

## Washington State

### Creating a More Walkable Community for Low-Income Residents

#### Public Health Problem

Obesity and physical inactivity are major public health issues in Clark County, Washington. In 2005, 25% of Clark County adults were obese, a 56% increase over the 1996 rate of 16%. Also, in 2005, only 55% of Clark County adults met the recommendations for moderate physical activity. Physical inactivity is a risk factor for obesity, which can lead to heart disease, cancer, diabetes, hypertension, and other diseases and disabilities.

#### Taking Action

The Steps Program in Clark County, WA took action by building political will and raising awareness about the importance of physical activity, the availability of trails and bikeways, and the need for walking and biking trails. The Steps Active Community Environment workgroup revised the Clark County Trails & Bikeway Plan (not updated since 1994) by gathering community input on the needs for trails and bikeways. Steps also worked with community partners to develop, design and distribute *Clark County, WA Walkaround Guide: 10 Great Walks in Our Community*, a portable, user-friendly publication that provides detailed information about 25 different walking routes in the Clark County area along with health information, activity logs, maps, and personal success stories. Organizations that use the guides incorporate them into their programs. Individuals using the guides fill out a user survey, and organizations promote the guides to people who are in greatest need of physical activity. They reach these individuals through worksite wellness programs, primary care visits, health education group visits, and community-organized activities. The development of this guide was coupled with a public media campaign, which provided Clark County residences information about the walking trails available to them in the area and encouraged them to utilize the trails to become more physically active. The kick off for this event coincided with the Lewis and Clark Expedition Centennial event, which celebrated the arrival of Lewis and Clark over 100 years ago to the Vancouver Washington area (where they walked along the Columbia River on the Discovery Walk trail).

#### Implications and Impact

*Clark County, WA Walkaround Guide: 10 Great Walks in Our Community* has been a great success. One of the major health system partners that supports healthy livable communities provided the funding to print 50,000 maps, one for every Clark County household. As of August 1, 2007, over 25,000 have been distributed to individuals in Clark County via 87 organizations representing businesses, non-profits, health systems, community centers, schools, organizations assisting the disabled, athletic clubs, churches, clinics, and the government.

More importantly, the Steps Program in Clark County, WA was able to influence the Clark County Trails & Bikeway Plan to include expansion of trails and bikeways over the next 20 years. This provides long-term sustainability for the importance of maintaining and continuing trails and bikeways for all residents of Clark County. Trail usage on the riverfront trail has increased 36% since the Walkaround Guide has been in use by residents, and users of the Walkaround Guide have indicated they have walked the trails 3-5 times since receiving the Guide. As one resident said, "I wasn't really physically active until I received the Walkaround guide. It inspired me to try out new places all over the county. Thanks for supplying this great guide. I feel great about my accomplishments. You have made me proud to be a citizen of this community".