and connecting children to nature.\(^16\)

- **The Friends of Briarlake Forest Park Survey on Park Usage**
  - The Friends of Briarlake Forest Park have created and disseminated a survey about various aspects of park use. They have made this survey available for other groups to modify and send out to their group.\(^23\)

- **Tennessee Department of Health Youth Run Club Toolkit**
  - The Tennessee Department of Health has put together a toolkit for those interested in creating a youth run club. Not all material will be relevant to your Friend’s group, but the document provides many helpful resources for starting a run club.

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**Keeping Track of Progress and Challenges**

- **Send feedback to Park Pride about activities your Friends of the Park group has added to their agenda.**
  - Share details about funding, implementing the program, how the program is going, etc.
- **Evaluate Community Organizations/Partners**
  - Share information about your experience working with partner organizations. Help other groups determine which partners would be a good fit for their activity.

- **Update the health activity idea bank as new activities are created**
  - Share details with Park Pride so they can keep the document updated.
Discussion

The purpose of this capstone project was to create a health program plan framework for Friends of the Park groups in Metro Atlanta. The plan will serve as a resource guide for the groups to use when thinking about adding health activities to their agenda. The goal of this plan is to encourage and increase health activities among local communities in Atlanta. To develop this plan, I engaged with several Friends of the Park groups with diverse populations, communities, and goals. Each Friends of the Park group has a specific vision and mission for the group, and those vary widely from one group to another. Some groups are already engaged in health activities, while others have focused their efforts on park maintenance, beautification, or social events. These activities are an important and key part of the Friends of the Park group’s work. When speaking with the different groups, some expressed more hesitation with the idea of incorporating health activities into their agenda than others. Reasons include physical, financial, and time barriers. The plan involved a holistic approach to planning health activities including methods to mitigate some of the barriers while providing activity ideas that take a variety of needs and populations into consideration. Most of the activities selected required no costs for the Friends of the Park group but involved partnerships with other businesses and organizations in providing financial support for the activities.

With the prevalence of chronic disease, obesity, and sedentary lifestyle habits in the United States today, it is important to engage groups such as Friends of the Park in encouraging them to expand their activities to include more health programs. Groups who have a focus on park upgrades, maintenance, and beautification can incorporate their efforts with health by implementing activities such as Green Gyms, where program members use gardening and ground maintenance as a form of light to moderate exercise. Groups that tend towards more social activities can find ways to introduce health activities with a social aspect, such a group fitness classes, dog walking club, children’s field days and more. It is critical that Friends of the Park groups choose health activities that not only interest members of the group but also the surrounding community.
Parks provide a unique opportunity to engage local neighborhoods in health activities that are conveniently located, low- or no-cost, and create social ties for the park community. By getting Friends of the Park group involved in health activities, it will serve to improve the health of the area and improve the social ties of the neighborhood. Strong social ties among the community promote safer, more stable neighborhoods leading to a better place to live for everyone.

**Recommendations**

Based on a review of the research and consulting with various Friends of the Park groups, the following recommendations should be considered by Park Pride:

- Because of the significant burden of chronic disease and obesity in Metro Atlanta, Park Pride should encourage Friends of the Park groups to consider incorporating new health activities into their agenda or plans. While Park Pride prefers to let Friend's groups take the lead on what direction they will go, the organization should consider the long-term benefits of encouraging healthy activities when guiding their direction. New activities will draw in a broader base of community members, thereby strengthening the parks, neighborhoods, and organization as a whole.

- Park Pride should consider developing a program of health activity grants to ease the burden of cost when considering new activities. As the groups become more established in these activities, new Friends of the Park members can help contribute to increased funding for group programs and events, thereby establishing new funding pools for the groups.

- Park Pride should build on this program plan framework by collecting information from previous groups' successful activities and sharing it with other groups. Duplicating activities and programs will help minimize the effort required by each group, increasing the chances of more groups getting involved.
To implement these recommendations, here are specific actions Park Pride should complete:

- Share the Health Activity Resource Guide with Friends of the Park groups through the website and via email. Educate the groups on the need for more health activities and how getting involved can benefit their group and community.
- Bring this idea to the Park Pride Board to inquire about adding new grant opportunities for Friends of the Park groups.
- Create an online tool or survey for groups to share about their activities with details about partnerships, funding, implementation, and success.

Friends of the Park groups are volunteer based and work with limited resources. These two details put a large strain on the groups' time and ability to start new activities and programs. Therefore, a vital part of the success of implementing new programs comes down to new funding opportunities, partnerships, and support. Other non-profit or local business organizations can provide support for both funding and help ease the burden of time when planning activities. Local health departments can utilize grant opportunities to assist with creating new park programming with Friends of the Park groups. Park Pride can also support the groups by offering new grants and creating resources to prevent duplication of efforts. It is also key for groups to find activities that they are passionate about and where they are willing to devote their time.

Conclusions

Friends of the Park groups serve an integral role in the fabric of local Metro Atlanta parks. These groups include a passionate group of members who are devoting their time, efforts, and resources to bettering their local park and community. By improving neighborhood parks, these groups help strengthen community ties, improve safety conditions, and provide an outlet for neighbors to get out in nature and be active.
While most people view the park as a place to exercise and be active, in reality this is not often the case. Sedentary activities and socializing are by far the most common event taking place at local parks. Parks provide people with an incredible opportunity to get physically active through a variety of infrastructure including sports and recreation, trails, and more.

To help ease the burden of chronic disease and obesity in the Metro Atlanta area, Park Pride and Friends of the Park groups can play a role by incorporating health activities into their agenda. Partnerships with other organizations and businesses will give groups the opportunity to bring new activities to their park. The Health Program Plan Framework is a guide for Friends of the Park groups to establish these new activities. The tool provides a resource for groups to use to help groups decide what activities would be best for their group, what opportunities are available, and how to go about starting the programs. This resource can be built upon with more detailed information as groups begin to engage in these activities, so that it becomes a more streamlined effort for the Friends of the Park network.
References


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Appendices

Appendix A - Questions from FOP Meetings

Questions Asked

- How long has the park been around?
- When was your group formed?
- What types of facilities does the park have?
- What types of activities do park visitors tend to take part in?
- What do you think is the most popular reason for visiting your park?
- Share with me a little bit about the neighborhood and residents surrounding the park.
- What types or groups of people tend to frequent the park most often?
- How far does the average park visitor typically travel to get to the park?
- What type of transportation does the average person typically use to get to the park?
- Are there any organized health activities already taking place at the park?
- What health activities are most popular in your neighborhood?
- What are park visitors and neighbors’ perceptions of the health impact of the park currently?
- What types or groups of people tend to frequent the park most often?
- How far does the average park visitor typically travel to get to the park?
- What type of transportation does the average person typically use to get to the park?
- Are there any organized health activities already taking place at the park?
- What health activities are most popular in your neighborhood?
- What health activities do you feel would most appeal to park visitors?
- What health activities would be think would be easiest to implement at your park?
- What health activities do you believe would be difficult to implement at your park?
- Does your Friends group have partnerships with other organizations?
- What local partnerships can you foresee being created for organized health activities?
- What is your vision for the park?
- Does you park have a master plan? If so, does the plan include anything specifics about improving the health of the community?

Interview Answers from Friends of the Park Groups

Friends of Collier Heights Park - R. Harris (Board President) and R. Turner (Board Member)

- How long has the park been around?
  - Forty or more years, no one knows exactly.
- When was your group formed?
- What types of facilities does the park have?
  - Life trail (exercise stations), pavilion, basketball court, baseball field, tennis courts, playground, community gardens, recreation center, kitchen, walking trail.
- What types of activities do park visitors tend to take part in?
  - Mostly families and children come to play on the playground. The park is near an elementary school so children come over after school.
- What do you think is the most popular reason for visiting your park?
  - Playground and recreational sports.
- What types or groups of people tend to frequent the park most often?
  - Families, teenagers, and young children.
- How far does the average park visitor typically travel to get to the park?
  - Within a couple miles.
- What type of transportation does the average person typically use to get to the park?
  - Walk or drive.
- Are there any organized health activities already taking place at the park?
  - Recreational sports and diabetes educational program.
- What health activities are most popular in your neighborhood?
  - Recreational sports
• What are park visitors and neighbors’ perceptions of the health impact of the park currently?
  • Spend time in nature, enjoy the shade
• What types of organized health activities do you feel would most appeal to park visitors?
  • Tennis for children, increased diabetes education
• What health activities would you think would be easiest to implement at your park?
  • Walking club, exercise club
• What health activities do you believe would be difficult to implement at your park?
  • Cooking class
• Does your Friends group have partnerships with other organizations?
  • Park Pride, Wayfield Foods for special events, Walmart/YWCA for the diabetes education program, Milner Foundation
• Does your park have a master plan? If so, does the plan include anything specifics about improving the health of the community?
  • Yes, plan to expand recreation center for education room. Increase community gardens.

**Friends of Briarlake Forest Park**

Jessie Hayden (Board President), John Steward (Safety, Health, and Wellness Co-Chair), Chuck Van Horn (Grounds, Trails, and Maintenance Co-Chair), and Margo Reynolds (Grounds, Trails, and Maintenance Co-Chair).

• When was your group formed?
  • August 2015
• What types of facilities does the park have?
  • 1.5 miles of blazed trails, mostly flat terrain, rolling hills, dirt w/mulch. House w/lawn area, no playground, volleyball/badminton net, community chest
• Share with me a little bit about the neighborhood and residents surrounding the park.
  • Affluent neighborhood, kids watched but not supervised
• What health activities are most popular in your neighborhood?
  • Walking by far most popular activity, dog walkers
• What types or groups of people tend to frequent the park most often?
  • 35-65 most common age group
• Does your park have a master plan? If so, does the plan include anything specifics about improving the health of the community?
  • Senior Playgrounds, Phase 1 priority program-ADA path around meadow
• What are park visitors and neighbors’ perceptions of the health impact of the park currently?
  • Value to the greywater infrastructure, Ecological guiding principles
• Are there any organized health activities already taking place at the park?
  • Workdays, earth day celebration, STEM education
• What types of organized health activities do you feel would most appeal to park visitors?
• What health activities would you think would be easiest to implement at your park?
  • No motivated health activities
  • Ideas for possible health activities:
    • Like Walk with a Doc
    • Content- walk in the park, track mileage, post on Facebook page
    • Giveaways
    • Challenge with other small neighborhood parks
    • Scavenger hunt to the various parks
      • T-shirts with various park names
    • Croquet clinic for the kids
    • Emory Environmental Health Center
    • Neighborhood competition
    • Qigong
Friends of the Park Health Program Framework

- Yoga by Miriam, LaVista Yoga
- Tree Climbing Clinic
- Health Expo

- What type of transportation does the average person typically use to get to the park?
  - Most people walk to the park, within .5-1 mile
- What health activities do you believe would be difficult to implement at your park?
  - Organized sports
- Does your Friends group have partnerships with other organizations?
  - Briarlake Elementary School
- What local partnerships can you foresee being created for organized health activities?
  - Partnerships with local businesses
- Where do you get your financial resources for your Friends of the Park Activities?
  - Park Pride, County, Fundraising

Friends of Little Nancy Creek Park - Anne Wilke (Board President)

- How long has the park been around?
  - Park built 2007, empty greenspace, worried what would happen
- When was your group formed?
  - Friends group
- What types of facilities does the park have?
  - Walking trail, creek, open field, fitness trail with exercise stations (donated by CHOA), tether ball poles
- What types of activities do park visitors tend to take part in?
  - Walking, playing on the playground, children playing in the creek
- What do you think is the most popular reason for visiting your park?
  - Spending time with family, get fresh air
- Share with me a little bit about the neighborhood and residents surrounding the park.
  - More affluent neighborhood
- What types or groups of people tend to frequent the park most often?
  - People of all ages- playground are a big draw, teenagers, parents, grandparents, on average of dads/moms with young kids. All sorts of different ethnicities/languages including Chinese/Spanish/eastern European.
- How far does the average park visitor typically travel to get to the park?
  - Estimated within few mile radius of park. No other significant parks close- Chastain park the closest.
- What type of transportation does the average person typically use to get to the park?
  - Most people drive to park because lack of sidewalks and bike lanes.
- Are there any organized health activities already taking place at the park?
  - Not really health activities but we have concerts, Easter egg hunt. End of school party-tug of war, horse shoe, jumping bags
- What health activities are most popular in your neighborhood?
  - Common health activities- Walking/running strollers/running with kids on bicycle, soccer very popular in area
- What are park visitors and neighbors’ perceptions of the health impact of the park currently?
  - People don't necessarily view as a place to exercise- quarter mile trail too short for running, opportunity to get out and enjoy fresh air.
- What types of organized health activities do you feel would most appeal to park visitors?
  - Activities that would appeal for park visitors- ultimate Frisbee, boot camp with exercise stations
- What health activities do you believe would be difficult to implement at your park?
  - Run club (trail too short), baseball, softball, anything that requires a lot of space
• Does your Friends group have partnerships with other organizations?
  o Park Pride- ongoing relationship
• What local partnerships can you foresee being created for organized health activities?
  o The park has been used by CHOA, Sarah Smith Elementary School, Wieuca Baptist Church, and Publix for different events. We might be able to partner with them for different things.
• What is your vision for the park?
  o Currently in the process of updating our Park Pride visioning plan. Park users would love to have bathrooms. Next to playground is perfect spot for splash pad.

Park Pride- Ayanna Williams (Director of Community Building)
• When was the first FOP of the park group started?
  • In 2007, the adopt-a-park- 2007 program converted to Friends of the Park. Adopt-a-park still exists for smaller parks with no maintenance. Friends of the Park includes mostly neighborhood parks.
• Do you anticipate new FOP groups to start in the near future?
  • There is a regular lifecycle of FOP groups. Some years are more active, others are less active, but we assist somewhere between 80-100 groups every year.
• Are there any commonalities you find among FOP groups?
  • The most common things we find are maintenance issues, issues that need city/county funding, and a budget that is constantly competing with fire, police, and city officials. Budget cuts tend to hit parks first. There are three main reasons groups form- maintenance, physical improvement, and bringing positive activity into the park. Groups are all community driven, I help them get community consensus.
• Among parks with FOP groups, what types of activities do park visitors tend to take part in?
  • Work days and family fun days.
• Among parks with FOP groups, what organized health activities are already taking place at some of the parks?
  • There are groups doing community gardening, nature walks, bird watching, Walk with a Doc, walking clubs (especially for seniors & women), yoga in the park, organized sports (Frisbee, kickball, soccer in the streets), and water aerobics classes at the park's pool. We have had lots of requests for exercise stations and playgrounds.
• Among parks with FOP groups, what do you think are the perceptions of the health impact of parks currently?
  • People see the park as a place where people can engage in healthy activities. Communities becoming more aware of mental health and the benefits of natural places. They can provide programming for people who may not be comfortable or used to be in those type of places [parks]. New exercise stations and playgrounds provides spaces for movement. People are generally more aware of health issues than they used to be, but people don't want to it to seem like work, they want to be active while having fun.
• Among parks with FOP groups, what types of organized health activities do you feel would most appeal to park visitors?
  • Partner with groups that do dance and group fitness, or other organized activities. These activities require professionals and equipment which can be harder to obtain.
• Among parks with FOP groups, what health activities would be think would be easiest to implement at those parks?
  • Walking clubs, walking activities, trail walk, bird walk (with the Audubon society), yoga walks.
  • Family fun days- hula hoops, tug of war ropes, parachutes, sack races
  • Dog walking club (dog walk or watch- neighborhood watch group)
- Among parks with FOP groups, what health activities do you believe would be difficult to implement at your park?
  - Organized group fitness and sports, requires more coordination and money. Historic Fourth Ward Park already offers free classes. Many parks have informal agreements for classes.
- What are the most common types of partnership (besides Park Pride) that FOP groups have?
  - Most will partner with their local neighborhood association.
- What is your vision for FOP groups?
  - I am working on helping the groups to have annual goals that they can identify and share with their community and elected officials.
- Do the FOP group future plans include anything specifics about improving the health of the community?
  - If health is something that the groups want to focus on, we try to make opportunities available- we go in the direction that they lead us.
Appendix B - Briarlake Forest Park Survey

Briarlake Forest Park Survey 2017

Q1 Please complete the following short survey about your experience with the Briarlake Forest Park, which is a new DeKalb County park on Briarlake Road, between Amberwood Drive and LaVista Road. Please note that the questions are referring to your usual visits to the park over the past 12 months.

Q2 Over the past 12 months, have you visited the Briarlake Forest Park?

☐ Yes (1)
☐ No (2)
☐ Uncertain (don't recall or have not heard of the park) (3)

*If No Is Selected, Then Skip to Q16, we would like a little information about you. If Uncertain (don't recall or have not heard of the park) Is Selected, Then Skip to Q16, we would like a little information about you.*

Q3 When was your most recent visit to Briarlake Forest Park?

☐ Within the past 7 days (1)
☐ Within the past 8-30 days (2)
☐ Within the past 1 to 3 months (3)
☐ Longer than the past 3 months (4)
☐ I cannot recall when I last visited (5)

Q4 During typical weeks, how often do you visit the Briarlake Forest Park?

☐ 1 or 2 times (1)
☐ 3 or 4 times (2)
☐ 5 or 6 times (3)
☐ 7 or more times (4)
☐ I visit infrequently (less than once per week on average) (5)

Q5 During your typical visit to the Briarlake Forest Park, how much time do you spend in the park?

☐ Less than 15 minutes (1)
☐ 15 to just under 30 minutes (2)
☐ 30 to just under 60 minutes (3)
☐ 60 minutes or longer (4)
Q6 What kind of activities do you participate in when you visit the park? Check all that apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Frequently/always (1)</th>
<th>Sometimes (2)</th>
<th>Never/rarely (3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Walking, jogging, or running</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreational activities (games, etc)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social or entertainment events</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work on the park</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Exploring nature</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sitting, relaxing, meditating</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Other activity (write in)</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q7 Do you agree with this statement? During my visits to the Briarlake Forest Park, I feel safe and not threatened.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Somewhat agree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat disagree (4)
- Strongly disagree (5)

Q8 Based on your experience going to or from the park, please identify your safety concerns about the park or the route to or from the park, if any. (choose all that apply)

- I do not have any safety concerns about going to or from the park. (11)
- Traffic on Briarlake Road (1)
- Traffic on the side streets (2)
- Street lighting (4)
- Sidewalk condition (5)
- Street intersections (9)
- Litter, debris, trash (22)
- Entrance to the park (10)
- Vehicle parking (6)
- Stray animals (3)
- Personal crime (7)
- Other (8) ____________________
Q9 Based on your experience within the park, please identify your safety concerns, if any. (choose all that apply)

- I do not have any safety concerns within the park. (1)
- Trails (2)
- Trees (3)
- Plants (4)
- Stray animals (5)
- Steep slopes/ravines (9)
- Litter, debris, trash (6)
- Signage/finding one's way (7)
- The house in the park (8)
- Parking for vehicles (12)
- Parking for bicycles (13)
- Personal crime (11)
- Other (10) ____________________

Q10 In your opinion, how likely is it that the park has been a positive impact on your health?

- Extremely likely (1)
- Somewhat likely (2)
- Neither likely nor unlikely (3)
- Somewhat unlikely (4)
- Extremely unlikely (5)

Q11 Please describe any changes in your health or in health-related behavior that you believe to be related to Briarlake Forest Park (over the past 12 months).

Q12 When you visit the park, do you have another person or a pet with you? Check all that apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequently/always (1)</th>
<th>Sometimes (2)</th>
<th>Never/rarely (3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child or children (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spouse/partner (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Other family member (3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friend (4)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Exercise partner (5)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher (6)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pet (e.g., dog) (7)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other (8)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I visit by myself (9)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q14 How do you get to the Briarlake Forest Park? Check all that apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode of Transportation</th>
<th>Frequently/always (1)</th>
<th>Sometimes (2)</th>
<th>Never/rarely (3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motor vehicle (3)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walk, jog, or run (1)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bicycle (4)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheelchair (2)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Motorcycle or scooter (5)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MARTA (6)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (7)</td>
<td>✓</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Q15 For your usual way of getting to the park, how long does it take you to travel one way to the park (in minutes)?

We would like a little information about you, please.

Q16 What is your age

- Under 18 (13)
- 18 - 24 (14)
- 25 - 34 (15)
- 35 - 44 (16)
- 45 - 54 (17)
- 55 - 64 (18)
- 65 - 74 (19)
- 85 or older (21)
Q17 What is your gender?
- Female (1)
- Male (2)
- Other/prefer not to share (3)

Q18 What street do you live on?

Q19 What is the cross street nearest to you?

Q20 To what extent do you feel informed about the Briarlake Forest Park (activities, events, natural features, work on improvement to the park, Friends of the Park group, etc.)?
- I feel extremely well informed. (1)
- I feel reasonably well informed. (2)
- I feel somewhat well informed. (3)
- I feel somewhat uninformed. (4)
- I feel very uninformed. (5)

Q21 Is there anything else that you would like to share with the Friends of Briarlake Forest Park about your experience in or around the park?
Appendix C - Photos from Park Visits

Collier Heights Park
Briarlake Forest Park