



Milwaukee, WI

▲ Community Example from Chapter 1 of "Lessons for Leaders:"
Lessons in Community Capacity Building

Community Background

Milwaukee is a city of approximately 600,000 ethnically and racially diverse residents with a long tradition of neighborhood-based youth and family centers derived from the settlement house movement of the 19th century, which sought to alleviate unhealthy conditions in poor urban areas. The eight separately-managed centers are joined under the umbrella of United Neighborhood Centers of Milwaukee (UNCOM) to share best practices, leverage resources and empower residents to collaborate to create solutions for some of the city's most pressing challenges. UNCOM served as the lead agency for the *Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities* (HKHC) partnership—the Milwaukee Childhood Obesity Prevention Project (MCOPP). The partnership included executive staff of the eight UNCOM member agencies and experts from Milwaukee Public Schools, Marquette University, Children's Hospital of Wisconsin and the Medical College of Wisconsin. Together, they created organizational and policy change supporting healthy eating and active living in each of the partnership's member agencies and surrounding communities.

The partnership included a leadership team and four subcommittees focused on creating UNCOM-wide standards for a healthy eating and active living curriculum and professional development; active living and physical activity; healthy foods and beverages; and land use.

Community Action

During HKHC, the partnership funded member agencies and partners to implement ten demonstration projects. Each of these projects advanced environmental changes and education related to healthy eating and active living with small changes that made

sense for each of their populations. For example, a subcontract with the Silver Spring Neighborhood Center promoted environmental change by installing bike racks, creating a bicycle club, and offering bike rides and free bicycle tune-ups for youth and families residing in the surrounding community. These activities helped member agencies and organizations be more invested in the project once they understood how these programs supported policy and environmental change.

UNCOM also shared HKHC funding with community-based organization partners, including the Next Door Foundation and Neu-Life Community Development, to support youth-centered capacity building and healthy eating initiatives. Finally, to build capacity for UNCOM staff and partners, MCOPP partners provided short, focused training sessions on healthy eating and active living.

Having fun was another strategy the partnership used to further engage residents, UNCOM staff and community partners. MCOPP invited partners to participate in HKHC-sponsored listening sessions, recognition ceremonies and community-wide physical activity events, such as four annual one-mile Walks for Wellness, which included healthy meals for participants. These investments proved invaluable for building agency capacity and commitment, and for maintaining momentum for policy change.

Because of MCOPP's model of sharing the money and opportunities for professional growth, policies and standards were developed for each of UNCOM's four strategy areas by the respective subcommittees, approved by the partnership and adopted by the UNCOM Board of Directors, increasing the likelihood that they would be sustained over time.