



University of
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Lowell

A community-based social networking intervention to increase walking in dog owners

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Abstract

Roughly 40% of U.S. households own a dog and while dog ownership is associated with greater engagement in physical activity, up to 60% of dog owners do not achieve the recommended 150 minutes of weekly physical activity. The present study aims to develop and test a dog walking intervention addressing individual, interpersonal, and community factors. The study represents collaboration between UMass Medical School, UMass Lowell and their community partners, Common Pathways and the Greater Lowell Health Alliance. The developmental phase uses a community-based participatory research approach by creating community advisory boards and conducting focus groups with residents to ensure community perspectives are represented throughout intervention development. Information gathered from the developmental phase will inform the intervention.

The intervention phase will determine the feasibility and efficacy of a multi-component dog walking intervention using a group randomized controlled trial. The intervention uses a social networking website, newsletters, pedometers, neighborhood walks, and community events to educate owners on the benefits of walking, create a supportive environment, and increase the “dog friendliness” of a community. Communities in Worcester and Lowell will be randomized to the intervention or control condition. Outcome measures include pedometer steps, time spent walking the dog, social support for exercise, and sense of community.

This study is one of the first studies to test whether increasing dog walking in dog owners can increase owner physical activity via a social networking website. If successful, we will assess the extent to which the community can sustain the intervention.

Introduction

- Less than 50% of Americans meet the ACSM/CDC recommendations for regular physical activity.¹
- Not all owners are aware of the health and behavioral benefits of dog walking for the dog, and those who are unaware are less likely to walk their dogs.²
- Dogs may facilitate social connections. Dog owners report and easier time meeting people, perceive their neighborhood as more friendly and engage in more community activities.³

Methodology

Developmental Phase

- Consult with community agencies (Common Pathways and Greater Lowell Health Alliance)
- Convene Community Advisory Boards in Worcester and Lowell
- Intervention Development
- Focus Groups
- Intervention Refinement

Pilot Intervention Phase

- Monthly Newsletters
- Meetup Website
- Neighborhood Dog walks
- Community Events

Outcome Measures

Baseline and Six Months

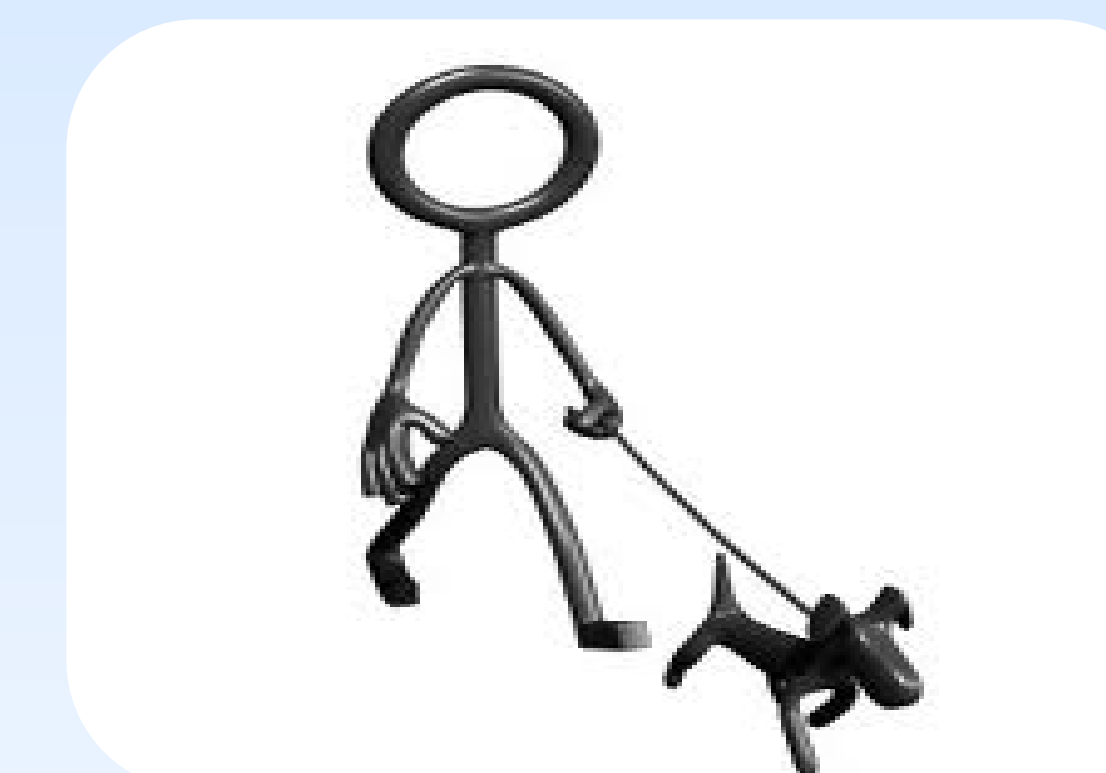
- Physical Activity
 - Number of steps/day
- Surveys
 - Dogs and Physical Activity Tool (DAPA)
 - Measures time spent walking with dog
 - Social Support for Exercise
 - Sense of Community Index

Specific Aims

- To develop and refine a community dog walking intervention program as a way to increase physical activity of the dog and the dog owners.
- To determine the feasibility of a multi-component dog walking intervention using a group randomized trial.
- To determine the effectiveness of a multi-component dog walking intervention.



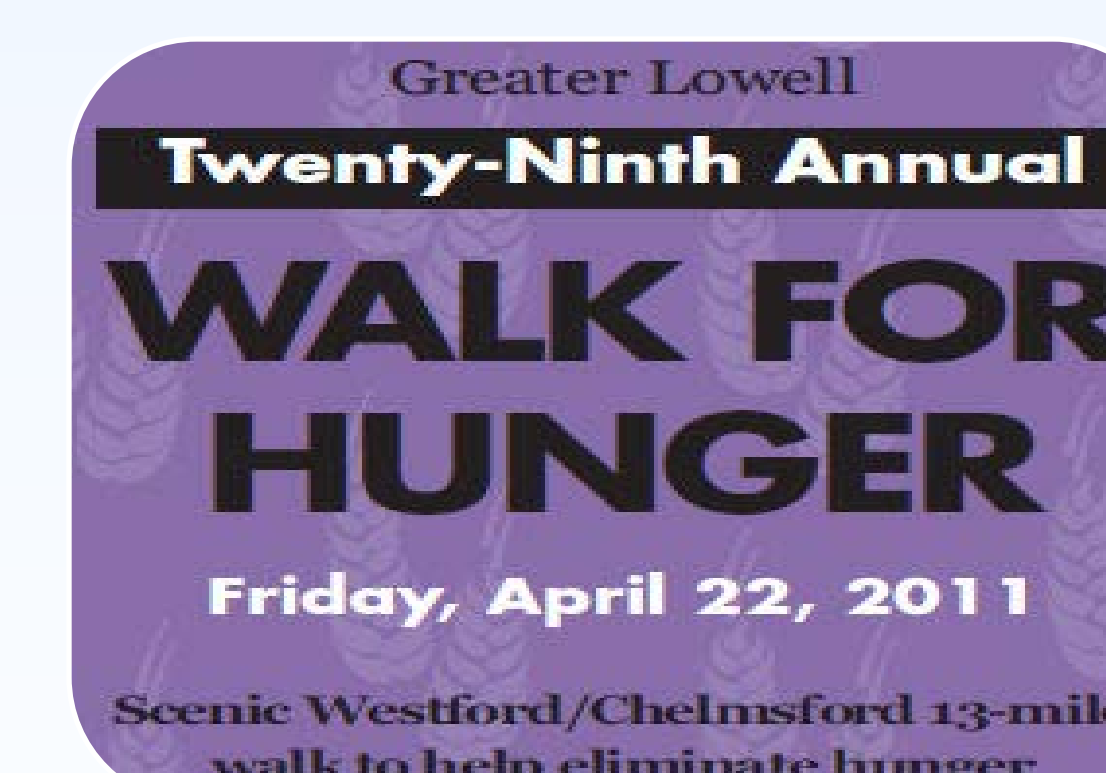
Education



Strategies and walking tips



Social networking



Community walks and events

References

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