



Rural Libraries and Walking Study: Oregon Walking Groups and Civic Projects

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WITH FUNDING FROM:



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Forward

I am delighted to write this forward for such an important research project led by OHSU School of Nursing Nurse Scientist, Dr. Cynthia Perry and her team and funded by the National Institute for Nursing Research (NINR). Nursing research is broad and may focus on topics such as health promotion, community health, and vulnerable populations, seeking to produce new knowledge, measure benefit and impact, and improve health. The *Rural Walking and Libraries Study* offered a multi-year intervention implemented in partnership with 18 rural public libraries across Oregon. It has and is generating practical, community-driven and community-based solutions to improve health and social connectedness, vital quality of life considerations, which can be challenging, especially for individuals living in rural areas.

This study partnered with the leadership of trusted public libraries to promote the benefits of physical activity, through weekly group walking programs and to support structured civic engagement projects in half of the sites. The summaries provided in this booklet describe the program's success through participant-reported improvements in physical activity, social connection, mental well-being and community engagement. Many of the individuals who participated did so consistently over the two years, and described reduced isolation, increased confidence in engaging in regular physical activity, and stronger social support networks, particularly among retired, older adults and those living alone.

The project also produced lasting community infrastructure improvements through the Change Club civic engagement program that offered \$5,000 to invest in a project that enhanced the walkability of nine communities. The pride and impact are evident in the descriptions of new and safer walking routes and signage, trail enhancements and accessibility upgrades, walking maps and guides available through libraries, healthcare sites, and visitor centers, and local policy and community engagement efforts to improve walkability and safety.

Participating libraries also reported increased capacity to deliver public health programming, expanded community partnership, and sustained walking groups that are continuing beyond the study funding period.

This important work demonstrates how nursing research, funded through NINR, supports health in rural areas, translating known evidence into scalable, low-cost interventions that strengthen individual health outcomes and communities.

Susan Bakewell Sachs, PhD, RN, FAAN
Vice President for Nursing Affairs, Professor and Dean
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Overview

Walking groups and rural communities

Rural communities in the United States have higher rates of chronic diseases than urban communities, and these outcomes are strongly linked to levels of physical activity.¹⁻² Engaging in adequate physical activity has numerous health benefits, including a lower risk of heart disease, diabetes, and some types of cancer.³

Walking is the most common form of physical activity and can be done without specialized skills or equipment, indoors or outdoors. Group-based walking programs have been shown to increase walking, physical activity, fitness and positive health outcomes.⁴⁻⁶ Group-based walking programs promote the adoption and maintenance of walking for health by building social support, group cohesion and social capital.⁷⁻⁹ In rural communities, social support or lack of social support can be an important facilitator or barrier for walking,¹⁰⁻¹² and group-based walking programs can strengthen social networks and social support.¹³⁻¹⁴

The US Surgeon General issued a Call to Action to promote walking and walkable communities, highlighting the importance of walking and having safe places to walk.¹⁵ Implementing physical activity interventions such as walking groups, however, face challenges in rural settings that include transportation issues, limited community resources and human capital, as well as greater geographic distances between residents.

The role of libraries

A potential health partner in rural communities is public libraries, which are increasingly recognized as community-level resources to implement physical activity programs. Libraries are geographically accessible to most Americans: about 96% of the US population lives within a public library service area, and about half of all US libraries are located in rural areas. Library-based group walking programs may be able to increase physical activity by enhancing social connections, social support, and social capital to promote adoption and maintenance of walking for health.

Our study

In response to the Surgeon General's Call to Action, researchers at Oregon Health & Science University, Texas A&M University, and University of North Carolina Greensboro, teamed up to apply to the National Institutes of Health to fund a two-year study with rural libraries in Oregon. Participating libraries led weekly walking groups in their communities for two years.

This study will report on:

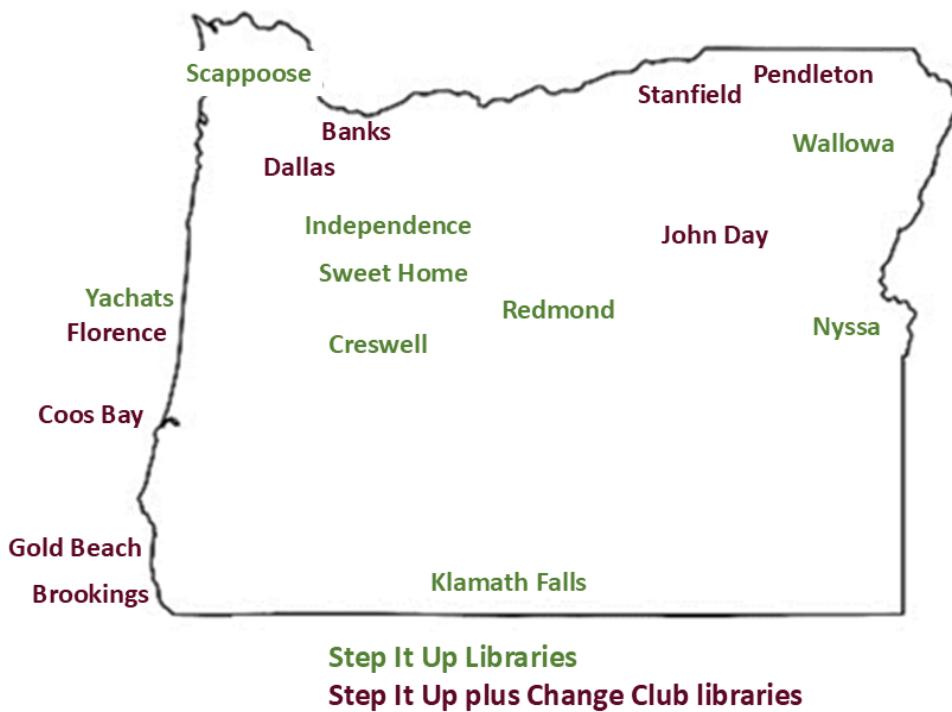
- How the health data of walking participants changed over the course of the study.
- How data collected from walking participants compared to data collected from walking-plus-civic engagement participants.
- To what extent the study helped rural libraries build capacity for implementing a public health program in their community.

This booklet describes the walking groups and civic engagement projects each library implemented during the study.

Walking vs. Walking-plus-Civic Engagement Groups

Eighteen rural public libraries in Oregon enrolled in the study and were randomized to implement either a walking-only group called Step It Up, or a walking-plus-civic engagement group called Step It Up plus Change Club. Groups commenced in June 2023 and continued until June 2025.

Locations of enrolled libraries:



Step It Up

All 18 libraries implemented a weekly walking group called Step It Up. Librarians recruited 15-20 participants from their communities, chose local walking routes, and led participants on walks that lasted up to 45 minutes. After six months, a participant took on the leader role. Librarians recorded attendance and helped organize data collection events.



Step It Up plus Change Club

In addition to walking each week, half the libraries in the study were assigned to implement a civic engagement program called Change Club. These groups were given \$5000 to spend towards a project that enhanced the walkability of their communities. Participants followed a 24-week curriculum that guided them on how to create a change objective, identify potential partners and stakeholders; map community assets; establish and carry out action steps, and monitor progress.



What participants have said . . .

Physical activity and health:

“[I am] truly grateful for this program that got me moving and motivated to spend more time taking care of my own health.”

“I have more social connections as a result of this group, have a better understanding of events going on in the community via word of mouth, and have incorporated more exercise into my daily schedule.”

“Meeting with people weekly provides motivation to keep walking daily and it has been fun getting to know the folks in my group. The people in the group provide good social support. I now walk more often and have developed strategies for how I can motivate myself to exercise regularly.”

Community engagement:

“I appreciate having time set aside just to walk, and to have gotten to know people I wouldn't have met otherwise. I also have a better understanding of several of the government and stakeholder groups we presented to and collaborated with. [I gained] social skills in interactions with people with different world views [and] sense of a role in enhancing community living experience.”

“[I have been motivated by] the connections with group, contribution to community via our civic engagement project.”

“[I have] made lifelong friends in this group and [was] inspired to volunteer and become very engaged in our community and went from being a couch potato to walking every day and many other outdoor activities. [The program] changed my life for the better in many ways, [I] found purpose in volunteering and bettering our community.”

Connection and friendship:

“Before this walking group, I never left the house. I was at home, alone for the past 10 years. This walking group gave me a reason to leave the house. I made friends.”

“I have made some friends! I feel more a part of my community, I recognize the other participants which makes me feel safer.”

“[I benefitted from this program by] getting over social anxiety, meeting new people with different beliefs and views, and finding a great support group.”

“The program, and our group specifically, has been a steady, reliable antidote to isolation, and at times despair.”

CURRY PUBLIC LIBRARY – Gold Beach

Name: Walk On! Gold Beach

We are a mix of lifelong residents and more recent arrivals, and conversations during our walks were opportunities to exchange a range of viewpoints on social issues in our community and beyond. Gold Beach has a relatively high proportion of older adults, and most of the group's participants are retired. Five participants were recruited from the local Veterans of Foreign Wars chapter and several others are also veterans.

Walk On! Gold Beach met on Thursday mornings and enjoyed varying the route. During our project phase, we always started from the library, tracing a loop through a nearby park or the neighborhoods near the elementary school. Later we walked on the beach, and occasionally during bad weather, circled around inside of the community room at the library.



Walk On! Gold Beach members in front of Curry Public library.



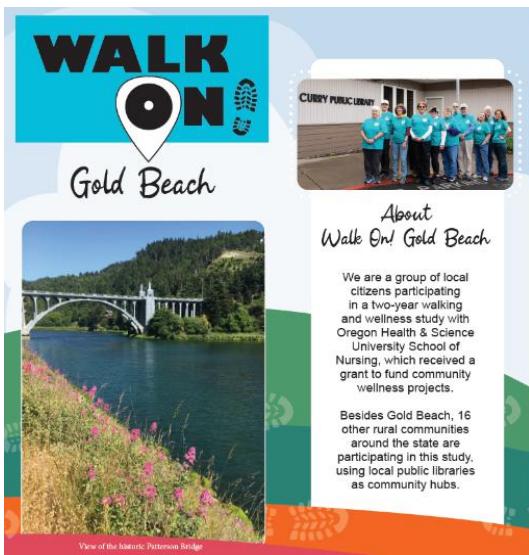
Group members on a local walking route.

Participants seemed to enjoy the exercise and the company, and they were proud of what the group accomplished in the civic project. Some were participating with longtime friends with whom they socialized elsewhere. Some enjoyed the opportunity to get to know people from other backgrounds. The group also got satisfaction from picking up litter every week as we walked.

The group strove for consensus in planning our walking routes project, with many creative ideas for the project direction and the routes. Our group met the challenge of balancing free expression of individual preferences while keeping forward momentum in tasks such as creating the brochure, signage, and online information.

Some of our participants had been quite inactive and were pleased to get out walking just once a week, while others were looking for new friends to exercise with. Some were new to the southern Oregon coast and needed encouragement to get the gear and get out, even when the weather was less than ideal!

Civic engagement project:



Front and back cover of the brochure.

social media to encourage residents to walk the routes, consider setting walking or fitness goals, and walk to establishments.

The chosen walking routes:

- Park Walk: a short, 0.6 mile loop at Buffington Park, with optional add-on “neighborhood” route
- Harbor/River Walk: a medium-length loop from the animal shelter area to the Rotary River Walk trail.
- Ocean/Town Walk: a longer, 2.0 mile loop that starts at the Community Center, follows Oceanside Drive and Ellensburg Avenue.

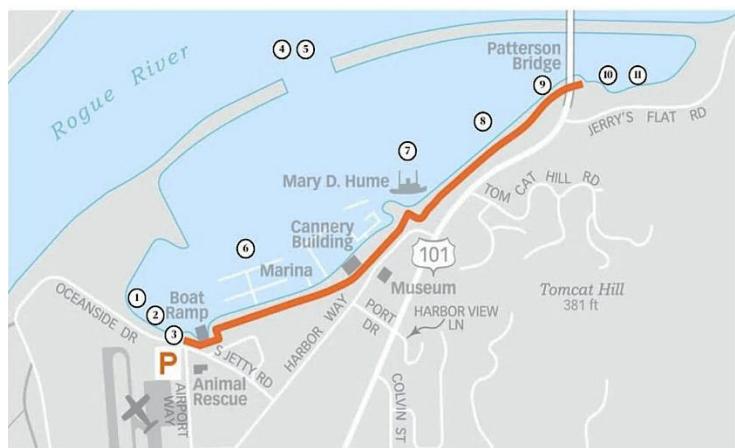
The Ocean/Town Walk was enhanced by completion of a paved off-road pedestrian/bicycle path, developed by the City of Gold Beach with state grant funding. As a result, we are seeing an increasing number of walkers (including dog owners) taking advantage of a safe, level path with views of and access to the beach.

Walk On! members (four in particular) presented to and coordinated with city and port governing councils and staff for planning assistance and permission to post signage. We also presented to the Rotary Club, which originally paved and maintained a riverside trail incorporated into one of our walks.

We designed our civic project with the goal of increasing recreational walking opportunities for residents and visitors by identifying and publicizing three walking routes. We selected routes that offered a range of lengths and points of interest, then marked the routes with signage around town in coordination with the City of Gold Beach, Port of Gold Beach, private property owners, and other community stakeholders.

Signage included a starting point sign with a QR code for a map and highlights of the walk (on the library’s website), as well as route markers that alert walkers to where the route continues or takes a turn.

Library staff provided valuable assistance in producing a professional-looking brochure and web pages, building on one team member’s extensive work on a team-designed version. Brochures were distributed to schools, health care providers, the Gold Beach Visitor Center, local businesses, and other locations. We also used



Harbor/River Walk walking route from the brochure.

DESCHUTES PUBLIC LIBRARY – Redmond

Name: Redmond Roamers

The Redmond Roamers are a group of incredibly supportive adults who share a strong sense of community and care for one another. Most members are retirees, with a few working professionals, including one married couple. Since the very first walks in May 2023, every participant has been empowered and encouraged to contribute ideas for the walking group.

At the start, we experimented with different walking locations—each selected with group input. Ultimately, one route emerged as the favorite: the Dry Canyon Trail, meeting at Quartz Park. With its wide, paved, flat paths, playgrounds, covered shelters, amenities, and optional stairs for an added challenge, it's hard to beat. Thanks to the trail being accessible even in winter, cancellations were rare.

It didn't take long for members to form a close bond. Just a couple of months in, the group organized a "Friends and Family Walk" outside of the study, on a different day of the week. This open walk continues to this day, and is recommended to other library community members. The group also attends community events together, such as the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Redmond Senior Center, the Bend Health Fair, visits to the new Redmond Library, and other fun library programs.



Some of the Redmond Roamers.



Participants walking along the Dry Canyon trail.

Each week, the group checks in with one another about health concerns, medical procedures, family events, and vacations. Many participants—especially those who live alone—have found this ongoing support to be a meaningful part of their lives.

The group also celebrates milestones and accomplishments together. We held a potluck to mark the transition to peer leadership, exchanged cookies during the winter holidays, and enjoyed a spooky Halloween-themed swap. The study will conclude with a pizza party, and the group plans to continue their weekly walks even after the study ends.

DALLAS PUBLIC LIBRARY

Name: Heart & Sole

Our walking group is a group of Dallas area residents who have developed a real bond over the past two years. Our first few meetings were at Dallas City Park; we walked through the park and the surrounding neighborhoods, but soon settled into the routine of walking the Rickreall Creek Trail System, located behind the Dallas Aquatic Center. This trail has a wide, flat path that makes it easier to walk side-by-side as a group, and enjoy the beautiful nature and wildlife.

Our group is a lively bunch of friendly people, and we quickly learned about each other's lives.

Most of our members are retired (two of them from the Dallas Library!) but we also have a few younger members still working full-time jobs. A few members of our group were new to the area, and joining our group was a great way for them to discover some of the best places to walk in Dallas.

After our peer leaders took over, walks regularly moved to the Dallas Cemetery, which has (in addition to beautiful scenery) hills for more of a walking challenge. During particularly cold and/or rainy days, we also met at two different churches and walked their hallways.



Heart and Sole members walking on the Rickreall Creek Trail.



Group members holding their Pacific Crest Trail medals.

Throughout the past two years, several members of our group have added other activities, including weight training, exercise classes and swimming. A group of five members also meet to walk two additional days per week. A few of us also walked in the Dallas Glow Run two years in a row (October 2023 and 2024) which is a 5k route.

One of our peer leaders created the Pacific Crest Trail Challenge. Each week she sent an email to the group letting us know how many miles we collectively walked, along with a map of where we would be on the Pacific Crest Trail. She also included photos of scenery we would see at a particular point on the trail. When the group completed the challenge, we had a potluck celebration at the library, and our peer leader awarded us with handmade medals.

Civic engagement project:

Our group discussed a few ideas before settling on our civic engagement project, but when we found out the city had received a grant to revitalize the Japanese Garden at Dallas City Park, we were interested in getting involved.

The original Dallas Japanese Garden was designed in the 1960s by Art Higashi, a Japanese-American businessman living in Dallas. Over the years it had fallen into disrepair. Several attempts had been made in the past to raise funds to restore it, but we found out that in addition to the recently obtained grant, several local groups and businesses were contributing time, supplies and money. Stakeholders included The Dallas



One of the Torii gates and plaque listing contributors to the garden.



Finished paths and new trees, shrubs and water features in the garden.

We decided to fund the plaques that would be placed on the Torii gates that would be installed in front of the bridge. The history of the garden was especially important to our group, and we are happy that Art Higashi's contributions would be remembered through a memorial on the plaque.

Many members of our group plan to continue walking together after the study is over. It is wonderful to be able to walk through the park and see our group's name on the plaque!

Rotary Club, Dallas Garden Club, The Dallas Community Foundation, and many others. An architect specializing in traditional Japanese gardens was hired to design a garden that would cost less time and money to maintain.

A few members of our group remembered what the original garden used to look like, and seeing the momentum building with the restoration was very motivating. After the footbridge was replaced with a beautiful new bridge, demolition began on the paths of the garden. Our group spent an afternoon hauling rocks, chunks of concrete, and brush to make way for the new paths.



Participants next to the rock and concrete they moved.

WALLOWA PUBLIC LIBRARY

Name: The Great Wallowa Walk About

When this project started in May of 2023, none of the participants knew what this weekly walk would come to mean for many of them. At our inaugural meeting ground rules were set by the group that would allow for our diverse group to enjoy weekly walks without the noise of the world and just enjoy our time together.

Wallowa, population less than 1000, had a group of nineteen women and one man. We set out on the goal to walk together once a week and tried many different walking routes around town, with some loops and some out-and-backs



The Great Wallowa Walk About.



Participants safely cross railroad tracks.

after the loss of a loved one, and created memories together.

Over the two year program, some participants came to nearly every walk and some were fair weather friends. But together, we grew, spent time in nature, shared life stories, and look forward to where this group will go at the conclusion of the study.

In the second year we settled nicely into a routine of walking a loop at our local Nez Perce Homeland, which allowed participants to walk a pace and distance that worked for each individual. Occasionally, in the dead of winter, we had to make laps around our high school gym to keep inside from the frigid, slippery world outside.

Together, participants ensured no one walked alone, which was one of our ground rules and checked in with each other if someone didn't attend several weeks in a row. Our group built cross-generational friendships, cross-political friendships, and friendships with others whom they may never have met otherwise, even in our small town.

As a group we rooted for each other after surgeries, celebrated a pregnancy and birth, held those up

GRANT COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY – John Day

Name: Walk-a-Lot-te



Members of Walk-a-Lot-te

In and around John Day, there is an extensive network of trails with beautiful mountain views; during our walks we see eagles, deer, foxes, rockchucks and other wildlife. And along with the scenery and exercise, we have a great time together socially.

We pride ourselves on walking in all kinds of weather (so long as it doesn't create a safety hazard). Last winter, on a couple of days when conditions were really rough, we were able to walk indoors at the Grant County Fairgrounds' Trowbridge Pavilion.

One day last summer, we hiked two scenic miles up the side of Strawberry Mountain to Strawberry Lake. At the lake, we ate lunch and held our weekly meeting. It was a wonderful time.

We also participate in parades and other community events, and our peer leader has been interviewed three times on our local radio talk show. The town has grown accustomed to seeing and hearing us! When the clinical study ended, we decided to continue on as a walking and community-engagement group.

Our group meets at the Grant County Library every Thursday afternoon. A half-hour before each meeting, we walk John Day sidewalks wearing our Walk-a-lot-te' T-shirts.

On Wednesdays, we take our weekly group walks. The first Wednesday of the month we walk at the Boot Hill Cemetery in Canyon City; the second, along the John Day Riverfront; the third, on John Day's Seventh Street Trail; and the fourth at the Grant County Airport. On months with a fifth Wednesday, we take a "surprise" walk at another of the many scenic sites Grant County has to offer. Before each walk, the peer leader sends members a reminder on our group's text-message tree.



Members march in a local parade.

Civic engagement project:

The Seventh Street Trail in John Day, which borders local baseball and soccer fields and other athletic facilities, is a main attraction for John Day's walkers and joggers. Where the trail branches off to become the riverfront trail, it crosses a hilly part of N.W. Bridge Street. Traffic tends to speed down that hill.

For our civic-engagement project, our group decided to seek to install signs to slow down traffic along the hill. We outlined our project to the John Day City Council, which approved it unanimously, and then put in for our \$5,000 civic-engagement grant from OHSU.

At that point, the search was on for signs. We found a company in California that could supply us with what we needed -- two pedestrian-safety signs with flashing, solar-powered LED lights that are programmable for on/off and bright/dim.



The flashing, solar-powered walk sign.



Members in front of the walking sign.

We coordinated the signs' installation with John Day's city manager and public-works department. They went up in June 2024 and since then have slowed traffic considerably where the walking trail crosses N.W. Bridge Street.

The project was a great learning experience in civic involvement and has helped make a heavily-trafficked trail safer for our local walking community.

Our group continues to walk every week to promote healthy living and lasting friendships. We continue to hold meetings every week and have expanded our civic engagement by taking on a couple of ambitious projects that will keep us involved in the community with no plans of slowing down. Thanks to OHSU for allowing us this opportunity.

CRESWELL PUBLIC LIBRARY

Name: Shake, Rattle, and Stroll

Our Creswell Shake, Rattle, and Stroll walking group has been a wonderful excuse to exercise, learn more about Creswell, and get to know the people who make the city special.

The group is made up of all kinds of people, from one person with young children, to another having their first grandbaby, and to more who are counting grandchildren on two hands!

We have walkers who volunteer at the local grange, food bank, Scouts, and library. We've seen members out for extra walks with family members and pets. We had another clearing blackberries on our walks. We even had a half marathon finisher!

The group has met every Friday morning to walk, chat, and check in on each other. Most days, the walks began and ended at the library, but would branch out into different parts of our small city. We also explored two local parks, one along a small lake and the other along the river.



Members of Shake, Rattle and Stroll.



Walkers cross the street in Creswell.

After visiting Lynx Hollow Park for the first time, more than half of our walkers were surprised to learn that such a beautiful park was just outside of town.

With the end of OHSU support looming, the Shake, Rattle, and Strollers are preparing to welcome new members to their walks. They hope to continue walking weekly and expand the group to those who didn't qualify for the OHSU study.

Friends and family of our current walkers are eager to join in. And there is the monthly conversation with a curious local driver wondering what the heck we were up to. Many locals have expressed an interest in joining our group.

SIUSLAW PUBLIC LIBRARY – Florence

Name: Siuslaw Wind Walkers



Siuslaw Wind Walkers at Exploding Whale Park.

every week and worked on our project, we always started our walks from the library. We varied our route, walking through neighborhoods or nearby parks, along Bay Street in old town Florence, or to the Siuslaw River.

Once our project was complete, we began meeting at other locations and sometimes having a picnic lunch together after our walk. Several of us were friends or neighbors before we joined the walking group, but most of us didn't know each other. We have become a cohesive group over the course of the study and have supported one another through life events, loss, illness, and injury.

We have walked in all kinds of weather. When OHSU offered us an incentive gift, most of us chose rain hats because we live on the coast and it's often rainy on walk days. We've even done laps around our local Fred Meyer when the weather was too dismal for an outdoor walk.

Our group plans to continue walking after the conclusion of the OHSU study, and to invite other people who have expressed interest in walking with us. We have seen many benefits from our weekly walks and hope to share with the community.

Our walking group is made up of 10 members from the Florence area (we started with 16 but had several members move away or leave due to health issues or the time commitment). The population of Florence skews older, and many of our group are retired or working part-time.

Participants were recruited through advertisements that were posted at local businesses, the library, and the library newsletter. Other recruitment methods included our librarian giving radio interviews, and friends who had already signed up promoting the group. Some of us are new to the area, and some of us have lived here our whole lives.

For the first year, while we met for Change Club



Siuslaw Wind Walkers at the library.

Civic engagement project:

The Siuslaw Wind Walkers decided to create a local walking map for our project. We saw a need in the community for a guide to lesser-known paths and trails for different kinds of walkers. Group members made a list of walking routes and went out to test them and make notes on their difficulty; accessibility; distance; type of terrain; dog friendliness; and amenities like parking, restrooms, and water fountains.



Recording our walking public service announcements at the local radio station.

We chose ten walking routes to include in our map, with a variety of appeal and types of walks. We worked with the City of Florence to create a map graphic and wrote descriptions for each of the trails.

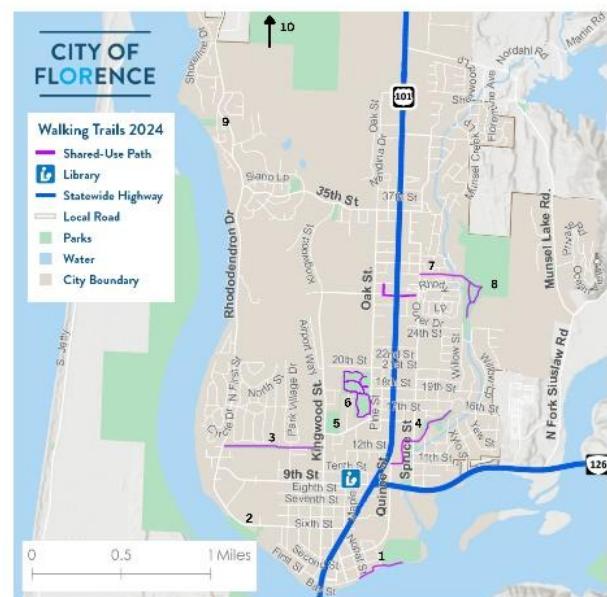
Our librarian created a trifold brochure design with the map and descriptions. We had 2,000+ copies printed, which we distributed to local businesses, hotels, restaurants, civic buildings, visitors' center, etc. The map is also hosted on the library website, where people can print their own copies or use on their phones.

We also held three community walks at a local park to promote walking. We led guided interpretive walks along one of the walking routes, gave out copies of the finished map, and gave away flashing walking lights and magnets with a QR code to our walking page. We also provided snacks and water for participants.

We used our remaining grant funding to increase awareness about the benefits of walking. We purchased a full-page ad in the local newspaper to publish our finished walking map. We arranged for a year of radio ads, which our group members have been recording monthly on a variety of topics about walking.



Promoting our community walks with fliers around town.



Walking trail map published by the group.

YACHATS PUBLIC LIBRARY

Name: Road Scholars

Yachats Road Scholars initially came together very easily and was in great demand. We did some local advertising but we also found participants through word of mouth. Before we even began walking we had a waiting list! The community got very excited about the opportunity to walk together once a week.

Our first task was deciding on a day of the week and the time of day. We landed on 2pm-3pm Thursday afternoons because this worked well for all of the walkers and it was also an empty spot in our Yachats Commons building. We were able to use the Yachats Commons as our inclement weather back up.

We began walking on Thursdays in May of 2023. We initially met at the old library location which is now under construction and did our stretching in the lawn area near the library. We started on the same route and used that route for a few months until people wanted to branch out and try something different. We tried out a number of routes but generally avoided walking along Hwy 101—which has sidewalks but is noisy!

After the first year, we moved our meeting place to the Yachats Commons building as the Yachats Public Library also set up a temporary location at the Commons during the tear down and rebuild of our “old library.” We ended up spending the majority of our time on a loop that started at the Yachats Commons and headed toward the ocean, walking along Ocean View Dr. The views are spectacular and we were very lucky.



Participants on Ocean View Drive.



Road Scholars in front of Yachats Pavilion.

We had three groups of walkers, a fast group, a medium group, and a group that was slower. At no time did anyone walk on their own. It was important to the group and the librarian leader as well as the peer leader that everyone walk in at least pairs.

The Road Scholars got very lucky with the weather. Surprisingly so. I don't believe we walked indoors more than 8-10 times during the two-year period. Windy, wet Yachats seemed ideal on Thursday afternoons at 2pm. Who would have thought?

We ended with 16 participants, all of whom looked forward to getting together on Thursdays to improve our health and to get to know each other better.

PENDLETON PUBLIC LIBRARY

Name: Pendleton Walkie Talkies

Pendleton Walkie Talkies members all joined the group with great enthusiasm and we lived up to the name: we walked and we talked!

The Walkie Talkies met on Thursday evenings and our main route was the Pendleton River Parkway. We talked about alternate routes, but the river walk was so perfect for us that we walked there most of our Thursdays. We were lucky enough to have access to the Pendleton Parks and Rec gym on very hot days. Most group members agreed that walking outside was more fun!

Walkers enjoyed the company and conversation as much as the exercise. Our group was welcoming, encouraging, and fun. We observed the seasons on the river, met a UPS driver who walked on his break driving across state, and ended one walk at the Pendleton Round-Up Cowboy Breakfast. We shared life events, vented about stress, encouraged each other through injuries and illnesses, and frequently laughed.



Participants on the Pendleton River Parkway route.



Participants on the Pendleton River Parkway walking route.

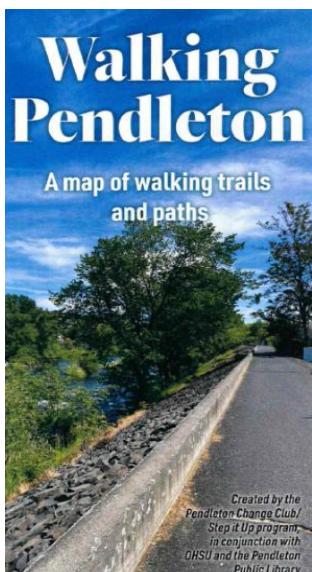
Many walkers noticed the physical and mental effects of activity as well as the effects of socializing. “I really need this walk today” or “I almost didn’t come tonight but I knew I’d feel better after walking” were common sentiments. Members sometimes walked together outside of the regular meetings and members who had to miss a regular walk often let the group know that they still got in a walk.

The group worked together to make the walks successful for all members by agreeing to walk inside when necessary, altering the route if needed, walking at a pace that was comfortable for everyone, or making sure everyone had a buddy and knew where to meet up with the group after the walk.

During the Change Club part of the program the group practiced brainstorming ideas, listening to other group members with different ideas, and voting on decisions. The regular attendees of the group are planning to keep walking after the end of the study in June and hope to encourage others to join them!

Civic engagement project:

The priorities of our civic engagement project were to provide the community with knowledge of available walking routes, to promote walking by sharing the benefits of walking, and to inspire the community to meet others who want to walk together. We agreed on creating a map of local walking paths, setting up an information table at three local events, and purchasing water bottles and reusable bags to give away.



Front of the walking map guide.

After discussing the pros and cons of a printed map vs an online map, the group decided on a printed map that

would be easy to hand out, fold down to a small size, and be accessible for anyone. We added links to information about other walking trails in the area, walking safety tips, the benefits of walking, and solutions to common reasons for not walking.

In addition to handing out maps at events, we talked to people about the benefits of walking and about how to overcome common barriers to going for a walk. We also chatted with people about their favorite walking spots and had them mark our large map with stickers.

Handing out water bottles and reusable shopping bags further encouraged walking and was also an incentive for people to stop and talk to us. Maps will be available at the library, the Pendleton Center for the Arts, and other local businesses and hotels.

The Pendleton Parks and Rec website provided us with information about most of the paths included on the map including distances, surface material, and available amenities. We printed maps at a local business, and hosted tables at the Pendleton Farmers Market and a local park as a part of Umatilla County Public Health Department 5K run/walk.



Walkie Talkies at The Umatilla County Health Department 5K event.



Walkie Talkies at the Pendleton Farmers Market.

SCAPPOOSE PUBLIC LIBRARY

Name: River Walkers

Our walking group is a vibrant blend of lifelong residents and those who have recently discovered the charm of Scappoose! Located just 20 miles from the Portland metro area, Scappoose has new homes and families all around us. Initially, we kicked off with 19 members, a mix of individuals balancing jobs and others enjoying their retirement.

Every Friday at 8 AM, the River Walkers came together, eager to embrace the great outdoors. Coordinating schedules was a bit tricky due to work commitments, but we eventually found a time for walking. Scappoose is blessed with several easy hiking trails both within the city and in the surrounding area.

While we explored various trails, we often found ourselves enjoying the Crown-Zellerbach Trail, a path that was once an old logging railroad. The section in Scappoose is paved, with ample parking, making it accessible for everyone, especially those with mobility challenges. We typically stuck to the paved trail for our study. Each session was a brisk 40-minute walk.



Participants on the Crown Zellerbach walking trail.



River Walkers members.

To maintain group interaction, we created a Facebook group where members could connect without needing to share personal emails. For the first six months, our membership was steady and full of life. However, as the seasons changed and the weather turned, attendance began to dip a little, with some members needing to step back due to work or health issues. By the second year, our group had settled into a core of about 10 dedicated walkers.

We organized ourselves into smaller subgroups based on walking speed, making sure everyone felt comfortable while sticking to our ground rules about conversations during our walks. We also regularly discussed potential changes to our walking routes, keeping things fresh and exciting.

Now that our study has wrapped up, a small group has started gathering on Monday mornings, and there's even talk of forming another walking group for a different day. The journey doesn't end here—we're thrilled to keep moving and sharing in the joy of walking together!

BANKS PUBLIC LIBRARY

Name: Rural Ramblers

The Rural Ramblers is a group of folks who are mostly retired. Originally, we had a 40-year age gap between our youngest and oldest walkers, but both the youngest and the oldest dropped out so now most walkers are within a 20 year age range.



Some participants participated in a bonus First Day walk at Stub Stewart State Park.

those friendships.

On the few occasions that someone was injured or unwell, the group was also kind about checking in and seeing how that person was doing. One member broke her hip but didn't drop out and is now back to walking full time with us.

The Rural Ramblers met on Friday mornings and walked on the Banks-Vernonia Linear Trail most of



Ready for a wet winter walk!

Some really lovely friendships have been born and bloomed in this group. At least one member joined because she was new to the community and she is now an active part of our group and a volunteer in the community. Many of the group knew each other before joining, but the commitment of weekly walking has deepened



Walking on the Linear Trail on a fall day.

the time. Sometimes we would thread through town instead, and enjoy looking at everyone's yards.

While we easily endured the rainy weather that our part of the state is known for, our group have had very few walks with really bad weather. In the end, we only had to cancel one walk because of ice and snowy conditions.

Civic engagement project:



The final product! Equipment installed and surface finished.

The librarian bore a lot of the responsibility of keeping track of who was doing what and how the fundraising was going, but the group were all really engaged in the project. Fundraising efforts included a letter campaign, selling 50/50 raffle tickets, a 4th of July carnival fundraiser, and grants from two organizations.

All together, we raised just over \$30,000 for the project. We also had local construction



Engaging with the community about exercise.

The Rural Ramblers' Mission is to promote physical activity among all community members by improving accessibility of recreation and exercise spaces. To accomplish this, we decided to install parcour equipment in Greenville City Park.

Nearly every member of the group helped in some very significant way. Some were adept at raising lots of money at different community events and in our grocery store. Others were active in reaching out to other organizations for significant funding. One person dove deep into the equipment research and found the company and equipment we ended up using.



Fundraising on the Fourth of July.

companies that donated over \$15,000 in in-kind work by doing all of the surface prep, concrete work, and installation of the equipment.

We are very proud of how well the project turned out. We held a Grand Opening Celebration on May 31, 2025.

Stakeholders that helped with this project include the City of Banks, Banks Community Foundation, Daybreak Rotary Club of Forest Grove, Ford Family Foundation, and the Chamber of Commerce.

SWEET HOME PUBLIC LIBRARY

Name: Sweet Home Striders

Sweet Home Public Library's group has been small, but very consistent. We have gotten to know the neighborhoods around the library.

We love walking on this short wooded path that is very close to downtown Sweet Home. Every week we see something different on the path, from people, to wildlife to wildflowers. We have also found many different ways to get to this path! There is a one block hill that we climb each week and we have definitely noticed how our stamina has increased over the course of our walks. The hill is much easier now.

Life and schedule changes forced many original participants to become unable to walk at our weekly time, but we know many of them have found ways to walk at other times of the week.



Entrance to the Sweet Home Public Library.



Participants walk along the South Hills trail.

We enjoy talking about happenings in town, flowers and birds (especially finches!) We are looking forward to continuing this walking group past the study and increasing our participant list.

The walking group has also had a positive impact on the Library. Many participants have become regular library users, with several continuing to visit at least once a week even after they were no longer able to join the Friday walks.

Members have consistently demonstrated strong support for the role of libraries in fostering community connection. Their ongoing engagement has helped raise awareness of library services and build a stronger sense of local involvement.

COOS BAY PUBLIC LIBRARY



Sole Mates participants at Shore Acres State Park.

Name: Sole Mates

Sole Mates came together with only one known commonality: being part of a group involved in a health study with specific parameters. Our group accommodated strengths and differences, each of us contributing our own special skills, ranging from amateur botany, photography, note-taking, graphic design, professional organization, and leadership. We all demonstrated supportiveness and acceptance of each other.

Many members improved their physical health by losing weight, lowering blood pressure, and increasing physical activity. Members also improved their mental health by building friendships, connecting with nature, and meeting people from different cultures. Learning more about library resources was another major benefit as members were not aware of the Library of Things, Community Fridge, State Park Backpacks, healthy cooking classes, other library programs, and resources related to wellness and physical fitness.

Members were made aware of several community groups for which they felt kinship and had no prior awareness, such as the walking group, Park Pack of Coos Bay and North Bend. Sole Mates participated in several volunteer activities both as a group and as individuals. Many members volunteered in local park clean ups.

As a group, we participated in a local Dog Days of Summer event at John Topits Park where we led hikes with residents, observing trails for trash and needed repairs. As a result, Sole Mates has become a local resource for the city's Adopt a Park program.



Participants on the South Slough Reserve trail.

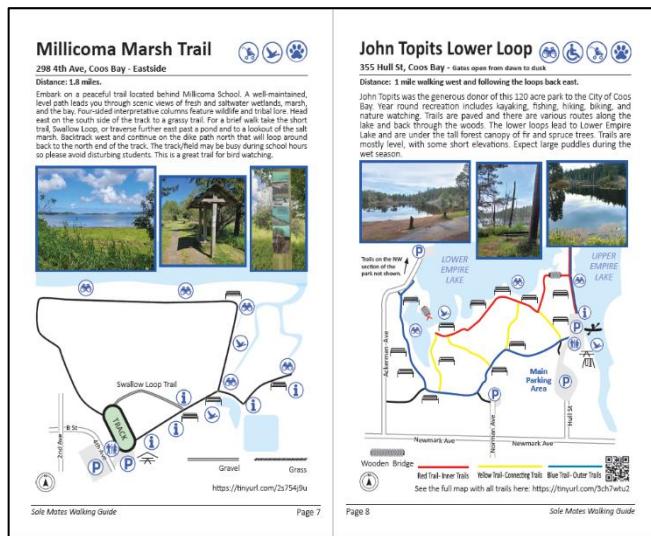
Civic engagement project:

Upon completion of the civic engagement curriculum, Sole Mates decided to create a walking guide. To start, we met at local trails to be considered for inclusion and began documenting amenities and taking pictures as we walked the trails. We focused on nine local trails that can be easily accessed by community members with different abilities.

Walking Guide for Coos Bay & North Bend was created after hiking numerous trails and determining which were the most safe and accessible. We decided to give each trail their own page. The trails have brief descriptions, maps, pictures, and icons. Descriptions include difficulty levels and safety concerns.

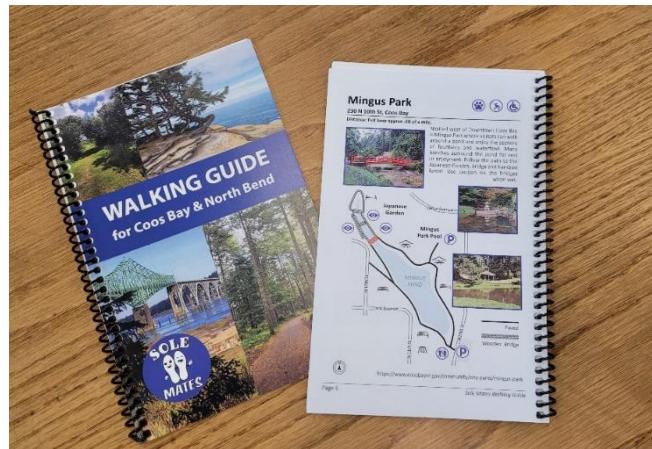
Upon completion of our guide, we held a well-publicized and extremely successful launch party at the library attended by 105 community members including the city manager who, in addition to the mayor, commended our group for providing this service, stating it is an excellent community resource. The mayors of both North Bend and Coos Bay have promoted the Sole Mates in their weekly community

announcements and Sole Mates often join the monthly Walk with the Mayors.



Two trail maps from the walking guide.

later, we printed five hundred more copies to keep up with demand as individuals and organizations across the county were requesting copies. We will spend the last sum of our project budget on five hundred more stapled booklets. Local organizations are interested in sponsoring future print runs for which they will receive acknowledgement.



Walking guide created by Sole Mates.

Electronic copies of the walking guide live on the library's website and can be accessed with a QR code which can be found inside the guide and on business cards we have distributed throughout the community.

Copies of the guide and business cards with QR codes have been distributed locally to healthcare facilities, visitor centers, state parks, and businesses. A page acknowledging community partners and stakeholders who supported or contributed to the project is included at the beginning of the guide.

Our first order of five hundred copies was printed in color with a black spiral binding, nice paper, and cardstock cover. A month

INDEPENDENCE PUBLIC LIBRARY

Name: Social Sneakers



Walking route in Riverview Park.

Everyone is proud of how much they have accomplished and have been motivating each other to reach their goals especially during bad weather. Everyone has been a great team keeping each other accountable.

Challenges to consistent attendance included bad weather, life events, and holidays. A light drizzle of rain never stopped the group from walking, but a downpour or some snow made the walking path slippery enough to cancel out of safety. The group appreciated the gear that was provided by the study, which included walking sticks and rain ponchos.

Now that the study has concluded, our group is looking forward to welcoming new members.

Our group consists mostly of residents from Independence, Monmouth and surrounding areas. Social Sneakers meet on Tuesday mornings. In the early stages, we would start at the library and walk downtown to Riverview Park, neighborhoods or Inspiration Garden. We later ventured out to different parks in our neighboring town, adding variety and distance.

Some joined to be more active and have some encouragement to exercise more consistently while others were new in town looking to meet new people, join groups and have new activities to do.

Participants enjoyed making new friends and exploring places they have not been to. The Inspiration Garden became one of the favorite places to walk. Some participants socialized outside the group and even participated in a 5k walk for charity. The group felt encouraged by these kind of activities together.



Participants exploring natural trails.

STANFIELD PUBLIC LIBRARY

Name: Sole Mates

Sole Mates are a vibrant and diverse group of Stanfield residents who have been walking together every Thursday evening since June 2023. The group includes 18 members ranging in age from their 30s to late 70s, with roughly one-third retired and the rest still working.

It quickly became clear that our group was not just a walking group—they're community builders who have sparked genuine connections among group members. Three Sole Mates serve on the Stanfield Community Center board, and many participate in monthly breakfasts to



Sole Mates walking at the local high school track.



Members walk in the winter.

The Sole Mates prove that when people come together with purpose and positivity, they can do far more than walk—they can transform a town.

Fun fact: One dedicated member—the oldest in the group—has only missed a single walk!

support the center. They celebrate each other's milestones, lend a hand when someone's in need, and uplift one another with encouraging words.

Their weekly walks also inspired action. Members partnered with Stanfield Parks and Recreation to launch new community programs: Zumba, Hi/Low Fitness, and Senior Fitness—all driven by the group's energy and commitment to wellness.



Sole Mates in the Stanfield library dressed for a winter walk.

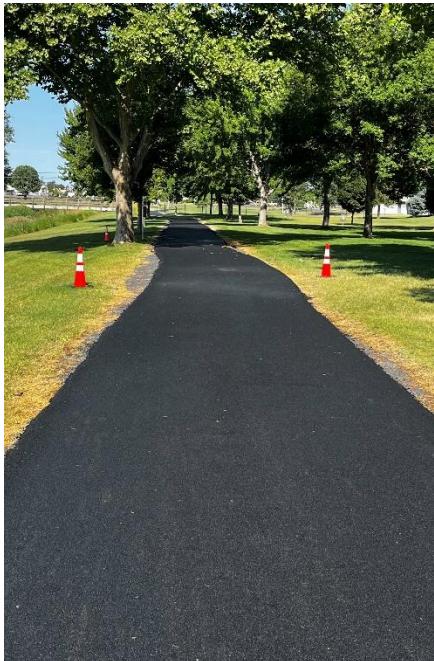
Civic engagement project:

For our civic engagement project, Sole Mates chose to improve a 1.3-mile gravel walking path in the city. Recognizing the trail's potential to serve as a safe and accessible outdoor space, we helped improve this trail by:

- Securing grants from the Good Shepherd Community Health Foundation, the Hermiston Community Foundation, and funding from the City of Stanfield
- Arranging for benches along the path for rest stops
- Paving the first section of the trail, beginning in July 2025
- Installing a kiosk at Bard Park to raise public awareness
- Encouraging the city to add dog waste bag holders and trash cans for cleanliness
- Installing better signage to mark the trail



Sole Mates secured a \$10,000 grant from the Greater Hermiston Community Foundation.



The Sole Mates raised money and engaged stakeholders to improve a city walking trail by paving and installing benches and a kiosk.

SOUTH SUBURBAN BRANCH LIBRARY – Klamath Falls

Name: Road Scholars

Here in Klamath Falls we had 20 people who originally signed up to join the study, and I believe 15 people attended the initial meeting and walk, which happened at the South Suburban Library. Our group voted on the time, day and location of our walks, which were to be held on Mondays at a lovely park down on the Klamath Lake.



The South Suburban Branch library in Klamath Falls.

There was always a nice breeze off the lake which made the walks on a hot summer day more tolerable! It's pretty warm out that time of day.

There were a few married couples in our group, and they eventually had to discontinue walking with us at that time due to work commitments. Most of our members are retired, and some faced difficult health challenges throughout the study. A huge round of applause to them as they were able to persevere and make it the full two years! We were all so proud of them!

Winter brought a new set of challenges this past year as we had more snow than we've seen in over 30 years! We searched for an indoor location to walk and only had two choices, and we chose The Home Depot. They were very welcoming and supportive, and we continued walking at 4:30 on Mondays. Walking there wasn't the perfect place because we were slowed down by bulky aisles and customers, but we were grateful to have a warm indoor location, safe from the snow and icy elements outside!



Moore Park in Klamath Falls.

Once Spring arrived, we were excited to be outdoors again, and this time chose a new park with a nice path that was manageable for one of our members who used a Walker. This park didn't have a view of the Lake, but there's always a trade-off, right?!

Our group members dwindled over time, but we have built new and lasting friendships, and everyone enjoyed benefitting from walking, being accountable, and following through from the beginning to the end of the two-year long commitment. I think most of us felt proud of ourselves for this accomplishment.

CHETCO COMMUNITY PUBLIC LIBRARY - Brookings

Name: Imagine Change Club

Our Imagine Change Club participants signed up for the walking group for a number of reasons: build a sense of comraderie with fellow residents, get some regular exercise, and explore the walking opportunities in Brookings. Participants were also interested in what joining a research study would be like.



Members of Imagine Change Club.

due to rain when it was really coming down. When windstorms rolled in, our group had the appropriate gear, with incentives paid for by the study, including walking sticks, rain ponchos, and reflective arm bands. Probably the worst risk from the rain was slippery walking surfaces, so wearing good shoes or boots was important.

Participants started noticing some changes within a few weeks. Some members remarked that their physical strength increased, measured by how far or fast they could walk in 45 minutes. Some said they had lost weight.

Overall, however, the biggest change participants noted was that being part of a group was a huge motivating factor. If left to walk alone, participants agreed they are more likely to skip walking. But knowing that they are meeting several other people on a weekly basis made the difference whether to show up or not.

We met at the library once a week, with the walking route determined by the librarian. Our group definitely ranged in walking speeds, from a relatively fast walker, to a participant who walked pretty slowly. Our rule was that no one walked alone. Participants took turns making sure at least one person walked with the slowest walker. And the fastest walker agreed not to get so far ahead as to lose eyesight with the rest of the group. At that point, they turned around and looped back to join the group before walking ahead again.

The weather in Brookings could change quickly. Participants were used to rain, of course, so walks were only called off



Entrance to Azaela Park in Brookings.

Civic engagement project:

We were provided by the study a curriculum booklet that gave a step-by-step guide on how to choose a project that improved walkability in our community. Each week after our walk we spent 30 minutes on a chapter. The curriculum gave guidance on how to identify potential partners in the community who would join our project, as well as creating a budget and a timeline.

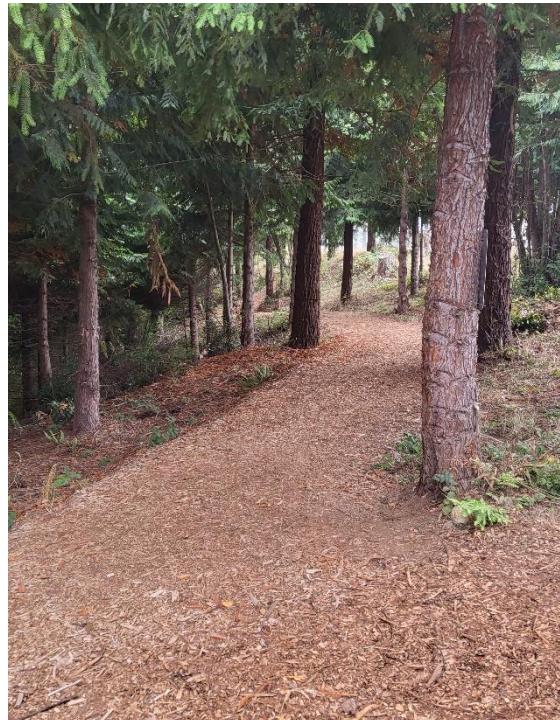
There were several possibilities to choose from, but ultimately we chose to use our funds to help the city improve a walking path and install a bench in Brookings most popular park: Azaela Park. The park has several walking trails, but some sections needed repair, so partnering with the City was an excellent way to improve walkability.

The city was happy to accept the money from our project, and a few details had to be worked out, such as is there a due date when the money has to be spent? Do they need to provide receipts on how the money was spent and would walking participants be involved in the labor? If so, does the city need insurance? Our group learned that there can be many details to be worked out as part of a civic engagement project.

Improving a walking path and providing a bench comes from the idea that infrastructure plays an important role in the walkability of a community. When a pathway is more useable and attractive, people are more likely to walk it. When there are limited or unsafe places to walk, people are less likely to walk.



A new bench in Azaela park.



Improved walking path in Azaela Park.

Work began on the section of pathway in June, 2025 and was completed before the end of summer. Our group is pleased that by the time the annual Azaela festival kicks off in June 2026, visitors as well as local resident will enjoy a walking path and bench that we helped provide.

In the meantime, our walking group continues to meet every week. Now that the study is complete, we are free to lead the group in whatever way we wish, including opening it up to new members, and allowing children and pets to join the walks. And we will continue to enjoy walking in Azaela Park.

NYSSA PUBLIC LIBRARY

Name: High Desert Hoofers

Our walking group in Nyssa had a wide variety of ages, ranging from members in their 30s up into the 90s. This meant that some members walked faster than others, so we made sure that the whole group was in eyesight of each other during walks.

Some of us were retired and some of us still worked, so finding a time that worked for everyone was challenging. Ultimately, we were able to schedule our weekly walks on Thursday evenings.

Our favorite walking location was out of town, a few miles up on the hill at the Hilltop Memorial cemetery. There was a good walking path and we didn't have to worry about traffic. There's also a row of trees in the cemetery that provided much needed shade on summer days when it's hot. When the weather was not suitable for walking, either too hot or too cold, we usually were able to use a nearby church gymnasium and walked indoors.



High Desert Hoofers at the Hilltop Memorial Cemetery.



Participants walk along the local cemetery.

In addition to Nyssa, our participants lived in three other small towns. The variety of participants meant that it was a good opportunity to get to know people from other walks of life. We were able to form friendships between our walking members, and those that already were acquainted with each other enjoyed the weekly interaction.

Some participants noticed benefits from walking in the group over time. We have a couple of participants who used walkers for support, but over time, found that they didn't always have to use one.

Some family illnesses and other challenging life events whittled our numbers down to a steady group of about eight consistent walkers. Sometimes participants who did not regularly walk still attended data collection events. Several participants wish to re-start the group in the fall.

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