Lessons Learned from WIN the Rockies

Wellness IN the Rockies' community coordinators worked with many individuals and groups to conduct walking programs during the project. They have shared much of what they learned regarding successes, challenges and creative ideas.

Ideas that worked:
- Recruit a motivated walk coordinator who is organized, enthusiastic and supportive (this may be you).
- Arrange opportunities for people to walk in groups.
- Identify indoor walking options for inclement weather (churches, schools, hospitals, stores).
- Offer reduced participation fees for senior citizens and for people who have their own pedometers.
- In the early stages, involve key people or role models who have lots of contacts and will tell others about the program.
- Target major employers for work-site walking programs such as schools, banks, hospitals, county government, city government, and federal agencies.
- Present to civic groups and organizations.
- Establish a process for participants to turn in their log sheets to a central coordinator who can provide immediate and positive feedback. Key points:
  - turning in logs encourages accountability, responsibility and greater buy-in
  - the logging process teaches goal setting and tracking skills
  - the drop-off location and/or method must be convenient (consider phone or email)
- Offer incentives for turning in the logs, such as a monthly drawing.
- Recognize that steps will vary from day to day and week to week and may not always increase, but the process of tracking is valuable.
- Provide group meetings for motivation and support.

Challenges (and a few ideas to address them):
- People drop out of the program:
  - Retention may be higher if participants pay an enrollment fee.
  - Convenient log drop-off methods helped retain participants.
- Inclement weather deters walkers:
  - Look for indoor options.
  - Identify outdoor walking paths that are well-maintained in the winter.
  - Work with local government to see if some walking paths can be maintained more often.
• How to count non-walking physical activity:
  o Establish conversions for other activities such as swimming or biking (see Step Conversions pages in the Coordinator’s Information section).
• Some people “fudge” on their logs:
  o Reinforce the benefits of tracking steps and acknowledge that while increasing steps is the ultimate goal, fluctuations are normal.
• Non-working or faulty pedometers:
  o Be prepared to replace faulty step counters.
  o Keep a supply of spare batteries to replace any bad ones.
  o Check the “non-working” pedometers by wearing yourself; sometimes they are working but not being worn correctly.

Creative Ideas:
• Newsletters give you a way to have additional contact -- include local events and motivational ideas.
• Conduct kick-off events to get people started:
  o Ask previous walkers to share testimonials.
  o Encourage people to find walking buddies if they would like.
  o Offer healthy snacks.
• Create a group goal for walking to a destination collectively:
  o Find an interesting name, for example, “Polar bear shuffle to Alaska.”
  o Establish guidelines for reporting steps to a central place.
  o Decide if and how alternate physical activities will be counted.
  o Post a large map and track progress.
  o Have prizes or trinkets for different locations (for example, sea shells for the coast).
  o Investigate the geography or history along the way.
• Have individuals establish destination goals:
  o Post a large map with pins for each person and move pins as they progress.
  o Identify pins with ID numbers, not names.
• Invite participants to closing parties at the end of the program:
  o Offer a variety of awards to recognize steps, improvement, creative stories, most people recruited, etc.
  o Allow time for networking and talking.
  o Ask volunteers to share testimonials.
• Offer team competitions:
  o Log steps of small groups with team captains.
  o Remember that competition is motivating for some, but not for everyone.
• Encourage family walking units.
• Suggest walk-a-thons as fundraisers rather than selling candy or other items.
• Share motivational phrases or stories from participants in newsletters or promotional materials (be sure to ask permission).
• Create brochures and signage around the community identifying steps to various local destinations:
  o For example, a sign outside the post office might say “only 1200 steps to walk to the bank” or “3-minute walk to the courthouse.”
• Invite local businesses, agencies, and/or organizations to provide incentive items for walkers:
  o This can be great PR for the business, agency, or organization.
  o Incentives may include walking books, t-shirts, or water bottles.
  o Establish scholarship funds so everyone can participate in a fee-based program.

Walking Survey:
A retrospective survey was sent to 1078 participants of 11 walking programs in the three WIN the Rockies' communities. The survey was sent in the summer of 2003 to assess the impact of programs held in fall of 2002. Interesting findings include the following:

✓ 363 completed surveys were returned for a 34% response rate.
✓ Mean age range of respondents was 45 to 54 years.
✓ Females outnumbered males 4 to 1.
✓ 35% of participants sustained an increase in their physical activity.
✓ 87% agreed the pedometer was an important motivating tool because it served as a measure of physical activity, an awareness tool, and a method for enhancing social interaction (they liked comparing their steps with others).
✓ 56% stated that they felt better in some way from participating in the walking and reported benefits that included more energy, weight loss and/or maintenance, better sleep, feeling stronger and feeling empowered.

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