

Massachusetts Department of Public Health Success Stories



BROCKTON MASS IN MOTION



Brockton Youth take on Big Park Improvements at Hillstrom Farm Park

SUMMARY

As part of an effort to get residents walking throughout the city, Brockton, a Mass in Motion community, tapped into trails at the Hillstrom Farm Park as a logical place to start. With the help of Brockton's young people, the city made major park improvements and has committed to ongoing maintenance. These actions have resulted in more people using the park, getting physical activity and enjoying their community.

CHALLENGE

In a time when communities are looking to improve health and reduce obesity, parks can provide the perfect opportunity for people to walk, play and be active in fun ways. But when parks are perceived as unsafe, people tend to ride on by. When Brockton Mass in Motion started the **Hillstrom Farm Park Project** during the summer of 2012, the playing field was mowed and used for sports, but the rest of the park was filled with trash and broken glass, keeping most people away. Brockton Mass in Motion, which is run by Mayor Linda M. Balzotti's Office, implemented a youth work plan in collaboration with the local Boys and Girls Club. The young people were given the goal of cleaning up the debris and clearing and maintaining the park's new trails.

SOLUTION

Brockton Mass in Motion developed and built the park's trails by installing three boardwalks around the pond and placing a "Fido House" containing bio-degradable plastic bags for dog waste at the three entrances leading to dog-friendly trails.

With help from **Brockton's Promise** and the Boys & Girls Club of Brockton, at-risk youth are now helping to improve and maintain the park. To become leaders, six youth (ages 16-18) went through a real-world hiring process and are being paid a stipend to oversee the younger volunteers (ages 11-12). One or two afternoons a week, two adult program directors, youth team leaders, and volunteers head to the park to pick up bottles and cans and to perform some light trail maintenance like cutting back thorny bushes.



“The most rewarding aspect is seeing people use the trails and catching a glimpse of the enthusiasm they— and their dogs — have towards this new addition to the neighborhood. It has been a phenomenal community-building endeavor.”

JANA LINHART
BROCKTON MASS IN MOTION
COMMUNITY PLANNER

For more information, visit www.mass.gov/massinmotion

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RESULTS

The park is just a few steps away from a bus stop, making it easily accessible to residents of Brockton who rely on public transportation. Jana Linhart, Mass in Motion Community Planner from the Office of Mayor Linda Balzotti, is already getting some great feedback. Residents of the Hillstrom Farm Park neighborhood have told her how happy they are with the new trails and added maintenance. More and more people are walking their dogs and joggers are also taking advantage of the natural setting. "I talk about this everywhere I go. It's amazing...I'm helping to build a park!" said 18-year-old Brian Constant, one of the hired youth team leaders.

The group plans to build additional boardwalk bridges over flood zones and will install ramps to increase accessibility. They will also create a map of the park that shows the length and details of the trails, which will be measured by young volunteers with pedometers and professional equipment. The youth leaders will also attend workshops at the Boys & Girls Club on life-skills subjects like creating a resume, speaking in public, creating presentations, and dressing for success.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

To sustain the ongoing maintenance of the park, Brockton Mass in Motion is collaborating with Harvard Law School to draft a conservancy agreement, customized for the City of Brockton. As a conservancy, a committee would be allowed to fundraise on behalf of the park, with all money raised going toward ongoing maintenance costs, healthy family events, and outreach to additional inner-city youth.

Using the Hillstrom Farm Park Project as a blueprint, Brockton Mass in Motion hopes to turn other underdeveloped or vacant areas of Brockton into family-friendly walking trails. When this takes place, more youth team leaders will be hired to help.



For more information, visit www.mass.gov/massinmotion