



Arthritis Interventions in Park and Recreation Agencies

Active Living Every Day: Best Practices Guide



WELCOME TO THE ACTIVE LIVING EVERY DAY: BEST PRACTICES GUIDE

Active Living Every Day: Best Practices Guide is a product of NRPA and is intended to be used by park and recreation (P&R) professionals and their agencies in the planning and implementation of the Active Living Every Day (ALED) arthritis-appropriate evidence-based intervention (AAEBI).

Since 2013, NRPA, in partnership with the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors (NACDD) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), has been providing local P&R agencies with grants to implement AAEBIs. As a result of this partnership, the P&R agencies mentioned below were selected to pilot the ALED program:

- City of Hialeah Parks and Recreation, Florida
- City of Memphis Division of Parks and Recreation, Tennessee
- City of Mustang Parks and Recreation, Oklahoma
- City of Shreveport Public Assembly and Recreation Department, Louisiana

All four P&R agencies completed three to four 12-week sessions and reached a total of more than 250 participants. The data gathered from the evaluations, surveys and interviews were analyzed, categorized and compiled to highlight the best practices and lessons learned during the planning and implementation of ALED.



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INTRODUCTION

Arthritis and Physical Activity

Arthritis, a condition that affects the joints and surrounding tissues, affects more than 52 million adults, primarily older adult women, and is one of the leading causes of disability in the United States. According to the CDC, this number is estimated to increase to 78 million by the year 2040. While the pattern, severity and specific symptoms experienced differ with each individual, physical activity has been shown to reduce pain and improve mobility, mood, function and the overall quality of life for all individuals affected by arthritis. Physical activity has also been shown to reduce the risk of falling, to delay the effects of activity-limitations and to prevent worsening of arthritic pain. Despite this evidence, 1 in 4 older adults are still inactive. In addition, people with arthritis, or who are at risk for arthritis, still struggle with becoming physically active and are uncertain about the necessary steps to become and to maintain a physically active lifestyle.



“Rather than simply prescribing exercise, Active Living Every Day addresses the root causes of inactivity and helps participants overcome those challenges.”

– Michelle Maloney, Human Kinetics

Active Living Every Day (ALED) In Park And Recreation Agencies

ALED is a CDC-recommended, 12-week evidenced-based behavior-change program developed by Human Kinetics that helps sedentary people become and stay physically active. ALED is unique in that it does not prescribe exercise, but focuses on incorporating physical activity into everyday lifestyle. The program can be personalized to meet each individual’s readiness and skills through goal setting, identifying and addressing physical activity barriers, self-monitoring and social support. For example, a sedentary adult will learn the skills necessary to accumulate 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity each week performing activities such as taking a 10 minute walk around their neighborhood, taking the stairs instead of the elevator while shopping at the mall, playing Frisbee with their dog in the park, or gardening in the backyard.

P&R agencies serve a wide distribution of the population, including communities with limited access to health resources, high levels of poverty and high rates of chronic diseases. Offering ALED is beneficial to both the park and recreation agency and the communities served. Program offerings of ALED will:

- Increase the probability of reaching adults still struggling to become physically active
- Provide a safe location for physical activity in neighborhoods with limited safe spaces to be active
- Complement current physical activity programs already being offered
- Attract new audiences
- Provide new opportunities for funding and partnerships

“This is truly a model program for our seniors”

– City of Shreveport Public Assembly and Recreation Department, Louisiana

ACTIVE LIVING EVERY DAY BEST PRACTICES

Planning The Active Living Every Day Program

The first step to any successful program delivery is to create a plan and timeline for the program. This should include methods for preparing, promoting, implementing and evaluating the program. This is the time to think about who will facilitate the program, locations and times, financial needs of the program, potential partnerships and how the program will be evaluated to determine its success and sustainability.

Selecting the ALED Facilitator

When selecting a program facilitator, it is important to consider the overall credentials, skills and attributes of the potential facilitators. The P&R pilot sites recognized that as a behavior-change program, the experiences of the facilitator would be critical to the effectiveness and success of the program. The experiences of the chosen facilitators included:

- Facilitating health promotion and health education classes
- Facilitating behavior-change and physical activity programs
- Facilitating small and large groups of varying ages, including older adult groups
- Coordinating and planning health and wellness programs

Target Populations and Marketing Strategies

Understanding the local community's needs and clearly defining the target population are important factors in the successful delivery of the program. Based on the fact that many forms of arthritis primarily affect older adults, the most common target population for this program was adults 50 years and older. Other target populations included people with chronic diseases, such as heart disease and diabetes, and people wanting to become physically active.

After defining the target populations, the pilot sites employed a combination of strategies to recruit participants, including:

- **Print** – flyers, local newspapers and press releases, brochures, posters, host facility newsletters and calendars
- **Broadcast** – local television announcement
- **Social Media** – posting of program information to P&R agency website and Facebook
- **Face-to-Face Recruitment** – talking to people at promotional events, health and wellness fairs, community centers, senior centers, assisted living facilities, local churches and community businesses, such as medical facilities, physicians' offices, community libraries, and supermarkets



The City of Hialeah Parks and Recreation utilized its local community TV channel to provide program information to the local population.

The City of Shreveport Public Assembly and Recreation Department reported hosting an ALED graduation ceremony at the end of the first 12-week session that was also used to market the program to potential participants. This method led to a large number of inquiries and subsequent participant enrollment.



The most successful strategy reported was face-to-face recruitment. The pilot sites found that participants were more willing to enroll in the program when directly approached and informed about the program's offerings and benefits. This method also allowed the facilitators to build rapport with the participants prior to the beginning of the program.

Community Partnerships

Developing community partnerships is one strategy to (1) generate support for the program, (2) enhance community outreach, (3) minimize duplication of efforts, (4) maximize resources and (5) ensure program sustainability. All four

pilot sites developed partnerships with community businesses and organizations to increase program visibility and uptake. Community partnerships not only provided venues for recruiting participants who did not currently attend a P&R facility or program, but also provided additional locations for hosting ALED sessions, as well as free incentives to enhance program retention. For example:

- The City of Mustang Parks and Recreation partnered with its local public library that provided recruitment assistance and a location for hosting the program.
- The City of Hialeah Parks and Recreation partnered with a local supermarket that donated cereal bars, juice and water.
- Most of the pilot sites developed a partnership with their local Housing Authority Food Service Program to transport participants to the weekly sessions.

“Providing the program at the community centers where the participants attend their lunch program was a successful strategy because it eliminated the need for additional travel.”

– City of Hialeah and Recreation, Florida



Implementing The Active Living Every Day Program

Ever had a new and exciting program, jaw-dropping incentives and an inspiring class facilitator, but have no one show up? Unfortunately, this is a reality for many programs and is due to the lack of community engagement. Highlighted in this section are several aspects of the pilot sites' program implementation that contributed to the success of the ALED program.

Program Location

Choosing locations that are convenient for the target population is crucial to the success of the program. Participants are more likely to come if the location is easily accessible and safe. Successful strategies included:

- Choosing locations where older adults reside or that they frequently visit, such as senior centers, community centers, assisted living facilities, park and recreation facilities, and other convenient locations, such as public libraries
- Hosting the program in a variety of locations

Program Timing

Choosing a date and time for the program is critical to program participation. The pilot sites took into consideration the time of year, days of the week and times for offering the program, and found that the best time was immediately before or after lunch time. This also coincided with the drop-off and pick-up times for the transportation services that carried participants to the centers. Programs were typically offered Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursday between 9:30 a.m. and 11 a.m. Evening classes were also offered for older adults who worked or had to care for family members during the day.



Use of Incentives

The use of incentives is a powerful and effective method to attract and retain participants in health and wellness programs. Incentives were used by all four pilot sites to enhance participation and promote retention. They were offered for homework assignment completion, overall class attendance, activity tracking and as weekly door prizes for early birds. Incentives were also matched to the weekly lessons and included healthy snacks and refreshments, water bottles, T-shirts, activity logs, pens, athletic wear, pedometers, journals, and free passes to P&R facility indoor/outdoor track and water aerobics class.

“The participants benefited from the class tremendously. There were several that were sedentary, depressed and just simply did not know what to do. At the completion of the class, they were exercising, eating the right food and burning calories (as well as counting them). Some say that they lost a few pounds and inches, and blood pressure and sugar level were under control.”

– City of Shreveport Public Assembly and Recreation Department, Louisiana

Program Facilitation

The facilitation of the ALED sessions is the main factor in the success of the program. The pilot sites reported that preparing lesson plans and having a good understanding of the material was the most important of the several methods used to maximize program participation. Other methods of delivery included:

- An interactive approach – grantees stated that the participants were eager to share their thoughts and this was a great strategy to encourage participation and feedback
- Multiple (at least two) trained facilitators to service multiple locations
- Visual reminders – participants were encouraged to use activity logs and journals
- Flip charts and dry erase boards versus projectors
- Household items, such as vacuums and mops, to demonstrate engagement in physical activity
- Group work to stimulate social support

Participant Communication

Frequent communication with program participants is another strategy to continuously engage and motivate them to overcome barriers and attain their goals. The pilot sites communicated with program participants on a weekly basis outside of the regularly scheduled session. They found that this strategy enhanced the retention rate and promoted participation. Forms of communication included weekly class reminders (phone calls, text messages, email) and follow-up phone calls to absentees.

Physical Activity Engagement

Although the ALED program is focused on lifestyle changes, it is important for facilitators to provide opportunities for participants to engage in some form of physical activity based on their level of comfort and physical ability. The pilot sites reported that they offered the ALED program in conjunction with a physical activity component. The types of physical activity varied based on the level of physical disability identified by the participants and included walking clubs, chair exercises, weight training with household items and structured activities, such as water aerobics, Zumba Gold® steps and Tai Chi. Activities were performed at the beginning or at the end of the weekly session to eliminate deviations from the program curriculum.

Accommodating Participant Needs and Abilities

While most programs and interventions are designed for diverse populations, modifications are necessary since not all participants have similar abilities. All four pilot sites had to include some form of modification to the delivery of their program based on the population served. Specific modifications included:

- Training of bilingual staff as program facilitators for non-English-speaking participants; for example, the City of Hialeah Parks and Recreation trained bilingual staff to accommodate the predominantly Hispanic population being served.
- Tailoring sessions to meet the cognitive and literacy ability of participants; for example, the City of Hialeah Parks and Recreation supplemented its program with chair exercises and 2-minute walks for a group comprised of individuals with high levels of physical limitations. Other grantees had to develop creative strategies to retain participants suffering from dementia and other neurological conditions.
- Grouping sessions based on participants readiness to change and physical ability levels.

“We made special accommodations for participants who were on oxygen, using walkers or canes, or had special health conditions. Our facilitator helped participants come up with modifications specific to their needs.”

– City of Mustang Parks and Recreation, Oklahoma

LESSONS LEARNED

Challenges and Solutions

Although the pilot sites reported great success in implementing their programs, they experienced several challenges. The major challenges and solutions are highlighted below:

Challenge: Competition for space with summer youth programs during the summer months

Solution:

- Secure and designate a quiet space prior to the beginning of class to limit surrounding distractions

Challenge: Participant retention

Solutions:

- Offer multiple sessions of ALED concurrently to fit different schedules
- Offer incentives for class participation
- Target populations not already physically active
- Conduct weekly reminders and follow-up with absentees
- Encourage online completion of lessons missed
- Partner with local organizations for host locations and transportation support
- Incorporate “bring a friend” into a weekly lesson

Challenge: Homework assignment completion

Solutions:

- Offer incentives for homework completion
- Complete the homework assignment immediately following the end of the weekly lesson



PUBLIC HEALTH IMPACT OF ACTIVE LIVING EVERY DAY

Putting Active Living Every Day into Practice

Through research conducted by the Cooper Institute in a variety of community settings, ALED has been found to increase engagement in physical activity, increase cardiorespiratory fitness, decrease perceived stress, improve blood pressure and cholesterol measurements, and reduce body fat composition.¹ Similarly, at the end of the 12-week session, participants expressed their satisfaction with the program as well as with their improved health and overall quality of life. Other major improvements included:

- Increased engagement in physical activity
- Reduced arthritic pain and body aches
- Improved mood, sleep, energy levels, blood glucose and weight loss due to increased physical activity

ALED participants also reported frequent walking in their neighborhood, light exercises during TV commercials, utilizing their P&R facility's indoor and outdoor track and engaging in a variety of physical activities, such as yoga, Zumba, tai chi, and water aerobics.

“Participants continue to share stories of better sleep, improved energy levels and decreased blood glucose levels due to increased physical activity.”

– City of Memphis Division of Parks and Recreation, Tennessee

Implications for the Future

Many people, whether or not they are affected by a form of arthritis, find it difficult to engage in and maintain a physically active lifestyle, and they are missing the opportunity to improve their health and quality of life. ALED is specifically designed for these individuals. It takes them through the process of identifying their barriers to physical activity and provides them with the necessary tools to be successful, once they have overcome those barriers.

Well-designed communities provide optimal opportunities for engagement in physical activity, but in their absence, as is the case for many communities across the United States, P&R settings are equipped and able to provide venues for evidence-based health and wellness programs.

“We now have a ‘Walk and Talk’ program that the participants engage in to encourage and motivate one another to reach his/her goals. They now see physical activity as a lifestyle rather than a task.”

– City of Shreveport Public Assembly and Recreation Department, Louisiana



¹Dunn, A. L., Blair, S. N., Garcia, M. E., Kampert, J. B., Kohl, H. W., Marcus, B. H. (1999). “Comparison of lifestyle and structured interventions to increase physical activity and cardiorespiratory fitness: A randomized trial,” JAMA, 27; 281(4): 327-34.

APPENDIX

Active Living Every Day on a Budget! Recommendation Checklist

Does your P&R agency want to include ALED in the current programming portfolio but is not sure where to begin? Follow the steps below, in addition to the recommendations from the ALED facilitator training, to deliver a successful and sustainable program.

- Create a plan and program budget
- If the program has not yet been added to the agency's programming portfolio and/or funding is not available, charge a small fee to offset the costs of participant materials and staff time
- Participants are more likely to return for weekly sessions if they have made an investment in the program
- Select and train at least two ALED program facilitators
- Secure and designate a space with limited distractions
- Partner with local businesses and organizations to expand recruitment and marketing strategies
- Create and use a sign-up sheet during recruitment on which participants can indicate their goals, current level of physical activity and limitations, as well as the best times for the program
- Solicit incentives from partners or community businesses
- Offer the program in convenient locations for the target populations (for example, senior and community centers)
- Offer the program at varying times of day to fit different schedules
- Plan for modifications to the program based on participants' cognitive and physical abilities
- Develop interactive lesson plans to maximize participation, including methods of communicating with participants and conditions for incentive dissemination
- Create a list of physical activities to complement each weekly lesson
- Utilize the ALED online participant tracking tool to easily track and manage participants
- Host an end-of-program ceremony to publicly acknowledge the accomplishments of the program participants
- Distribute post-program questionnaires and complete program evaluation
- Document program evaluation results and make the case for internal and external funding



The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) is the leading non-profit dedicated to improving the health and sustainability of communities for all people through parks, recreation and conservation. NRPA represents a vast membership network of 12,000 agencies, 105,000 parks, and touches the lives of more than 200 million people in virtually every community. The majority of the membership consists of over 50,000 employees of local park and recreation agencies across the country. As public agencies, members routinely work and partner with other local agencies including health, planning and transportation departments to advance their missions. Leadership from local park and recreation professionals is essential to increase safe and equitable access to parks. As the trusted leader for parks and recreation, NRPA is at the forefront of the movement to educate and empower professionals across the country to ensure safe access to parks.

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