Active Living in Oklahoma

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Some Background

- Our earliest work in obesity prevention emphasized individual change.
- Through materials for home visiting emphasizing family wellness.
- Intervening on early possible risk factors (feeding and sleep).
- Our efforts to encourage breastfeeding, in particular, emphasized the limitations of the environment.
Rural communities confront serious obstacles to healthy living, including inadequate food and supports for active living.

Our ALR project represented our first effort to better understand these limitations for tribal families.

and to think about the possibilities for change.

We were focused on developing knowledge through partnerships with parents.
**Study Components**

- Focus groups with parents and observations in three different communities
  - Focus groups explored parents perceptions of barriers and opportunities for activity
  - Observations document environmental problems and possibilities
  - Parents guided observations and helped interpret results
  - The process culminated in community redesign
- A survey with 130 respondents using the Rural Active Living Perceived Environmental Support Scale
We partnered with the Cherokee Nation Early Childhood Unit to identify communities.

We recruited parents through the program.

After our initial meeting we made observations of identified community locations.

To begin to discuss what kinds of environments might better support active living.

In our final meeting we developed plans for environmental change to promote activity.
Results

- All communities involved do not offer adequate support commuting by walking or biking—roads are narrow, sidewalks unconnected and sometimes in poor repair, housing is often removed from destinations.
- People do not view town centers as destinations, except for special events.
- Thoroughfare zones are destinations, but do not generally have recreational facilities.
- Parks w/playgrounds appear to get heaviest use, but even this is well below capacity.
- Barriers to active living include perceptions of safety and condition of facilities, distance to facilities, and weather.
In our final discussions with parents, we began to contemplate redesign of communities.

- All communities wanted multipurpose indoor recreation centers.
- That could serve as destinations.
- A major motivation for an indoor facility was the weather.
- In the two communities that had Walmarts, the facilities were sited near there, suggesting possible partnerships.
Active Transport?

- It was more difficult for participants to imagine biking or walking to school or work.
- The remote location of housing and unsafe roads made this hard to contemplate.
- It may be more realistic to design opportunities for active living with current conditions in mind.
- But we do not want to give up on rural active transport prematurely.
- This may be especially important as we consider the needs of seniors in these communities.
Parks and schools were both seen as possible additional sites for activity.

Safety was a major concern, especially for use after dark.

Schools raise interesting opportunities as destinations, with diverse possible programming for children and adults.

Many adults took children to parks, but were not active there themselves.

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**Current Community Sites**
We followed these community meetings with a survey exploring broader perceptions of current residential and community environments (n=130)

- Residential environments were seen as least favorable for activity, schools most
- Indoor facilities were seen as more supportive than outdoor
- We had very high rates of do not know responses for church facilities and programming
Churches did not come up spontaneously in our focus groups, many survey respondents did not know about offerings.

These may offer opportunities for multi-activity programming, with diverse opportunities for family members.
Despite enthusiasm for recreational facilities, it was still not clear how much they would be used.

Even after designing recreation centers, focus groups members still indicated infrequent use.

A center may not support daily physical activity for families.

And our survey indicates that many people may not be generally active, so motivation to use a center may be limited.
Our survey asked for past-week activities in two categories.

Moderate activities:

- Walking-61 cited this activity
- Swimming-14 cited this activity
- Exercise Routines-18 cited this activity
- Running/Jogging-11 cited this activity
- Yardwork-10 cited this activity
- Housecleaning-12 cited this activity
- Work-4 cited this activity
- Sports-6 cited this activity
- Miscellaneous-10 cited this activity
Vigorous activities:

- Running/Jogging-8 cited this activity
- Walking-7 cited this activity
- Exercise Routines-13 cited this activity
- Sports-4 cited this activity
- Work-7 cited this activity
- House cleaning-3 cited this activity
- Miscellaneous-3 cited this activity
There clearly are important limitations on activity choice in rural tribal communities.

And environmental changes can increase options.

Even with current facilities, aesthetic improvements to parks and expanded use of churches and schools may be indicated.

We also recognize a need for multipurpose community facilities that can serve as destinations.
But We Also Need to Look at Actual Behavior

- Our audits of identified recreational and community environments suggest underutilization
- And our survey results suggest low levels of activity
- Our next efforts will be designed to examine children’s actual use of recreational and community environments
- To facilitate improved policy and environmental action
- In ways that make sense in the current context of their lives