

Improving Health by Increasing Parks Utilization and  
Reducing Public Perception of Crime  
Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission &  
Public Health-Dayton & Montgomery County  
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## Executive Summary

**Parks within the City of Dayton are, on average, 63% safer than the rest of the City of Dayton as a whole.** With this, we also know that the closer to a neighborhood park, the lesser the crime rate (Littlejohn, vii). In addition, there is a lack of utilization of parks, believed to be derived from a negative public perception of crime within parks among the public. In order to get people out in parks, this perception must be reversed and city parks seen as positive spaces.

**Park programming, community policing and outreach and park design must be focused on in order to elevate levels of physical activity within Dayton.** Park programming is often viewed as the most effective method of increasing parks utilization, and it makes sense. Citizens will be more motivated to get out to their neighborhood parks if there is an activity that themselves or their children want to participate in.

**Community members must have an active voice in implementing each recommendation contained within this report.** An underlying theme in every recommendation is that the community voice is a **must** have when determining how to best implement the following measures. If community members and stakeholders are not included and even sought out, any program or initiative implemented risks reducing its effectiveness, or even becoming useless in addressing the issue that is was implemented to address.

**A culture of physical activity must be cultivated.** With the technological boom that we are experiencing, it is easy to sit inside and play video games or browse Facebook. In order to maximize effectiveness of any strategies implemented, there must be a culture of physical activity and we must make every effort to enhance equitable access to physical activity opportunities Even more than that, we must make it easy to choose physical activity.

## Recommendations for Action

- 1. Work with Dayton PD to implement a Community Engagement Task Force.** Once the task force has been formed, Community Engagement meetings should be scheduled in order to provide a mechanism to gauge community member's concerns. This mechanism should be utilized to gather public concerns on Dayton parks and work with community members to develop strategies to alleviate those fears. While Dayton Police do have a myriad of initiatives aimed at garnering public opinion, the creation of a task force specifically aimed at collecting citizen's concerns on crime and perceptions of crime will serve to better allow Dayton to address its problems with negative perceptions of crime. By staffing a task force with officers who volunteer for assignment to the task force, the officers will be engaged in their work and will make a positive impact on the communities that they are serving through the task force. In addition, the implementation of this mechanism will allow for a police-citizen dialogue specifically on safety within Dayton parks.
- 2. Increase prevalence of walking loops in Dayton parks.** The term walking loops is generally used to describe a walking path or loop that becomes its own destination (for the purposes of walking, jogging, bike riding, etc.) within a park. According to a national study of parks done by Deborah Cohen, the availability of a walking loop can increase park utilization by up to 80% when compared with parks that do not have walking loops (Cohen, 2017). Walking loops generally are six feet or wider, and can often times follow the path around other park attractions such as a gymnasium or a set of baseball diamonds. They also should have markings for distances traveled, and should be in an area that is free of isolating features such as dense trees or shrubs so that large sight lines can be

maintained. The benefits of walking loops are two-fold; first, they provide a specific destination for physical activity, and second, the development of walking loops will increase the number of park users, which contributes to feelings of public safety and decreases negative perceptions of crime.

3. **Collaborate with outside organizations to develop park programming.** It is no secret that parks with programming will attract more users than those that do not. It is also no secret that Dayton is a city rich in culture. Dayton should collaborate with the resources that are already here in Dayton to mobilize those organizations into neighborhood parks and to sponsor various activities (dance clinics, sports classes, Zumba, movie nights, etc.). Many of the neighborhood parks in Dayton do not have the recreation opportunities of the larger parks, such as pools, gymnasiums and sports fields, and therefore must increase availability of other opportunities, to enhance public perceptions of parks and get community members into their parks.

4. **Enhance the ability of neighborhood associations to activate parks in their neighborhoods.** Neighborhood associations are seen as the driving force behind many activities that get people out into their neighborhoods and their communities. While there are many active neighborhood associations in Dayton, many of them simply do not have the resources that they need to that they can use to activate their neighborhoods. Increasing the availability of resources to neighborhood associations in Dayton will allow them the ability to bring back some of the events that have been shuttered in the past due to a lack of resources during the recession. Events like block parties and family festivals are effective in getting people active in their neighborhoods are not only effective in Dayton, but have been shown to be effective in other places as well, such as Minneapolis,

Minnesota with the StreetReach Program that was successful in mobilizing people into their parks through the use of volunteers to enhance awareness of community events. If you have additional questions, please contact Cody at [smith.1739@wright.edu](mailto:smith.1739@wright.edu)

## **Background**

The Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission (MVRPC) has teamed with Public Health-Dayton and Montgomery County (PHDMC), as well as enlisted the help of a consultant that is currently a Master of Public Administration student at Wright State University, to develop a matrix of evidence-based strategies for decreasing negative public perceptions of crime in parks and the areas surrounding neighborhood parks, as well as increasing park utilization. MVRPC and PHDMC are studying strategies to reduce negative public perceptions of crime, as they believe that these negative perceptions are a hindrance to park usage and in turn, resident's activity levels.

Under Goal 1 of PHDMC's Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP), PHDMC's key measure for this study is to increase the percent of adults who reported doing any physical activity/exercise during the past 30 days (other than at work) by 10% (PHDMC, 2017). MVRPC and PHDMC are exploring strategies to increase park utilization as a part of the CHIP and believe that developing a matrix of best-practices will assist in achieving this goal.

This project builds off of a study done previously by Jeff Littlejohn assessing crime rates within the City of Dayton and its parks. This findings of these studies are primarily applied to the West Dayton, Jefferson Township and Trotwood portions of the Dayton region.

The research focuses on strategies that have been implemented in other metropolitan areas to understand the research designs used, the goals of the strategies, and the outcomes taken

from them in order to determine what best-practices can be successfully implemented within the City of Dayton. The Littlejohn study presented evidence that crime data in parks within Dayton is below crime levels for the City of Dayton as a whole (Littlejohn, vii), with the exception of Wesleyan Metro park. This study utilizes a combination of research done on best-practices and their implementation on a nationwide scale, and interviews with City of Dayton officials to develop a matrix of strategies for possible implementation within the City of Dayton. Upon completion of the matrix of strategies, interviews will be conducted with key City personnel to determine how to best implement the strategies in Dayton, as well as work to overcome any barriers to implementation that may exist. The initial research design used for this project focused on strategies to reduce negative public perceptions of crime in parks; however, during the course of gathering information on this topic it was concluded that some strategies may not be applicable for implementation in the parks themselves (such as traffic calming initiatives), but can still be effective in reducing fear of crime in parks and increasing parks utilization. The overarching goal of this project is to develop strategies that will increase the number of people participating in physical activity opportunities within the City of Dayton. Perceptions of crime, rather than actual crime rates, both within and around neighborhood parks is believed to be a large reason why parks are underutilized in Dayton and is therefore why perceptions of crime are the focus of this project. This project is developed from the perspective that increasing parks utilization and increasing the number of positive figures in the parks is one of the keys to reducing the negative perceptions of crime in and around parks, and is why strategies to increase parks utilization is another main focus of this project.

### **Increasing Park Utilization and Decreasing Public Perception of Crime: A Review of the Literature**

The research contained within this report will focus on three main topic areas, which are as follows:

- Effects of Park Design on Reducing Fear of Crime and Increasing Parks Utilization
- Programming
- Community-Oriented Policing and Outreach Strategies

Effects of Design is primarily concerned with the physical aspects of parks and routes to parks within a community. The park environment itself can be a hindrance to park usage if there are many isolated areas of a park, if lighting is not adequate, or if the environment does not create a sense of security among its patrons (Project for Public Spaces 2008). Equally as important to the design of the park itself, is the design of the pathways and walkways patrons have available to them in order to get to their neighborhood parks. If these routes are viewed as unsafe then community members will not utilize their parks, no matter the quality of the parks themselves (National Recreation and Parks Association 2014).

Programming is also vital in enhancing park utilization. Without targeted and relevant programming within parks, utilization and attendance suffers (Roberts 3). The Summer Night Lights program in Los Angeles has been successful in engaging over 700,000 community members throughout 32 of its parks across the summer of 2016 by keeping parks open later, and by developing and implementing programming geared toward each park's target audience (GRYD Foundation 2016).

Community-Oriented Policing strategies are utilized to increase citizen participation in the policing of their communities and to enhance the citizen/law enforcement relationship as a means to reduce public perceptions of crime. Perception of crime is an extremely important

“quality of life” issue that must be addressed in order to increase park utilization and to bring community members out into their respective neighborhoods (Cordner 1).

Community Outreach initiatives are also designed to reduce public perceptions of crime through enhancing community cohesion and, in one example, recruiting volunteers to enhance awareness among community members of events taking place in their neighborhoods through door to door interaction. In addition, the StreetReach initiative placed volunteers in public parks to enhance perceptions of safety by providing a visible adult presence (Minneapolis Dept. of Health and Family Support 1).

### **Effects of Park Improvements and Design on Perceptions of Crime**

Park design and improvements that can be made to the physical structures of a park to reduce public perception of crime and increase feelings of safety in neighborhood parks are thematic topics that this study is tasked with analyzing in order to reduce negative perceptions of crime and increase utilization of Dayton park facilities. Littlejohn’s study touches upon the idea of problems with a park’s “built environment”(Littlejohn 8), defined as having one or more of the following; narrow pedestrian walkways, dense shrubs, secluded and unmonitored pedestrian routes, inadequate lighting, graffiti, and/or a lack of surveillance (National Recreation and Parks Association 5). Even though crime rates within the City of Dayton parks are 63% below the overall crime trend for the City of Dayton, if a park is falsely perceived as unsafe due its features or other factors, utilization can be negatively impacted (Littlejohn vii).

### **Factors that Contribute to High-Risk Environments**

In relation to the brief by the National Recreation and Parks Association, the Toronto, Canada Department of Parks and Recreation has found that there are many qualities that park

users associate with what are described as “high-risk” environments, which include but are not limited to the following (Project for Safe Spaces 2008);

- Poor Lighting-Lighting can be the largest factor in improving many of the following factors to increase park utilization. While not the only solution to making parks safer and increasing usage, lighting should be one of the first strategies considered.
- Isolation-Areas of parks where crime can take place unseen.
- Poor Visibility- The ability of patron to see other park users, or other people in the area of the park. Perceptions of safety improve greatly if people can see around and ahead of them, as well as being able to see other people.
- No Access to Help- Patrons can be discouraged from using park facilities if they view that they cannot obtain help, should they need it. This can be alleviated through the installation of telephones, lighted emergency pillars, improvements to cell service or increasing park staff with access to help.
- Poor Maintenance-If park structures are dilapidated, in need of repair, or have graffiti covering them, park users avoid these areas of the park and may avoid parks all together. Ensuring that grass is cut properly, shrubs are trimmed and all facilities are maintained enhances patron’s sense of being in a safe area.
- Presence of “undesirables”-The presence of drugs, alcohol, gangs, violent groups, or other undesirable characters within parks and park facilities
- Legibility-Ease of navigation within a given area. How easy it is to organize the parts of a park into a recognizable and easy to understand pattern.

### **Increasing Walkability to Parks**

The National Recreation and Parks Association published a study on how increasing walkability to parks increases park utilization by increasing safety on the routes that community members take to neighborhood parks. The NRPA identified 5 characteristics that increase walkability to parks (National Recreation and Parks Association 2014):

- **Convenience:** Walking to a neighborhood park should take no longer than 10 minutes, or be within ½ mile from the targeted residents.
- **Comfort:** The paths and sidewalks leading to parks must be clean, well-maintained and be visually pleasing. The walking paths leading to parks should invite citizens in and encourage them to be active through their visual characteristics.
- **Safety:** Perceived safety is key here. While organizers and officials may understand that a route is safe, if the community has negative perceptions, the route will not be utilized; therefore routes must include physical barriers to traffic and be free of personal security concerns.
- **Access and Design:** Citizens must have multiple access points to parks. If a park is located in the center of a neighborhood, but only has an entrance along the north end, it may be viable that only those residents will utilize the parks. Every effort must be made to ensure equitable access for all community members. In addition, proper signage, landmark and distance markers all play a large part in perception of a safe route to a park.
- **The Park:** A park must offer infrastructure and programming relevant to the citizens in which it is intending to serve. If a park is located in an older, established neighborhood, there must be programming that will be of interest to an older population. On the other hand, if the park is located next to the local high school, park utilization may benefit more from a pool, basketball courts, or baseball diamonds.

In developing their Pedestrian Plan, tasked with enhancing pedestrian's ability to utilize the cities' infrastructure, the City of Chicago has identified their primary concerns regarding implementing pedestrian safety strategies as follows:

## **Traffic Calming**

Traffic calming initiatives are an important aspect to consider when looking at pedestrian safety and walkability to neighborhood parks. Neighborhood streets are designed so that they accommodate both vehicle and pedestrian traffic; however, if too large of an emphasis is placed on vehicle traffic, it can lead to decreased perceptions of safety among neighborhood, as well as decreasing ability to use the street for walking, biking, and playing (Community Transportation Plan 8).

Keeping in mind the fiscal constraints on implementing these strategies, the following section will only review traffic calming devices deemed "low cost" by the City of Chicago Department of Transportation (Chicago Department of Transportation 2012). Please refer to Image 1 below for examples of these mechanisms.

- **Marked Crosswalks:** High-visibility areas where traffic expects there to be pedestrians crossing the roadways
- **In-Road State Law Stop for Pedestrian signs:** Create awareness to drivers of pedestrian's right of way in high traffic areas
- **Pedestrian Count-Down timers:** Provide pedestrians with an amount of time to safely cross the roadway. Retrofitting existing signage with timers is based off of presence of "at-risk" populations (children, elderly, people with disabilities)

- **Leading Pedestrian Intervals:** Walk signals are turned on 3 seconds before a green light for traffic is given. This allows pedestrians a head start into intersections, and eliminates pedestrians and vehicle traffic competing for space on roadways.
- **Lagging Left Turns:** Hold vehicles turning left until vehicles traveling straight through an intersection have traveled through. Allowing pedestrians to cross while straight bound traffic goes through the intersection again eliminates traffic and pedestrians competing for the roadway.

**Image 1: Examples of Traffic Calming Measures**

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>Marked Crosswalk</p>                            |  <p>Source: Counseloroffices.net</p>    |
| <p>In-Road State Law Stop for Pedestrian signs</p> |  <p>Source: michaelmorgenstern.com</p> |
| <p>Pedestrian Count-Down timers</p>                |  <p>Source: Columbian.com</p>         |

## **Safety Zones**

Chicago implemented Safety Zones, similar in application to School Safety Zones, in areas that were at least 1/8 mile from parks. These Safety Zones were primarily constructed through the use of traffic calming tools and speed enforcement initiatives. The funding generated through speed enforcement are then utilized to expand the Safety Zones to other parks, starting first with those deemed most high risk (Chicago Department of Transportation 2012).

## **Funding Mechanisms for Traffic Calming Initiatives**

While implementing their strategy, Chicago began by incorporating pedestrian safety into any applicable public works projects. The Pedestrian Plan puts forth that “Any project being designed in the public way, from a street being resurfaced to the rehab of a train station, should be reviewed to ensure that pedestrian safety and accessibility improvements are included (Chicago Department of Transportation 2012).” Additionally, the City of Chicago realigned their criteria for distribution of transportation and infrastructure funds to include “pedestrian safety and operations” and the “condition of pedestrian facilities”, which allows project funding to be allocated not only on the basis of repairs necessary, but also on making it easier for citizens to utilize infrastructure as a part of a healthy and active lifestyle. Finally, the City is utilizing proceeds from the introduction of automated speed enforcement to fund pedestrian safety projects.

## **Utilizing Lighting to Keep Parks Open Later**

The National Recreation and Parks Association published a brief on Creating Safe Park Environments, with three case studies covering three diverse approaches to this issue. The City of Los Angeles developed the Summer Night Lights Program, aimed at increasing park traffic by

implementing extended (7-11 PM) hours for various recreation facilities throughout the summer time, as well as adding extended programming options to keep the community engaged in their neighborhood recreation opportunities. The Summer Night Lights Program and the City of Los Angeles is explored below more in depth, as we turn to programming as a means of increasing park utilization and perceptions of safety.

## **Programming**

One essential strategy to increase park utilization is to increase park programming, and to make it accessible and catered to the needs of the target audience for the park (Cohen, 2009). This is derived from a 39% decline in park attendance when programming was cut due to budget restrictions in the aforementioned study. Park programming that is effective in enhancing park utilization and subsequently in increasing physical activity levels in target populations takes a community-focused approach and takes into account the desires of the target community for the park (Cohen, 2009). In addition, the First National Study of Neighborhood Parks concludes that “Offering more programming, using marketing tools like banners and posters, and installing facilities like walking loops, may help currently underutilized parks increase population physical activity” (Cohen, 2016).

### **Summer Night Lights and the City of Los Angeles.**

The Summer Night Lights (SNL) Program began in 2007 in the City of Los Angeles after a shooting occurred near a closed public park. The resulting response was the start of the Summer Night Lights program, a public-private partnership between the Mayor’s Office and the GRYD (Gang Reduction and Youth Development) Foundation. The Summer Night Lights Program is aimed at keeping 32 recreation centers within the City of Los Angeles open later in

the summertime months, as well as providing funding to increase available programming and engage the community. The 32 sites chosen for the SNL Program in 2017 are neighborhood recreation centers with established recreation facilities (i.e. pools, baseball diamonds, and community rooms). The highest attended programs were:

- Art workshops-21,172 attendees
- Sports leagues-9,184 attendees
- Zumba classes-5,772 attendees
- Indoor/Outdoor movie nights-2,467 attendees

### **Partnerships with Outside Agencies.**

One of the strategies that makes the SNL program so effective is the Partnership's ability to make use of outside agencies and resources within the City of Los Angeles. In 2016 alone, the SNL program was able to engage over 690,000 participants, with an average of 674 persons per park per night (Summer Night Lights 2016). The SNL Program hosted voter registration initiatives, health and wellness programs, specialized sports clinics, arts workshops, hiring events and jobs workshops, as well as City Department outreach events. One strategy that the Partnership used was public outreach via event calendars in both English and Spanish. (SNL officials have been sought out to get more not-readily-available information such as various strategies used to garner attendance and develop partnerships with so many other agencies)

### **Washington Parks and People-Washington, D.C.**

Washington Parks and People is recognized as a leader in enhancing public parks utilization and developing strategies for community engagement and increasing physical activity in Washington, D.C., and this is exemplified by having received the National Parks Service's top

honor, the Top Community Partnership Award (Roberts 8). One of Washington Parks and People's foundational initiatives, Heart and Soul, offers dance programs, community walks, cooking and health classes, bike repair as well as bike trail patrols; in addition to audience-specific programming, such as the Girls on the Run, and Family Fun Fridays. The Heart and Soul initiative also holds their own Farm Market every Saturday at a local park (Heart and Soul 2016).

### **Community-Oriented Policing Strategies.**

A very common theme in all of the research conducted and strategies reviewed, is that the community members need to be involved in the process of improving neighborhood safety, reducing perception of crime, and ultimately in increasing utilization of neighborhood parks. If community residents are not empowered to contribute to the process and are not embraced as the driving force of the various changes taking place, there is a high possibility that the initiatives undertaken will not be as successful as possible, or may fail entirely (Cordner 2010).

### **Police-Community Interaction.**

Public Relations type events put on by Police Departments are usually ineffective at both reducing fear of crime, and in increasing trust in law enforcement because the individuals participating in those types of events are usually pretty comfortable already with police (Johnson 2015).

### **Citizen Contact Patrols.**

The types of policing efforts that are most successful in reducing fear of crime, as well as increasing public trust of law enforcement are "non-enforcement, face to face contact between officers and citizens" (Johnson 2015). One form of this, implemented in Houston, Texas, saw officers meet informally with various citizens, business owners, etc. in high crime neighborhoods

and introduce themselves, ask if there are any safety concerns they should be aware of, and leave contact information with the citizens in the case that something should arise. After making these contacts, the officers would then document who they spoke to and any issues that the citizen discussed. Results of this program were very favorable and were linked to a decrease in overall perception of crime in the target-areas (Brown 14).

### **Bringing Minority Communities into Fear Reduction Strategies.**

The results were markedly less noticeable in African-American communities and among renters; therefore, those undertaking this type of strategy should be aware of these limitations and should make adjustments to increase results within these communities. In the Houston case study, the researchers suggest utilizing minority community leaders to disseminate information of these programs to their followers and to receive feedback on bringing their communities into the purview of the various initiatives. In addition, the Houston case study exemplified the need to give planning considerations, at least in part, to those who will be carrying out the actions. For example, the police officers were given authority to take part in designing the initiatives and the Houston PD had success with this.

### **Community Outreach Strategies.**

An underlying theme among most of the strategies explored in this project is community involvement and participation in making their parks more accessible and increasing utilization. Bringing communities together and increasing neighborhood cohesion has an automatic effect on getting communities members outside and increases activity levels. Isolation has the effect of decreasing public perceptions of safety, and in turn decreases activity within the community (Project for Safe Spaces 2008). One strategy to combat these issues is community outreach;

recruiting community members or volunteers to get out within target neighborhoods and increase visibility and increase awareness of park programming and community events.

### **Patterson Park Outreach Program-Baltimore, Maryland.**

The Patterson Park Outreach Program was a 1998 Herman Goldstein Award for Excellence in Community-Oriented Policing nominee, for its inclusion of City Service agencies, Baltimore PD, and the community in solving issues with crime in Baltimore. The Program begins with ranking community problems by all involved, including the citizens affected. After problems have been identified, the participants focus on “defining problems, establishing roles and tasks, focusing resources, sharing information, and working as a "team" toward positive results” and work through “education, structured meetings, oversight, and public awareness initiatives” (Gavrilis 1998). The results of this initiative were so successful, that in the following year, the “community outreach philosophy” and designated outreach teams were created. These outreach teams are assigned to “high-risk” cluster areas and are directly responsible to the citizens that live in their cluster. Citizens can come to them directly with concerns, but the outreach officers are also responsible to attending community outreach gatherings to discern issues. These officers are tasked with solving their community-specific concerns, and are highly effective at doing so, along with enhancing cohesion between resident’s and police (Gavrilis 7).

## Matrix of Strategies

### Programming

- Collaborate with local organizations to get citizens out into parks (L.A. Summer Night Lights)
- Mobile Recreation (BREC)

### Community Oriented Policing & Community Outreach

- Citizen Contact (Houston)
- Community Outreach Teams (Baltimore, Minneapolis)

### Design

- Traffic Calming (Chicago)
- Walking Loop (Cohen Study)

## Strategies in Programming

### **Collaborating with local organizations**

The Summer Night Lights Program in Los Angeles was able to successfully engage 700,000 community members through initiatives like dance workshops, sports clinics, art workshops and voter registration drives, by partnering with local organizations such as the LA Sparks, The Laker Girls and the LAFD. The SNL Program has been recognized by the Institute for Local Government as a program that is successful in “reducing crime, preventing violence, increasing physical activity, building social cohesion and trust, and provide a framework for serving disadvantaged communities”(Institute for Local Government, 2015). While Los Angeles is out of scale with the City of Dayton, the initiatives utilized by the SNL and the GRYD

Partnership were extremely successful in increasing park utilization, regardless of population size, and prove useful while developing strategies for Dayton parks.

To effectively cultivate collaborations with local organizations, Dayton must undertake the following steps:

- Develop a volunteer board of various community members and stakeholders, charged with planning activities for local and neighborhood parks. During the process of reviewing literature on the subject, it became apparent that one mistake other communities make in park programming is focusing an overwhelming majority of resources on larger regional parks, leaving neighborhood parks with little ability to attract users.
- Work with neighborhood associations to develop a poll to determine which types of activities would be most attended by the community. In the case study example, movie nights, dance classes, touch-a-truck nights, voter registration drives and sports clinics were all popular options.
- Contact local organizations, based on the results of the community polls, to determine their abilities and resources required to bring their activities into neighborhood parks. In addition, collaborating with other local recreation providers (YMCA, Recreation and Youth Services, etc.) may net additional resources that can be utilized in activating neighborhood parks.

## **Mobile Recreation**

The Recreation and Park Commission for the Parish of East Baton Rouge (BREC) has established an initiative entitled “BREC on the Geaux”, that takes recreation programming and infrastructure on the road to various parks within BREC’s jurisdiction. BREC on the Geaux operates from box trucks and visits various community parks and schools to get kids engaged in physical activity during times that they may not normally be active, such as during the after school hours and in the summer. The program is also designed to serve minority and underserved populations that may not have the resources to access other, more expensive means of physical activity.

Comparability between BREC and the City of Dayton is derived from a very similar population of approximately 500,000, and the racial demographics of both areas are evenly split, with the majority of both areas being shared by Caucasians and African-Americans. The mission of the program is “To provide fun, positive and structured physical recreation programming for children and adults who live in “play deserts”, which BREC defines as areas and parks that do not contain a playground for children (Collum, 2017).

## **Strategies in Community-Oriented Policing and Community Outreach Citizen Contact Patrols and Community Problem-Solving Meetings**

Public perception and fear of crime and actual crime rates can often times be two very different problems and require distinct strategies in order to effectively combat both. Utilization of joint citizen-police community problem solving meetings and citizen contact patrols, are effective means of reducing public perception of crime. In the report by Jeff Littlejohn, it is established that crime rates in City of Dayton parks are, on average, 63% lower than that of the crime rate for the City of Dayton as a whole, however, utilization of public and neighborhood

parks in Dayton continue to suffer due to negative public perception of crimes in parks and the neighborhoods that surround them (Littlejohn, vii). While the primary concern of this project is related to the safety of parks, the neighborhoods surrounding the parks must too be included in order to ensure the maximum effects of these strategies are realized.

In order to ensure that citizen contact patrols and the community problem-solving meetings can be implemented effectively, Dayton must take the following steps:

- Develop a community engagement task force, staffed by officers who volunteer for the assignment, in order to ensure the highest levels of officer engagement.
- Incorporate a standardized system for tracking and monitoring data gathered while participating in citizen contact patrols to ensure that information gathered is not lost.
- Implement a schedule of community problem-solving forums to gather information on what the largest problems citizens feel their communities are facing.
- Disseminate information about the community problem-solving meetings through community leaders and through partnerships with the City of Dayton schools.
- Establish joint problem-solving working groups between Dayton Police and community stakeholders, such as local business owners or other community members affected by the issue.

Working off of the findings of Dr. Zhao of Sam Houston State University, Richard Johnson concludes that the most effective strategies in reducing public perception of crime are joint community problem solving meetings between citizens and police, as well as “proactive, non-enforcement citizen contacts” (Johnson, 2). The key to ensuring that these meetings are successful in reducing fear of crime are small working groups to increase police awareness of

issues within the community, as well as allow members of the community to feel that they are having their voices heard and are contributing to the enhancement of their neighborhood in an effective manner. Public perceptions of crime were decreased, at least slightly, in all 13 case studies presented by Dr. Zhao when the comprehensive strategy involved some sort of community problem-solving mechanism.

A study completed by Wesley Skogan and Susan Hartnett in the City of Chicago saw public perception of crime and disorder as declining in all 5 police districts that were observed (Zhao, 21). Aside from Chicago and Dayton both being examples of Midwestern cities and therefore sharing similarities, the demographics for the police districts studied are comparable to Dayton; three of the five districts were within +/- 5% of Dayton's poverty level, while four out of five were at least one-third African-American (Skogan, 3). At least one partial reason for the success of the CAPS (Chicago Alternate Policing Strategy) was the effort placed on community awareness of the community-police meetings. Heavy emphasis was placed on ensuring knowledge of and access to the community meetings through a television, print and radio campaign, inviting and encouraging citizens to participate. Over 60% of the citizens of Chicago were aware of the program and the community meetings, and 31% percent of those reported attending at least one community meeting (Skogan, 6). Evidence suggests that while TV may play a large role in increasing public awareness of community meetings, it is not a particularly strong mobilizing factor, however, announcements sent home with Chicago Public School report cards, information disseminated by local church leaders, and simple word of mouth were reported as large mobilizing factors.

In addition, the positive results of these initiatives were seen from programs that had careful development, planning and execution and were tailored to the specific communities in

which they were applied. The successful programs also contained actions plans with strategies for dissemination of information and for garnering support and attendance for the community outreach meetings, whereas programs that were implemented at random often saw either no or very small changes in decreasing public perception and fear of crime.

## **Community Outreach Teams**

Another proven strategy for decreasing public perceptions of crime and increasing parks utilization is the development of community outreach teams. Community outreach initiatives decrease negative public perceptions of crime in parks both by increasing awareness of park programming, but also by facilitating a positive presence in neighborhood and community parks. While parks that are more nature-oriented may benefit from isolating features such as forests, bushes, and closed off areas, neighborhood parks often suffer when these features are present (Project for Public Spaces, 2008). Isolating features in neighborhood parks can lead to decreased perceptions of safety and therefore decreased park utilization, and to combat these feelings of isolation among park users, parks benefit from the presence of positive adult figures. Community outreach teams, in addition to providing a positive adult presence in parks, are useful in conducting door-to-door outreach activities that increase awareness of park programming and physical activity opportunities.

In order to successfully develop community outreach teams within the City of Dayton, community leaders must consider the following steps:

- Develop a central park activity to direct community members to
- Recruit and vet potential volunteers
- Design unique volunteer apparel to make volunteers easily recognizable
- Identify key parks and neighborhoods to implement outreach teams

- Develop an assessment mechanism to determine level of success and initiate improvements to implement between seasons

The Streetreach teams developed and implemented in Minneapolis, Minnesota are an example of both the positive impacts and the potential barriers to successful implementation of community outreach programs within local communities. The Streetreach program was initially successful in decreasing negative perceptions of crime in the parks; however, acts of violence near some of the parks in August of 2011 may have been correlated with the following increase in negative perceptions of crime (Outreach Workers, 2011). While statistics show that perceptions of crime were increasing during the implementation of the Streetreach program, the candid survey responses from community members indicate that the teams had positive effects on public perceptions of crime and helped with raising awareness of park programming and connecting residents to their neighbors and their community.

While this strategy seemed successful upon talking to community members, the central assumption that is key to the success of community outreach teams is the ability of team members to point out specific park programming (In this case, the Family Festivals held in each park) to direct community members to their parks. Without the presence of a singular event to provide as an incentive to getting out to the parks, the implementation of a similar program will fail to see positive results. In addition, 67% of festival attendees indicated that they already attend their parks either daily or weekly, and 8% indicated that the festival was their first interaction with the parks. Knowing this, developing a strategy for implementation within Dayton should take special care to ensure that community members being targeted under the program are not already active park users.

## **Strategies in Changes to the Physical Environment**

### **Traffic Calming**

Traffic calming initiatives are developed and implemented in order to “improve conditions for non-motorized street users”, and include a myriad of strategies that can be utilized to increase the ability of community members to engage in physical activity opportunities (Traffic Calming, 2018). Traffic calming mechanisms can be very effective, however there are important considerations to take when designing and implementing these strategies. Traffic calming strategies are an important consideration when looking at strategies to increase utilization of public parks as community members may not take advantage of recreation opportunities in their neighborhood parks, if they perceive it to be unsafe or too difficult to travel to their parks. While this topic may not be directly related to perceptions of crime in the parks, it is directly related to increase parks usage and increasing overall physical activity levels within Dayton and is an important consideration to be made within the City of Dayton.

First, it is important to decide why traffic calming initiatives are necessary and how they should be implemented. This process involves a wide range of stakeholders, including service delivery agencies, community members and other stakeholders (Noyes, 2). Traffic calming is unique among other strategies for increasing physical activity, in that it contains a great number of methods of implementation that can differ widely based on the area it will be implemented, and therefore having defined goals and is extremely important.

Once the need is established for traffic calming initiatives, the implementing jurisdiction must define policy that will guide the implementation of the traffic calming measures on a neighborhood level. Stakeholder input, funding sources and a specific timeline need to be identified and taken into account when developing these strategies. There are a great many

individual strategies under the umbrella of traffic calming and the implementing agency must decide while strategy or combination of strategies are appropriate and how to utilize them to best serve the community. Without involvement from community members and stakeholders, the benefit derived from implementing traffic calming measures could be diminished by not taking into account their specific concerns (Noyes, 6). Additionally as important are developing performance measurement tools to ensure that the desired impact is being realized, and allow the implementing jurisdiction to make the appropriate changes to ensure the desired impact is reached.

The Lafayette Consolidated Government (LCG) has been recognized by the US Department of Transportation for their innovate approach to implementing traffic calming strategies. The LCG gives the ability to initiate and demonstrate need for traffic calming to its citizens, in the form of the submission of a petition for consideration (Lafayette Public Works Department, 2). When the petition is submitted, the problem area must be identified, along with 5-10 community members willing to form a steering committee for the project. Once this has been submitted, the LCG will conduct a study to determine applicability of traffic calming measures with in the area of concern, and will make a determination whether to continue with the measures. If, under the study conducted by the LCG, the requirements are not met to follow through with funding for the proposed project, the community members still options that would allow them to fund the project independently of the LCG (Lafayette Department of Public Works, 5). Retaining this ability allows citizens, community members and stakeholders much greater flexibility and control over improvements to their neighborhoods and expresses the underlying value in public service; democracy and accountability to the citizens.

## Installation of Walking Loops

A national study, completed by Deborah Cohen and the RAND Corporation, shows that the installation of walking loops within neighborhood parks is one of the most effective ways to mobilize communities and get them out into their neighborhood parks. According to the study, parks that had a walking loop as one feature of the park saw an increase in users of 80%, and the increase in moderate-to-vigorous physical activity was 90%, as compared with parks that did not have a walking loop. The study defines a walking loop as typically having the following characteristics (Cohen, 2017):

- Six feet or wider
- Path can follow larger recreation areas (i.e. baseball diamonds or other sports fields)
- Surface can vary from asphalt, gravel, grass, concrete or dirt
- May utilize signage to mark distances traveled
- Designated for recreational and exercise purposes

Please refer to images 2 and 3 below for examples of a distance marker for walking loops, as well as an example of a walking loops incorporating all of the recommended best practices. Image 2 demonstrates how distance markers can increase feelings of safety by ensuring that patrons using the walking loops know where they are in relevance to other park features, as well as allowing patrons to know how far they have traveled on the loop. Image 3 shows an example of a walking loop that incorporates all of the best-practices described above. There are wide, open sightlines that decrease feelings of isolation, as well as a feature that will attract park patrons for the purposes of walking, jogging, etc.

**Image 2: Walking Loop Distance Marker**

Source: Author

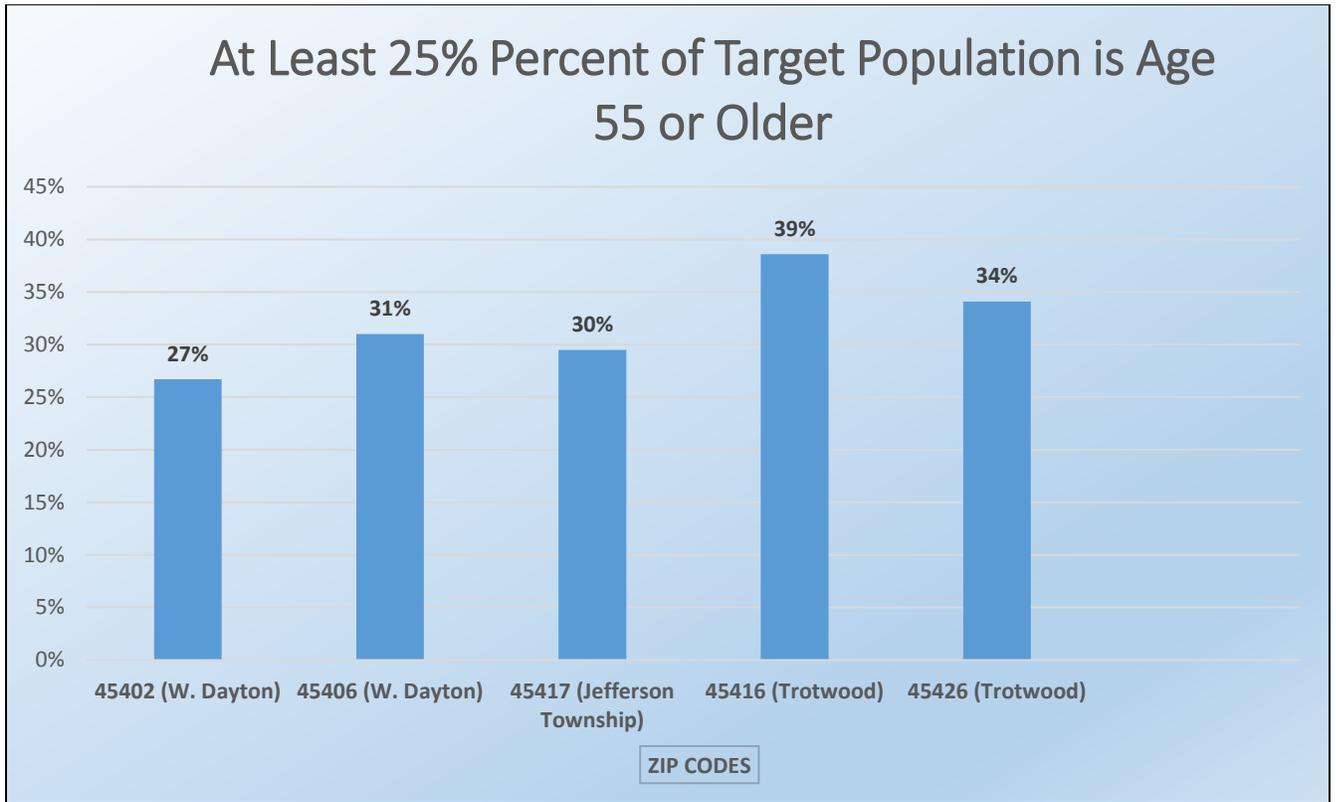
**Image 3: Best-Practices Example**

Source: Author

Walking loops may also be of benefit to increasing park utilization in that they may lead to the development of a regular community of users that therefore reduces the fear of crime in the parks by increasing the presence of adult figures. In addition, the installation of walking loops may lead to an increase in utilization of other park facilities, such as gymnasiums, playgrounds and sports fields, although no causal relationship can be stated and the possibility remains that the inverse is true as well.

Walking loops, while they benefit each population, benefit senior citizens disproportionately. While senior citizen utilization of parks in general is extremely low at 4% of users identified in this study, their representation doubled to 8% of park users in parks that made use of a walking loop (Cohen, 2017). The citizens of the zip codes targeted under the Community Health Improvement Plan are made up heavily of senior citizens (age 55 or older), with most zip codes being near or over 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the populace belonging to that age group (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016).

Image 4



United States of America, U.S. Census Bureau . (2016). ACS DEMOGRAPHIC AND HOUSING ESTIMATES more information 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

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## **Working with Area Hospitals**

Premier Health, Dayton Children's Hospital and Kettering Health are active in developing and implementing strategies to increase parks utilization and bolster participation in physical activity within the City of Dayton. PHDMC has provided contacts within each organization of individuals responsible for planning and execution of these initiatives and strategies. This report has collaborated with these organizations to foster partnerships and new initiatives aimed at increasing physical activity in Dayton. The outcomes from these discussions are as follows.

### **Dayton Children's Hospital**

In line with Dayton Children's mission to improve the health and wellbeing of all children, they have developed the Office of Community Health and Engagement Programs (The Center) as a tool to provide for the health and wellbeing of all children in the Dayton region (The Office of Community Health and Engagement, 2017). The hospital utilizes this office as a community outreach and public policy arm dedicated to work in the following four main areas; Education, Outreach, Policy and Research. The Center operates through the administration of specific programs and initiatives targeted at preventing illness and injury and improving the overall health of children.

The Center administers a Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) every three years as a means to guide the development and improvement of their strategic plan. Contained in the most recent addition of the CHNA are the Center's three goals focus areas; Mental Health and Addiction, Chronic Disease and, Maternal and Infant Health (community health needs assessment, 2017). The Implementation Plan for the 2017 CHNA identifies "access to physical

activity” as a major gap in the Dayton region and lists 4 potential strategies for rectifying this issue. Those strategies are as follows: Get Up Programming, Not removing recess, Encouraging parents and families to be active and working with parks to do physical activity programming. Going further, the CHNA identifies the implementation of Safe Routes to School (SRTS) programming as a strategy to reduce chronic disease among youth, and sets forth a timeline necessary for gathering information on current STRS initiatives, the ability to develop new SRTS initiatives, develop walking and biking groups and group leaders, and enhance awareness of SRTS programming with the Dayton region (community health needs assessment implementation plan, 2017).

In line with these priorities, Dayton Children’s has developed initiatives and programs that promote an active healthy lifestyle, a part of which is increasing physical activity to combat childhood obesity. In this area, Dayton Children’s has spearheaded the Walk with a Doc program, the Safe Kids Greater Dayton Coalition and the Healthy way Neighborhood Collaborative. Each of these initiatives fosters partnerships between Dayton area organizations dedicated to similar missions, such as Public Health Dayton Montgomery County, Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission, City of Dayton Schools and the Greater Old North Dayton Neighborhood Association and allows the hospital to support these alliances and advocate for them as a means of pursuing Dayton Children’s mission.

An interview was conducted with Abbey Rymarczyk, The Community Relations Prevention Coordinator at Dayton Children’s Hospital, under the Office of Community Health and Engagement Programs. She explained in greater detail the activity undertaken by Dayton Children’s to connect children to physical activity opportunities, and relayed that the hospital is very interested in the “promotion of active, healthy lifestyles” and that they are active in

advocacy and support of a multitude of initiatives and programs administered by outside organizations. Involvement with three organizations were discussed; Safe Routes to Schools Dayton, the Safe Kids Coalition, and Miami Valley No Child Left Inside. Further discussion revealed that high levels of collaboration between Public Health and Dayton Children's already exists and the need to enhance collaboration on these efforts is not necessary at this time; however, opportunities for continued and enhanced collaboration are encouraged and should be continuously updated.

### **Premier Health**

The mission of Premier Health, as stated in their 2017-2019 Community Health Improvement Plan is to "improve the health of the communities we serve with others who share our commitment to provide high quality, cost-competitive health care services". Similar to Dayton Children's, Premier Health offers a community outreach tool, titled Premier Community Health. This tool offers health initiatives to "promote healthy living" such as Premier HeartWorks, LIFESTEPS Weight Management Program, and a partnership with GetUp Montgomery County.

Premier Health also conducts their own Community Health Needs Assessment and lists Chronic Disease Prevention, and subsequently obesity, as one of their top three priorities for 2017-2019. Premier Health, in partnership with Mahogany's Child, has developed programs that "empowers the African-American population in the community to make positive health decisions through culturally relevant means" (Community Health Improvement Strategies, 2017). This partnership develops strategies and initiatives to improve health, and then works with minority community leaders in schools and churches to promote them. The partnership is currently

working on implementing an initiative entitled “Mile a Day”, which encourages participants to run at least 1 mile each day. The Community Health Improvement Strategies report puts forth that when a similar program was implemented in Scotland in a school setting, the student’s obesity rate dropped by 45% after 18 months.

In addition, Premier Health’s website contains a dedicated section for information on proper exercise and fitness, such as the need for conditioning and warm ups when exercising, and the effects of dehydration, as well as services that are offered, such as proper bicycle fitting, that enhance and increase health and wellness in the Dayton region.

Shaun Hamilton, the System Director of Community Benefits for Premier Health, granted an interview on what role Premier Health is playing in increasing physical activity in the Dayton community. In addition to the initiatives discussed previously, it was indicated that in order to make a positive effect on the levels of participation in physical activity, there must a culture shift to a “culture of physical activity”, meaning that we must, as a society, make the choice to be physically active an easy choice to make. In a world increasingly full of technology, smart phones, tablets and video games, the easiest choice right now is to sit at home and indulge in technology instead of being active. In order to make a real change and truly increase physical activity levels, we must turn that around and make being active the easy choice.

Two ideals were expressed as means to begin the process of exchanging technology for physical activity; first, we must reverse the trend of a decline of physical activity in schools. Our schools should be the forefront of providing access to physical activity opportunities and cultivating a culture that values physical activity, but with the decline of things like recess, PE classes, and sporting opportunities he does not believe that is currently the case. Second, there must be incentives to being active, just as there are incentives to being inactive and engaging in

technology. One example of this that Mr. Hamilton provided were video games. Video games, he says, are very popular because they allow anyone to feel that they are a part of a greater community and also to connect with others around the world in an instantaneous fashion. Mr. Hamilton expresses that “people want to be a part of something bigger than themselves” and that we must develop and incorporate the culminating moments that allow people to realize this in physical activity in order to make a successful and long-term impact on getting people active in Dayton.

## **Methods**

This report and the strategies contained within it were gathered via a thorough literature review of strategies utilized in other metropolitan areas to accomplish similar tasks, along with the results of those strategies and how they might apply to the City of Dayton. The thematic areas focused on as a part of this report are; Park Programming, Park Design, and Community-Oriented Policing and Outreach Strategies.

For each strategy derived from the literature review, best-practices and best practice leaders were sought out to determine how these strategies have been implemented in other, similar communities. Best practice leaders were determined either by awards received for work done in that area, or by recognition from a federal or state agency. Once the best evidence-based strategies were collected and a complete matrix of strategies developed, interviews were conducted with City of Dayton Departments to determine barriers to implementation within the City of Dayton and recommendations to overcome those barriers. Interviews were also completed with representatives from Dayton Children’s and Premier Health to determine what

roles the area hospitals play in increasing parks usage and physical activity overall in the City of Dayton.

An interview, lasting about one hour, was conducted with the Dayton Recreation and Youth Services department at their office. The main topic of discussion during the interview was strategies that can be utilized to increase the amount of users that neighborhood parks see in Dayton barriers that Recreation and Youth Services saw to mobilizing community members into their parks. For a list of interview questions composed, please see Appendix A.

From Dayton Children's Hospital, an interview was conducted with Abbey Rymarczyk, the Community Relations Prevention Coordinator under the Office of Community Health and Engagement. The interview was conducted on site at Dayton Children's and lasted approximately forty-five minutes. For a list of interview questions composed, please see Appendix B.

In addition, an interview was conducted with Shaun Hamilton, the System Director of Community Benefits for Premier Health. This interview was conducted at Public Health, at the conclusion of the Community Health Improvement Plan meeting for 2018 and had a duration of about thirty minutes.

### **Next Steps**

Upon completion of the compilation of evidence-based strategies, as well as conducting interviews with key personnel relating to decreasing negative public perceptions of crime and increase parks utilization, there are strategies that will have a more profound impact on City of Dayton parks, and those strategies should be first considered for implementation.

**Cultivate collaborations with local organizations.** The Summer Night Lights program was extremely effective in mobilizing their citizens and getting them out into their parks. While L.A. is out of scale with Dayton, they were able to engage 14% of the population of Los Angeles County with their SNL initiative, and being able to increase parks utilization by that large of a margin merits the implementation of similar strategies in Dayton. Even though Dayton is a smaller city, we are culturally rich and diverse, and there are many opportunities for collaboration. (More on this section after Parks and Rec Dept. interview)

**Enhance marketing for new and existing park programs.** A large portion of the issue at hand with underutilization of parks is related to the perceptions of crime within Dayton. One solution to this is to implement awareness campaigns targeting those negative perceptions and increasing and enhancing the flow of information demonstrating the safety of Dayton parks, especially compared with Dayton as a whole, although caution must be taken not to mistakenly increase general perceptions of fear. In addition, new programs must have an appropriate amount of marketing resources to ensure they get off the ground properly, and it would be beneficial to study which existing programs could best utilize additional marketing resources. In line with other recommendations made in this report, the up and coming “Y on the Fly” program should have adequate resources as it will perform under a few different topic areas discussed in this report.

**Conduct a study of Dayton parks usage with and without walking loops.** The study conducted by Deborah Cohen on a national level demonstrated the dramatic increase in park utilization when a walking loop is present. There should be a study conducted specifically in Dayton parks to determine to what degree these findings are applicable to Dayton parks. If they are significant, resources should be directed at constructing walking loops. As demonstrated

above, the good portion of the target area are senior-citizens, for whom the walking loop most directly increased activity levels.

**Continue to cultivate a culture of physical activity and develop programs to incentivize being active.** A culture of physical activity must be created in order to enhance physical activity levels. Partnerships with area schools should continue to be developed and ensure that recess activities are not diminished further. Unfortunately, this is not a goal that will occur over night, but it is something that must be continually developed and progress made on, especially with youth. The more physical activity is demonstrated as important in schools, the more those attitudes will transfer to activities outside of schools. Of course, physical activity should be stressed within all age groups, however, children should be the priority as they are going to be the easiest to instill the importance of being active, and they have the longest time to benefit from the adoption of an active lifestyle.

## Appendix A

The following are the questions that were composed for the meeting with Dayton Recreation and Youth Services to discuss parks utilization and strategies to decrease public perceptions of fear in parks. The list of questions was composed before the meeting, however, the discussions took a more open-dialogue style format and therefore not all of the questions were asked directly.

- What, in your opinion, is the best strategy that can be utilized to increase neighborhood parks usage in Dayton?
- In the Summer Nights Light Program in Los Angeles, parks were able to partner with outside organizations to create programming opportunities, is this something that is being done in Dayton? What would be the barriers to do so if Dayton is not already?
- What types of marketing is Recreation and Youth Services currently engaging in? How are you utilizing social media and what barriers do you notice in making full use of social media?
- A national study shows that walking loops increase parks usage by a wide margin. What barriers does Recreation and Youth Services see to implementing more walking loops in neighborhood parks?
- Utilizing parks outreach teams are shown to increase usage of parks by making community members aware of parks programming. Is this a viable strategy for Dayton? Why or why not?

## Appendix B

The following are questions that were composed to be asked of Dayton Children's Hospital during the interview process with each respective organization. The questions were modified as to be applicable to Premier Health. Similar to the interview with Dayton Parks and Recreation, these questions were composed prior to the meeting, and both meetings took an open-dialogue approach in order to garner as much information as possible from each interview, and therefore each question may not have been asked in its entirety.

- Can you explain the mission of the Dayton Children's Office of Community Health and Engagement and what the Department hopes to accomplish in its mission?
- The Dayton Children's Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) identifies access to physical activity as a major gap with the community. Within that, the CHNA lists GetUp programming, can you go more in depth about Dayton Children's involvement with this program?
- In addition, the CHNA lists encouraging physical activity and working with parks to increase physical activity programming. Can you elaborate on what Dayton Children's is currently doing and what future plans the hospital has to continue to support this goal?
- In the view of Dayton Children's, how can the hospital, Public Health-Montgomery County, the Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission and other stakeholders best work to increase physical activity and parks usage to decrease public perceptions of crime in parks? In what areas does the hospital see the most need for improvement?
- Is there anything else that you feel would be useful to know in developing this report?

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