How to Think about Public Libraries in Active Living

Presented by Noah Lenstra | lenstra@uncg.edu | @NoahLenstra | @LetsMoveLibrary
and Sandy Mayer | mayer.sandy@ocls.info | https://www.ocls.info/classes-events | @LetsMoveLibrary

At Active Living Conference, Orlando, February 4, 2020
Slides and Handout available online at: https://www.LetsMoveLibraries.org/ALC2020

Background and Purpose. According to the American Library Association (2018) “significantly more voters today describe the library as a place that ‘offers activities and entertainment you can’t find anywhere else in the community’ than did in 2008, and more believe this is an important role.” These new “activities” taking place in public libraries include physical activities. The American Library Association (2014) shows that over 23% of the 16,568 public libraries in the United States have offered fitness classes. This talk illustrates how to think about public libraries in active living through the local story of the Orange County Library System in Orlando, Florida, and the national story of Let’s Move in Libraries.

Description. Since 2016, Let’s Move in Libraries (LetsMoveInLibraries.org) has grown to include over 2,000 librarians and library supporters. Data collected and analyzed as part of this work include: 1) a survey of 1,157 public libraries in the U.S. and Canada, and 2) a collection of over 2,000 online publications that describe libraries offering everything from StoryWalk in the park programs to bike shares. This broad picture of public libraries supporting active living receives local detail in the story of the Orange County Library System, which since its origins in the 1920s has existed to improve the quality of life in the greater Orlando area. With sixteen branch locations, OCLS is easily available to the majority of Orange County’s 1.3 million residents. Today the library is established within the community as a place to engage in amazing experiences and opportunities to learn, explore, create, and be physically active, from babies to seniors!

Specific active living offerings at OCLS include weekly or monthly yoga and zumba classes for children and families, movement-based programs for Pre-K, Tai Chi and walking programs for older adults, and a Nature Walk Book Club. Partnerships with many groups and institutions enable the library to offer these programs.

Lessons Learned. The public library adds value to local efforts to increase active living. Promoting active living is not the primary mission of the library, but, liked faith-based institutions, it is an ancillary role facilitated by the deep embeddedness of libraries and librarians in their communities.

Conclusions, Implications, and Next Steps. The next steps are up to you. What partnerships will you start with your local librarians to increase physical activity? We will continue to promote active living at the Orange County Public Library System, and across North America. Will you join us?


Stay involved and connected at LetsMoveInLibraries.org!
Part 1 – Studies of Active Living Interventions


Description: In this study, four public librarians in Southwestern Ontario trained to lead Move 2 Learn program. Libraries were selected because they had space. Findings: “The results of this study demonstrated the feasibility of teaching staff without specialized training in physical education to implement Move 2 Learn.”


Description: In five Canadian public libraries, 90 pedometers were made available. 41 library patrons completed a survey about their walking patterns and pedometer use. More than 330 loans were made. Findings: Chi-square analysis found significant associations between walking and motivation to walk more (p < .05), walking and goal setting (p < .05), and motivation to walk more and setting a walking goal (p < .001).


Description: “Multisectoral approach” to development of rural physical activity promotion coalition in Clinton County, Kentucky, includes public libraries as key stakeholders.

Part 2 – Studies of Natural Practices of Librarians


Description: From 2013–2016, researchers visited 36 library systems and 57 different branch libraries throughout the U.S. Findings: Observations of library storytime programs showed that librarians trained in Every Child Ready to Read were “much more likely to include music and large- and small-motor movement—all contributing to a fun atmosphere that encourages parents and children to play together.”


Description: Survey of Pennsylvania public libraries (n=262). Findings: Librarians frequently interact “with patrons around health and social concerns” including help with “nutrition (70%), exercise (66%).” Survey also finds a little under 50% of libraries said they offered physical activity programming, including Tai Chi and outdoor recreation programs.


Section on McCreary County focuses on Kay Morrow, library director: “Always eager to make a better life for residents here, Morrow is spearheading efforts to rebuild the crumbling sidewalks downtown, secure more lighting at night, and organize a downtown walking club to boost physical activity.”

Part 3 – Public Libraries in Active Living Policy


States public libraries are “an opportune space for the coordination and delivery of health-promoting services,” including “physical activities such as yoga and Tai Chi.”


States "Peer-based strategies can be implemented in a variety of different settings, [including] a community location like a Council on Aging or public library."


States public libraries can facilitate nature connections through StoryWalk® programs, lending nature backpacks, and youth-led nature experiences, among other programs.

More articles at LetsMoveLibraries.org/ALC2020