

## **Park Hop: An inter-agency collaboration to promote park visitation and physical activity in Greenville, SC**

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### **Background and Purpose:**

Parks are important venues for physical activity (PA) [1,2], but research indicates that they are underutilized by youth [3,4] and the number and types of park features are related to increased park awareness and park-based PA [5,6]. The Task Force on Community Preventive Services strongly recommended the creation or enhancement of access to places for PA combined with informational outreach activities for PA promotion [7]. This abstract describes the preliminary evaluation of Park Hop, an innovative collaboration of diverse agencies to create an incentivized passport-style initiative to increase awareness, visitation, and active use of parks among youth in Greenville County, South Carolina.

### **Description:**

Park Hop occurred in summer 2013 as a partnership between Livewell Greenville, seven area parks departments, local schools, and partner organizations to help Greenville County families discover parks in their community in a fun, cost-effective way. The goals of Park Hop were to foster an awareness and appreciation for the wealth of parks in Greenville County, increase youth PA, and establish an annual tradition for all to enjoy.

Park Hop featured a summer-long scavenger hunt of 17 total parks from the seven area parks and recreation departments. Participants completed Park Passports which contained interactive clues about each park along with a short youth survey. Clues for each park were released weekly from local media outlets and participants were recruited through a website, newspaper ads, or through flyers at recreation facilities, schools, and partner organizations. Completed passports were submitted online, through mail, or in person at the closing event. Depending on the number of parks visited, participants received fun, adventure-themed prizes such as water park passes, t-shirts, or camping gear.

Several methods were used to collect process and outcome evaluation data, including the youth's park passports, a post-Park Hop survey of parents of youth participants, and program website analytics. Park Hop process evaluation measures included information regarding program accessibility, enjoyment, and ease of participation (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree). Outcome evaluation measures included information about park awareness and visitation (e.g., number and names of parks visited, parks visited for the first time), perceived change in park enjoyment (1=a lot less than before; 5=a lot more than before), and park-based PA (total minutes during most recent visit).

**Lessons Learned:**

A total of 231 youth submitted completed passports, ranging from 7 months to 16 years old (M=7.0 years). Of these, 6.5% of youth visited 1-5 parks, 26.4% of youth visited 6-10 parks, 112 48.5% of youth visited 11-16 parks, and 18.6% of youth visited all 17 parks. All but one youth (99.6%) indicated that they visited at least one park for the first time during Park Hop, with an average of 7.0 new parks visited per youth.

147 adults completed the post evaluation survey, with 143 indicating that they had children who had participated in Park Hop. The majority of people learned about Park Hop through the website (36.7%), school (21.1%), friends/family (19.7%), and newspaper (18.4%) advertisements. The main Park Hop webpage had 8131 views and the Park Hop passport webpage had 1794 views.

Parents indicated that, on average, 2.2 youth per household participated in Park Hop. Overall, parents reported strong agreement that Park Hop information was easily accessible (M=4.32), that they would recommend Park Hop to a friend (M=4.64), and that they would participate again next year (M=4.58). Parents were more neutral regarding appropriateness of the number of parks included (M=3.29) and the ease of answering scavenger hunt clues (M=3.22). Further, 98% of parents indicated that their child agreed or strongly agreed that they enjoyed participating in Park Hop (M=4.61).

With respect to outcomes, youth reportedly participated in an average of 87.1 minutes of PA during their last park visit. After participating in Park Hop, 46.2% of parents indicated that their children would visit a park more often, while only 3.4% of parents forecasted a lower number of park visits. Finally, 76.5% of parents indicated that after participating in Park Hop, their child enjoys parks in Greenville County somewhat to a lot more than before.

**Conclusions and Implications:**

Results indicate that Park Hop was well-received by parents and successfully influenced awareness and visitation (especially to new parks) among youth. Park Hop effectively translated park awareness research into a sustainable initiative that can influence youth park-based PA. Further, Park Hop exemplifies a successful collaboration of multiple recreation partners across Greenville County. Such partnerships may be critical during times of budgetary constraints while cross-promotion of all area parks offers a wider variety of parks to citizens.

**Next Steps:**

Next steps for Park Hop include development of a mobile app for individual park scavenger hunts and establishment of Park Hop as an annual event. In future, more focused and rigorous evaluation of Park Hop will explore effects according to the types and features of parks most frequently-visited, spatial analyses of youth and parks, and pre-post effects on youth PA.

**Support/Funding Source:****References:**

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