



"I love this walking thing. I've been here every week that I could since I started.It made me enjoy walking so much that I don't mind going by myself."

-- Sound Steps walker

Healthy Aging Partnership Sound Steps

2004 Evaluation Executive Summary



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2004 Executive Summary

This 2004 Sound Steps report supplements the 2003 evaluation report, highlighting comparisons between the two years. Both quantitative and qualitative information was gathered from questionnaires completed by walkers and volunteers and through interviews conducted with program staff. In the second year of the two-year pilot of the Sound Steps walking program, the Healthy Aging Partnership expanded the program from three months in 2003 to four months (June through September 2004) and officially implemented the program at a total of 15 sites.

Results

The quantitative results indicate that 1) at least 40% of those who were not walking regularly prior to Sound Steps became regular walkers, and 2) among those who were walkers before participating in the program, there was a modest improvement in number of times walked each week from 2.5 to 3 times per week. Demographics of participants, including age, gender, marital status, health status, and baseline activity level were very similar in 2004 to what they had been in 2003. The racial/ethnic balance in 2004 better represented the demographics of Seattle.

The volunteers recounted that the benefits of the Sound Steps program for both the volunteers and the walkers were: meeting neighbors, sharing their love of walking, and discovering new places in their neighborhoods or communities. They also shared stories reflecting how the Sound Steps walking group provided social support for fellow walkers.

Success Factors

Kirkland Senior Center's Sound Steps program was a particularly successful Sound Steps site, with a large number of active and consistent walkers. The Senior Center Director cited the following keys to their success, which were similar to those in other successful sites:

- Publicity, including articles in local newspapers
- Talking it up in classes and other events at the center
- Active volunteers
- Visibility of their red t-shirts
- Free kickoff breakfast walk with support of Mayor and City Manager
- Special events, including a picnic, a trip to a health club, and health screenings

- Merchant support
- Great walking community, with destinations such as shops, cafes and parks
- Local history buff to provide walking tours
- Naturalist/park ranger to guide walks

Summary of Recommendations

Below are highlights from the program staff and volunteer recommendations.

- Until the program is well-developed, focus on a small number of sites.
- Provide support and encouragement for volunteer walk leaders.
- Honor volunteers and walkers with special events and stories on bulletin boards, in newsletters, and in neighborhood newspapers.
- Provide safety training for volunteers walk leaders.
- Develop walking route maps.
- Create a continuous, year-round program.
- Offer the option of organized walks more than once a week.
- Provide walkers with a list of names, phone numbers, and email addresses of the Sound Steppers in their neighborhood.
- Create visibility with program t-shirts or hats.
- Solicit support from local merchants.