



# WALK WITH EASE

## SOUTHGATE RECREATION & PARK DISTRICT

By Brianna Blaschke, Communication and Marketing Specialist, Southgate Recreation & Park District

**S**outhgate Recreation & Park District (SRPD) oversees 6 community centers, 2 aquatic facilities, and 47 parks. The diverse range of ages represented throughout the district necessitates activities for all ages; and, at any age, physical activity is of the utmost importance. Unfortunately for many older adults with health conditions like arthritis, the traditional approaches simply do not suffice as pain and discomfort often plague the participant. One of the subsequent roadblocks to optimizing physical activity for older patrons is a lack of comfort in exercising alone.

The proposed answer? Walking. This activity has proven to be a valuable tool in practicing healthy fitness habits and has provided a new element of fun for seniors in the community.

Southgate Recreation & Park District (SRPD) sought to mediate the struggles older adults face through the Arthritis Foundation's Walk With Ease (WWE) program. This six-week program is designed to teach participants how to safely make

physical activity a part of everyday life, particularly for those who suffer from arthritis pain. The low-impact and group-based nature of this program not only provides the physical health benefits resulting from walking and stretching, but also encourages a comfortable and supportive social setting for those interested in exercising. WWE also seeks to promote education about successful physical activity, administer methods for arthritis self-management, and encourage participants to continue walking, as well as explore other exercise programs, to alleviate arthritis pain and facilitate long-lasting benefits.

In order to grow this program, SRPD relied heavily on grassroots efforts and partnerships with other associations to ensure success. SRPD partnered with the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) to provide the opportunity to offer the Arthritis Foundation's Walk With Ease program, a unique pilot program that derived from the NRPA's Walk in the Park program. Walk With Ease was the result of multiple

### HARD FACTS

YEAR ESTABLISHED: 1956

POPULATION: 126,000 RESIDENTS

WEBSITE: SOUTHGATERECANDPARK.NET

DISTRICT SIZE: 52 SQUARE MILES OF UNINCORPORATED SACRAMENTO COUNTY

LOCATION: SOUTH SACRAMENTO. MAIN OFFICE ADDRESS IS 6000 ORANGE AVE,

SACRAMENTO, CA 95823



collaborations with a number of different agencies, including the NRPA and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The StopFalls Sacramento Coalition, an organization focused on reducing falls, risk of injury, and hospitalizations of older adults, also played an active role.

After the conclusion of the WWE program, SRPD was invited to present the successes at the coalition's meeting. Additionally, a unique opportunity to work with the UC Davis Department of Family and Community Medicine (UCDHS) arose during the pilot program. The Community Liaison for the UCDHS worked with SRPD's Recreation Supervisor to schedule a resident physician to attend one class of each Walk With Ease session, offering a presentation on a health topic, then leading participants on a walk at their own pace while answering health-related questions. The cross-functional approach allowed for a unique opportunity for all participants and helped to foster relationships between SRPD and local health agencies and organizations. SRPD invested in a variety of efforts to achieve the WWE program, including receiving aid from the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA). NRPA's grant and the support of tertiary groups made it possible to train instructors and provide the program at a nominal fee, while also strengthening SRPD's partnerships with other agencies.

In order to inform the community of Walk With Ease and the resulting benefits, Southgate Recreation & Park District marketed through a variety of channels, including digital and print methods. While SRPD relied on a variety of methods to disseminate information and seek feedback from the community, word of mouth proved to be the most effective. Based on participant evaluations, the in-person presentations during existing SRPD programs were unquestionably the most successful means of recruiting new participants for the Walk With Ease program, proving that grassroots efforts are often most impactful in special districts.



The program has proven to be a huge benefit to both instructors and participants. One instructor, Paulette Douglas, was motivated to become a walk leader because her own experiences showed her the value in staying active. "At 68, I have many of the same medical issues that people in the program have – so I can relate," said Paulette. Her parents passed away young, and her prior history with high blood pressure and diabetes, as well as a bout of breast cancer back in 1998, prompted her to make some serious lifestyle changes. Paulette stated "That's when I started exercising, eating better, and eliminating negativity that caused stress. I teach 11 fitness classes a week now, all geared toward older adults, because I want to give people a fun way to live healthier and longer lives. And we do make the program fun for

people. There's no pressure to do more than people are comfortable doing... there's lots of talking and laughing."

Walk With Ease and its positive impacts are reflected in the participants, too. Sue, a regular walker prior to WWE, joined the program for the stretching and strengthening component. "They don't push you. They let you do what you can do, and they make it fun. I used to get tired in the hip area when I walked for too long, and the stretching has really made a difference."

Another participant, Clo, walks with a cane at age 86, and appreciates the program allows her to participate at her own pace while being surrounded by the support of others. "The program is fun," said Clo. "I like to keep moving and I enjoy being with the others – it's the camaraderie that makes it fun."

SRPD engaged with 92 participants during the initial six-week session! The success of the pilot Walk With Ease generated enough interest and participation that the inaugural year saw three additional iterations of the program. Walk With Ease continues to be a successful addition to Southgate's senior program repertoire and continues to help seniors exercise in a socially and physically beneficial way.

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