



Chicago, IL

▲ Community Example from Chapter 4 of “Lessons for Leaders:”
Lessons in Advancing Policy/Systems Change

Community Background

For the diverse, lower-income neighborhoods west of downtown Chicago, three regional parks (Humboldt, Garfield and Douglas) have always been a critical resource for families and children. During efforts to plan three eight-mile “open streets” events through these neighborhoods and parks in 2008 and 2009, a productive collaboration was formed to improve access to play spaces and healthy foods in the city’s parks. Led by the Logan Square Neighborhood Association, the *Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities* (HKHC) leadership team included the Active Transportation Alliance, the Coalition to Lower Obesity in Chicago’s Children and the Chicago Park District (CPD).

Community Action

HKHC partners used pilot testing effectively on two projects: a Safe Routes to Parks initiative in Humboldt Park, and a healthy snack vending effort throughout the CPD.

The HKHC partnership selected the 200-acre Humboldt Park as its test park and then a traffic-calming pilot within that park for its larger vision of Safe Park Zones across the city. The Chicago Department of Transportation used \$20,000 of menu money from Alderman Roberto Maldonado and temporarily installed street barrels and signage to mimic potential future construction along Humboldt Boulevard. They collected traffic speed and volume data prior to and during the pilot to determine the impact on surrounding roads. After the pilot proved successful at reducing traffic speeds and volumes without significant impact on surrounding roads, Alderman Maldonado approved \$178,000 for permanent improvements.

Implementation of a half-mile road diet reduced the four-lane road to two lanes. The final construction included 11 speed bumps, three refuge islands, six curb cuts and visible signage warning motorists of pedestrians.

This successful pilot project demonstrated concrete and effective action to the community, built credibility for the Safe Park Zones concept, and helped establish a foundation for scaling the concept citywide. When the City of Chicago updated its Pedestrian Plan and included a goal of Child Safety Zones within one-eighth of a mile of all parks and schools, the city prominently featured the Humboldt Park road diet as an effective strategy to increase pedestrian safety.

To support a healthy vending machine contract change, the Chicago Parks District conducted a pilot research project at four parks to understand the impact of nutrition education on park staff and the impact on patrons of healthier items offered in the vending machines. Sales of healthier vending items increased in three parks. Patron surveys showed that 80 percent or more consumers liked the new vending options and 90 percent or more would purchase the healthier snack items again. Monthly sales data proved that the vending machine owners were making a profit. The information helped establish confidence and the vending policy change was successful. In April 2011, the district executed a snack-vending contract with the Compass Group and used the new 100 percent healthy “Fit Pick” guidelines. In the short term, this changed 106 vending machines across the city.