

Mapping the Movement for Healthy Food and Activity Environments in the United States

ORGANIZATIONAL SNAPSHOTS

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Prevention Institute is a nonprofit, national center dedicated to improving community health and well-being by building momentum for effective primary prevention. Primary prevention means taking action to build resilience and to prevent problems before they occur. The Institute's work is characterized by a strong commitment to community participation and promotion of equitable health outcomes among all social and economic groups. Since its founding in 1997, the organization has focused on injury and violence prevention, traffic safety, health disparities, nutrition and physical activity, and youth development. This, and other Prevention Institute documents, are available at no cost on our website.

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This is one in a series of 11 organizational snapshots that represent examples of compelling policy advocacy, programmatic, and environmental change efforts designed to positively impact people’s lives and livelihoods. In these snapshots we hope that the reader will recognize interest and capacity among committed advocacy groups to apply their strategies, passion, and energy to improving opportunities for healthy eating and active living in their communities. The profiles were written and produced by Prevention Institute. Funding and guidance were provided by Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Foreword

The organizational snapshots captured in the following pages present innovative efforts of 11 organizations advocating for improvements, predominantly in low-income neighborhoods and with African American and Latino residents. Each of the 11 community groups take on tough policy and environmental change issues like increasing access to healthy food, addressing safety concerns, and cultivating opportunities for walking and bicycling. In both rural settings and urban neighborhoods throughout the country, these snapshots paint a picture of pervasive challenges to healthy eating and active living and explore creative solutions to improve health and quality of life.

These 11 snapshots are part of a broader effort entitled, *Mapping the Movement for Healthy Eating and Activity Environments in the United States: A Snapshot of the Field* funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. In December 2006, Prevention Institute embarked on a national search for coalitions and organizations advocating for change in communities of color and in low-income neighborhoods. Our scan of the field involved interviews with numerous key informants which resulted in semi-structured interviews with representatives of 312 organizations. The scan

included groups working on nutrition and physical activity advocacy and related issues like food security, sustainable agriculture, and the built environment, as well as groups advocating to limit unhealthy exposures (e.g., tobacco, alcohol, and environmental toxins) and to expand human rights (e.g., labor and housing rights groups).

Of the more than 300 groups interviewed, the 11 organizations profiled in this document represent examples of compelling policy advocacy, programmatic, and environmental change efforts designed to positively impact people's lives and livelihoods. In these snapshots we hope that the reader will recognize interest and capacity among committed advocacy groups to apply their strategies, passion, and energy to improving opportunities for healthy eating and active living in their communities.

Our hope is that these organizational snapshots can be used to offer advocates, policy makers, funders, and community residents with examples of how the inertia of active, engaged organizations and residents can transform communities—make them healthier—through changes to policies, environments, and social norms.

OVERVIEW

Mapping the Movement for Healthy Food and Activity Environments in the United States: Organizational Snapshots

The organizational snapshots include a description of the organizational setting, overview of their policy advocacy and environmental change efforts, discussion of significant challenges to the work, and “quick facts” about each organization.

The “quick facts” box in the upper right-hand corner of the first page of each snapshot draws data from the Mapping Database and provides the organization’s location, policy jurisdiction (local, state or federal), policy orientation (engaged in policy, poised to do more policy work, education orientation); approach (environmental/ institutional or services/programs); strong equity focus; issue areas; policy domains; and website address.

- 1. Community Farm Alliance:** With a membership base of over 2,000, CFA spearheads policies to support family farming in rural Kentucky and creates access to healthy fresh fruits and vegetables among urban, West Louisville’s primarily African American residents through a blend of programs and policies.
- 2. Get Moving Kern and Greenfield Walking Group:** A parent-led walking group serves as the resident task force to the *Get Moving Kern* coalition and is reversing barriers to healthy eating and safe walking in their rural, predominantly Latino community of Kern County, California.
- 3. Chicagoland Bicycle Federation:** In Chicago and the surrounding region, this membership-driven organization works on Complete Streets policies, local bikeways, safe routes to school, and public events to rally for streets that will accommodate bicyclists safely on their way to school and across the city.
- 4. Pennsylvania Hunger Action Center:** This statewide advocacy center works at the nexus of nutrition, hunger, and poverty as it coordinates a network of nutrition activists and professionals to advocate for statewide legislation to improve school nutrition, increase participation in the Food Stamp Program, and increase the minimum wage.
- 5. Piñeros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste (Northwest Treeplanters and Farmworkers United):** In the rural town of Woodburn, Oregon with a more than 50% Latino population, the farmworkers union has developed a strong organizing and advocacy history on labor and housing issues. Now, through its 5,700+ members, the farmworkers, spouses, and children are also addressing healthy food access and physical activity to help local residents eat better and move more.
- 6. Lifelong Communities Initiative:** This program of the Atlanta Regional Commission pays special attention to the needs of seniors as it works to improve community design and support city-wide ordinances to support better walking and transportation alternatives and healthy housing for seniors.
- 7. The Food Project of Boston:** Cultivating fruits and vegetables in an urban garden and on a suburban farm leased from the city at minimal cost, youth work with *The Food Project* and participate in community-supported agriculture that brings healthy produce to low-income residents throughout Boston.

8. ***Teton Valley Trails and Pathways:*** Looking to find a balance between responsible development, land conservation, and a physical activity friendly environment, advocates and residents of this rural, sparsely populated city work together to advance local and regional policies that will guide development for years to come.
9. ***Center for Economic Security:*** Working intensively in the low-income city of Muskegon, Michigan, this relatively new organization is galvanizing support for a local, sustainable food system and hopes to get a statewide initiative on the 2010 ballot that will declare healthy, sustainable food as a right for every Michigan resident.
10. ***Pedestrians Educating Drivers on Safety:*** With a primary goal of increasing pedestrian safety throughout the Atlanta region, this organization has won policy victories and manages an innovative web-based system that allows residents to report barriers to safe walking directly to the appropriate city or county agency.
11. ***New Orleans Food and Farm Network:*** Hurricane Katrina was a recent memory when food scarcity became a frightening reality for many residents who already lacked easy access to healthy foods before the disaster. A food mapping effort started out as a short-term response to residents' need to get access to soup kitchens, grocery stores, or food pantries and now has become a tool for understanding—and filling—gaps in access to healthy foods and community gardens.

PEDS

Safer streets support walking in the Atlanta region

Executive Director Sally Flocks remembers a time in Atlanta when she would wear a whistle around her neck and blow it while crossing the street. She felt desperate to get drivers to slow down, to be safer. She knew Atlanta, like many urban centers, didn't support pedestrians, so she founded Pedestrians Educating Drivers on Safety (PEDS), a Georgia-based organization serving Atlanta and the surrounding region. Within a year of founding the organization, Flocks had an "aha moment." She realized that PEDS wouldn't be nearly as effective as it could be by reaching out one driver at a time. PEDS needed a broader approach. Now, through policy and environmental change and innovative use of web-based technology, PEDS has become a leader in creating and maintaining pedestrian-friendly environments to support recreational and incidental physical activity.

For the last 10 years, PEDS has emphasized pedestrian safety for immigrants and in-town communities because these populations are disproportionately



HIGH-VISIBILITY CROSSWALK MARKERS HELP KEEP PEDESTRIANS SAFE

QUICK FACTS

LOCATION . . . Atlanta, GA

POLICY JURISDICTION

■ Local □ State □ Federal

POLICY ORIENTATION

■ Policy □ Poised □ Education

APPROACH

■ Environmental/Institutional □ Services/Programs

EQUITY FOCUS Strong

ISSUE AREAS . . Physical Activity

POLICY DOMAINS

■ Bikeability/Walkability

WEBSITE www.peds.org

involved in pedestrian injuries and fatalities. Low-income families and immigrants are less likely than the general population to own a car and so, are more likely to walk or bike for errands or to commute to work—incidental physical activity. PEDS sees that making the road safer for the most frequent and vulnerable pedestrians can improve pedestrian safety for everyone. As Atlanta's population booms, PEDS has begun to expand to suburbs, where pedestrian injuries are increasing. Among people over 60—who will represent 20% of the Atlanta population in the next five years—Flocks also sees a critical opportunity to improve pedestrian infrastructure. If the region's older adults feel safe on the streets, then children, the disabled and the general population will also benefit from safe places to walk and they will be more likely to engage in this common form of activity.



BRINGING ATTENTION TO PEDESTRIAN HAZARDS
ACROSS CULTURAL LINES

Since being named one of the ten most dangerous cities for pedestrians in the US by *Mean Streets 2004* (issued by The Surface Transportation Policy Project), Atlanta has experienced a number of positive shifts to make their streets safer. PEDS has been at the forefront of those changes. At the helm, PEDS has advanced a statewide policy to get cameras installed at signal lights to help enforce red-light violations. The organization moved forward a policy to install in-street crosswalk signs throughout Atlanta that will alert drivers to the presence of pedestrians.

In addition to changing the built environment, PEDS has also created a web-based hazard reporting system that allows pedestrians from nine jurisdictions to report dangers and request repairs. Whether it's a busted sidewalks or a broken crosswalk signal, the PEDS system encourages pedestrians from places including DeKalb, Decatur, Conyers, and the city of Atlanta to "take action" by reporting anything—from speeding cars to overgrown shrubs—that makes the walking environment unfriendly. When visitors register a complaint, their requests are automatically forwarded to the appropriate city department. The online system takes the leg-work out of trying to track down who is responsible for what, an often confusing and daunting maze of bureaucracy for the average pedestrian.

PEDS has begun shaping a walking friendly region and Flocks laments that there is still plenty of work to be done. Armed with effective partnerships and an emphasis on policy and environmental changes, though, Flocks is confident that PEDS is on the right track. Since its early days of crosswalk protests, PEDS has developed fruitful partnerships with city departments of transportation, planning, public works, and law enforcement to influence planning, enforcement, and funding decisions. With experience, PEDS has learned how to engage traffic engineers and policymakers to develop pedestrian friendly solutions to new projects and existing infrastructure. PEDS tries to get involved in projects as early as possible to make sure developers, planners, and engineers are paying attention to pedestrian issues. She insists that, "If you don't get involved early, it is much harder to shift the momentum."

Through wins like the in-street crosswalk signs designed to make pedestrians more visible, PEDS is slowly beginning to see a culture shift. Even so, one of the persistent obstacles to creating a pedestrian friendly region is the auto-centric culture that pervades traffic planning and development. To accelerate the paradigm

"When I first founded the organization in 1996, I thought it was primarily about educating drivers...By '97, I knew policy issues like road design really mattered."

Sally Flocks, president, CEO, and founder
Pedestrians Educating Drivers on Safety (PEDS)

shift, PEDS hopes to "get a seat" at the state and federal planning tables so that the needs of pedestrians are systematically explored. Without pedestrian advocacy groups like PEDS, pedestrian voices are drowned out by the din from lobbyists, developers, and traffic engineers who tend to think about cars before people. Flocks acknowledges that, "One pedestrian advocacy organization is too small to create the world it wants on its own," but, she says, "if we can influence others to see the world the same way, we won't be working alone."