

Healthy Parks Healthy People: Bay Area

Program Announcement · January 2013

Purpose Statement

Improve the health and wellbeing of all Bay Area residents, especially those with high health needs, through regular use and enjoyment of parks.

Overview

Encouraged by growing evidence that spending time in nature improves physical and mental health, leaders representing parks, open space, healthcare, and public health agencies in the Bay Area initiated a *Healthy Parks, Healthy People* collaborative in June 2012. The collaborative will increase opportunities for communities with high risk of chronic disease to enjoy parks and open spaces.

Goals of the *Healthy Parks, Healthy People* collaborative include: increasing access and utilization of parks by communities that are historically under-represented and/or suffering from high risk of chronic disease; and ensuring that park facilities and programs encourage physical activity and social connection, particularly for people who have been physically and socially inactive. The agencies are committed to a long-term collaboration between the counties and various sectors – parks, open spaces, healthcare, and public health agencies.

To implement long-term goals into a regional effort that will improve the health of Bay Area residents, the parks agencies propose a multi-county program of (monthly or weekly) “Healthy nature walks” that would introduce visitors to safe, low-impact walking in nature. Health and social service providers will refer their patients (particularly those who’ve been physically and/or socially inactive) to regularly scheduled “Healthy nature walk” in every Bay Area county.

Initial Proposal of Regional Program

- *Enhanced Programming to Promote New Physical and Social Activity:* On Saturday morning, selected parks in each county will welcome new visitors with group stretching exercises, encouragement to meet other participants, an orientation to the natural features of the trail, the health benefits of the walk, and guided group walks.
- *Simple Schedule to Encourage Initial Participation:* To encourage first-time visitors to parks, the schedule and location of the Saturday morning program will be simple and consistent.
- *Regional Consistency to Maximize Support and Outreach:* A consistent regional effort would facilitate the support of organizations with a multi-county presence or collaboration, including healthcare systems, media outlets, transit authorities, and potential funders.

Expected Outcomes

- Health and community partners have a clearly defined connection with public lands to promote health and wellbeing.
- Health and community partners can recommend specific outdoor programs that are welcoming to new users as well as being sustainable and culturally appropriate.
- Bay Area public lands agencies better support each other in their goals to serve high health needs communities by forming a community of practice that creates evidence-based strategies and programs.
- Bay Area residents are increasingly aware of public lands resources in their community and value those places for maintaining their health.

Contributing Partners

Bay Area Open Space Council
Children's Hospital & Research Center Oakland
Crissy Field Center
Don Edwards SF Bay National Wildlife Refuge
East Bay Regional Parks District
Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy
Golden Gate National Recreation Area
Institute at the Golden Gate
Marin County Parks
Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District
National Park Service
Network for a Healthy California
San Francisco Bay Trail Project
San Francisco Department of Public Health
San Francisco Parks Alliance
San Francisco Recreation & Parks Department
Santa Clara County Open Space Authority
Santa Clara County Parks
SF State University, Department of Recreation, Parks, & Tourism
Solano County Department of Health and Social Services
Solano County Parks and Recreation Division
U.S. Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region