

‘Walk with a Doc’™ gets Rural Madison County Moving Together

Mary Kate Lee

Madison County is among the most rural areas of Central New York. One limitation of rural places is that there are limited spaces for people to engage in physical activity or exercise. Compared to 93% of residents in New York State, only 75% of Madison County residents have access to parks or recreation facilities.¹ As a result, Madison County has a higher rate of physically inactive adults than New York as a whole.¹ In addition to these built environment challenges, residents of Madison County also have less access to health care providers compared to other parts of New York State.¹

To overcome these challenges, the Madison County Rural Health Council (MCRHC) and the Syracuse University Lerner Center for Public Health Promotion created the Live Well Committee. The Live Well Committee has successfully created 12 Madison County Monday Miles, with more in the works.² The Monday Mile is a one mile route mapped out with directional signage to inspire physical activity and socialization among residents.³ Monday is always around the corner, and this program uses the start of the week as motivation to create and sustain healthy behaviors. To strengthen the Monday Mile program, MCRHC launched the ‘Walk with a Doc’™ program to increase physical activity and connection among residents and to give them a chance to learn about specific health topics.

What is ‘Walk with a Doc’™?

‘Walk with a Doc’™ is a national walking program that began in Columbus, Ohio. Born from the desire to create positive behavioral change, Dr. David Sabgir invited his patients to join him on a walk during a Saturday morning. To Dr. Sabgir’s delight, over 100 people

participated. He continued these walks and coined them ‘Walk with a Doc.’™⁴ The concept has spread all over the U.S.: a doctor gives a short talk on a health topic and then leads a walk in the community.

Success in Madison County

In Madison County, ‘Walk with a Doc’™ events occur on one Saturday each month. They occur on different Monday Mile routes to spread awareness of the various recreation areas throughout the county. The program serves many purposes:

- Participants are able to speak with a physician outside of a clinical setting, which can minimize the authoritative relationship between doctor and patient.
- Participants can learn about a health topic and pick up tips to help them lead healthier lives.
- Residents are centered around the idea of walking for their health.
- The event sparks a sense of community and connection among residents.



The first Walk with a Doc™ with Dr. Berg in DeRuyter, NY

Residents are Enthusiastic about ‘Walk with a Doc’™

Participants from recent ‘Walk with a Doc’™ events expressed their enthusiasm for how these events encourage them to socialize while getting physically active and receiving health education at the same time.

“I love working out and I don’t get to often. On my road, you can’t walk so I try to walk here [Monday Mile route]. You can socialize and exercise! There’s a lot of volunteers at the library and they don’t like walking on their own, and this encourages them to get out and walk together. They don’t feel as vulnerable walking alone. This is a good experience: exercising and meeting new people! You get the education from the doctor and a chance to walk.” -- Renee, Madison County Resident

“It’s a really great thing to do. It’s like we were talking about, there has to be community around these types of things. People were walking dogs and moving around; you see it and it motivates you. It’s a good cause and I like to walk.” -- Dr. Edwards, Family Physician

“I believe in the program...if I’m gonna [live] I want to be able to move around and do the things I want to do.” -- Rachel, Madison County Resident

“I saw that Dr. Puc was involved and I’m interested in integrative medicine so I thought it would be nice to learn more about tick prevention. We just moved to the area and I plan on doing a lot of gardening. And I’m trying to get to know my new home - Chittenango. We saw the flyer at the park and thought this is perfect! It focuses on health and gives us additional info. We’re doing something healthy by walking but the doctor adds another layer of information. It’s a great idea especially when it’s nice out. And it attracts some nice people who choose to send their Saturday morning doing stuff like this.” - Dorothy, Madison County Resident

“We decided to launch ‘Walk with a Doc’™ to create more awareness of and participation on the Monday Mile. It’s a great way to promote all the Monday Miles in the county and to encourage our community to become active. Walk with a Doc also connects local healthcare providers with community members, which is a goal for the Madison County Rural Health Council. It’s been great to see people coming out to learn about an interesting health topic, connecting with other Community members, and walking the Monday Mile.” - Bonnie Slocum, Executive Director Madison County Rural Health Council



Residents enjoy Walk with a Doc in Chittenango, NY

Join Us Next Month!

For more information about Madison County ‘Walk with a Doc’™ events, visit

<http://www.mcruralhealthcouncil.org/walk-with-a-doc> and follow Madison County Rural Health Council on Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/mcruralhealthcouncil/>. To start a ‘Walk with a Doc’™ program in your community, contact the Syracuse University Lerner Center (mlee77@syr.edu).

References

1. Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. (2019) County Health Rankings & Roadmaps. Retrieved May 8, 2019, from <http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/app/newyork/2018/rankings/madison/county/outcomes/overall/snapshot>
2. Syracuse University. (2019, August). Retrieved May 9, 2019, from <http://lernercenter.syr.edu/healthy-monday/programs/move-it-monday-monday-mile/>
3. Lee, M.K., & Slocum, B. (2019, March 26). Jumpstart Your Week with a Monday Mile. Syracuse University. Retrieved May 9, 2019, from <http://lernercenter.syr.edu/healthy-monday/programs/move-it-monday-monday-mile/>
4. Walk with a Doc. (2019). Retrieved May 9, 2019, from <https://walkwithadoc.org/>

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About the Author

Mary Kate Lee is the Program Coordinator of the Syracuse University Lerner Center (mlee77@syr.edu).

The mission of the Lerner Center for Public Health Promotion at Syracuse University is to improve population health through applied research and evaluation, education, engaged service, and advocating for evidence-based policy and practice change.