

## PARCS: A Safety Net Community-Based Fitness Center for Low-Income Adults

NiCole Keith, PhD<sup>1,2,3</sup>, Deming Mi, MS<sup>4</sup>, Kisha Alexander, PhD<sup>5,6</sup>, Stephanie Kaiser, MS<sup>7</sup>, Mary de Groot, PhD<sup>8</sup>

(1) Indiana University Center for Aging Research; (2) School of Physical Education and Tourism Management; (3) Regenstrief Institute, Inc.; (4) Division of Biostatistics, Indiana University School of Medicine; (5) Accountable Health Solutions; (6) University of Phoenix; (7) National Institute of Fitness and Sport; (8) Diabetes Translational Research Center, Indiana University School of Medicine

### Purpose

- This study describes a partnership that resulted in three fitness centers in urban, underserved communities and characterizes its members and the population in its surrounding neighborhoods to demonstrate a need for such partnerships in low resourced areas.
- Physically Active Residential Communities and Schools (PARCS) offers personal training and group fitness classes at a member cost of \$20 per year. Partners include Federally Qualified Health Centers that are part of Indiana's largest safety net public health system, the Indianapolis Public Schools system, and Indiana University Kinesiology Department.
- The primary goals of PARCS are to 1) offer sustainable opportunities for community members to exercise in a facility that delivers supportive services, 2) provide teaching and learning opportunities for university faculty and students, and 3) provide primary care providers with fitness referral sites that are prepared to work with their patients.

### Problem

- Poor health is a threat to community sustainability. The Institute of Medicine endorses provider screening of patients for physical activity during a medical visit and then referral to community resources. Federally Qualified Health Centers were housed within communities; fitness facilities were not.
- Providers said fitness facilities that were accessible, affordable, safe and supportive of patients with conditions that could be improved by exercise (e.g., high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease) were needed.

### Findings

- Residents living in the communities surrounding PARCS sites and study participants both demonstrate a need for affordable fitness options.
- Across communities, 35% of the residents live in poverty and 53.5% to 70.2% are overweight or obese.
- Participants were mostly obese with two cardiovascular disease risk factors and moderate confidence in their ability to exercise in the face of barriers such as cost or location.
- Most (71%) participants reported an income of less than \$25,000, 50% reported high levels of financial strain, and 40% reported moderate levels of financial strain.
- Results support a need for financially and geographically accessible fitness programs.

### Who Should Care Most?

- Those who seek affordable ways to improve health including community members and health care providers can be informed by these results.
- School leaders can use these results as evidence that shared use policies can support delivery of services to community members.

### Recommendations for Action

- Attend meetings with potential partners to learn about ways to address community needs.
- Interact with unconventional groups to identify innovative ways to promote health.
- Encourage college students to be civically responsible citizens as they emerge into their professions by engaging them with a community that has identified a specific need.