



# Marion County

## Designing Inclusive and Accessible Communities

### Summary

Often times people with disabilities are overlooked in public health strategies. This underrepresentation can lead to poorer health outcomes for people with disabilities as compared to those living without disabilities. In Marion County, the Creating Healthy Communities (CHC) coalition is working to lessen that health gap by improving access to community resources and helping to facilitate a culture of inclusion in Marion County.

### Challenge

Data suggests that people with disabilities experience health inequities at a much higher rate than those living without them. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), people without disabilities are less likely to be obese (34.2 percent) as compared to people with disabilities,

who are more likely to be obese (44.6 percent). Also, from the same CDC report, we know that people living with a disability report being less physically active at 54.2 percent, than those living without a disability at 32.2 percent. This data is further supported by the 2015 Marion Community Health Assessment (MCHA), in which only 17 percent of people living with disabilities reported participating in physical activity at least four days per week, compared to 31.1 percent of the general population. In the United States, one out of five people are living with a disability. A disability can occur at any time and may impact physical, sensory or cognitive abilities. This can lead to challenges accessing their community's most basic needs such as housing, employment, food, transportation and community resources. According to our 2015 MCHA, 17.4 percent of Marion County's

population is living with a disability. The largest of those with a disability are over the age of 65 and have ambulatory difficulties. Based on this data, our community is redefining our commitment to this population and working to ensure our facilities and services are inclusive and accessible for all ages and abilities.

### Solution

The Marion CHC coalition used the Community Health Inclusion Index (CHII) to conduct an extensive assessment evaluating inclusion and accessibility in several sectors and organizations throughout our county. Through these assessments, we were able to recognize opportunities for disability inclusion efforts when developing community health strategies. One of the largest opportunities identified, was to



improve access at one of our best-known community assets, the Tallgrass Trail where people from in and outside Marion County come to walk, run and ride bicycles. The CHII assessment revealed many favorable features supportive of inclusive physical activity; these characteristics coupled with organizational readiness made this a prime location for change.

## Results

The assessment identified that a barrier to accessing the 12-mile trail was related to lack of sidewalks connecting a recently established parking lot to the path. Additionally, accessibility was a concern at a new storage facility which was built to support future inclusive programming at the trail. Park improvements made to the parking lot and the addition of sidewalks were completed in summer 2017 and the establishment of a universal bike share program was completed in spring 2018. Additional data was collected in preparation for this system change through an adaptive equipment expo which was held in May 2017 at the trail. The purpose of the event was multifaceted: assess participant interest and gather needed data while providing community education and awareness on inclusive health design. An overwhelming response to the need for this program was identified with over 100 attendees and 16 equipment evaluations conducted within a two-hour window. The data compiled during this event has provided

information as we work to establish the universal bike share program. Anticipated outcomes of this change for people with disabilities include improved social connections, increased access to physical activity opportunities, reduction of financial burden in purchasing adaptive equipment, and ease in transporting and maintaining equipment.

## Sustaining Success

In an effort to sustain this work, the Marion County Park District has agreed to oversee and manage the bike share program. A process is being planned that will allow people to schedule the rental of an adaptive piece of bike equipment, access it from the storage facility, and experience a ride along the trail. This organizational system change coupled with the infrastructure improvements will have lasting impact as residents access the trail for years to come.

## Your Involvement is Key

- To help design your community to be more accessible and inclusive, follow these easy steps:
- Become an advocate for inclusion and join the movement: <http://committoinclusion.org/commit/>.
- Visit <https://www.nchpad.org/Select-Resources> to access a set of survey tools to assess resources in your community and the degree to which they are inclusive.
- Design community spaces utilizing the 8-80 model: <https://www.880cities.org/>.



***Marion County CHC has utilized multi-level assessment data to create a comprehensive plan for improved access to community-based resources for people with disabilities. This is a monumental step toward building a community that is inclusive of and accessible to all people, young and old, regardless of ability or disability.***



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