



Extension Team Enhances Recreation Spaces in Menominee County Nation

Menominee County/Nation residents are disproportionately affected by obesity while also experiencing limited access to places to be physically active. The Extension Menominee County/Nation **Kemāmaḥeḥtaḥ** team convened partners to complete Wisconsin's Active Community Toolkit assessment, along with three walking audits using an intergenerational approach, to identify opportunities to improve community design and land use, promote active transportation, and enhance and promote places to be physically active. Findings from the community assessment led to the implementation of two park improvement projects planned by the Menominee Indian Tribe: Chief Niwopet Park in Neopit and Sturgeon Park in Keshena. The grand opening of Chief Niwopet Park took place on October 26, 2019 and featured integration of Menominee art, language, and history. In January 2020, **Kemāmaḥeḥtaḥ** team members facilitated a community engagement event to inform the final design for Sturgeon Park, scheduled for reconstruction in 2020-2021. In the next year, **Kemāmaḥeḥtaḥ** team members and partners also plan to improve active transportation systems of everyday routes, including a major sidewalk improvement project.

Public Health Challenge

Over 4 in 10 Menominee County/Nation residents live with obesity, reflective of a long history of systemic oppression of indigenous people by white colonists limiting economic opportunities, access to healthy foods, and places to be physically active. Only about 1 in 15 people in Menominee County/Nation have access to places to be physically active, driven in part by the rural nature of the community.

Approach

Kemāmaḥeḥtaḥ (“We’re All Moving”)

Extension Menominee County/Nation convened partners to complete Wisconsin's [Active Community Toolkit](#) assessment tool between April - June 2019.



Grand opening of Chief Niwopet Park in Neopit, Wisconsin

Representatives included individuals from the County Highway Department, Department of Land Conservation, Forestry, and Zoning, Menominee County Development, Menominee Tribal Community Development, Menominee Tribal Police Department, Menominee County Sheriff Department, Menominee Department of Transit Services, and community youth members. Results from the Active Community Checklist identified opportunities to improve community design and land use, promote active transportation, enhance, and promote places to be physically active, and improve coordination and support across partner organizations.

Youth leaders, agency partners, and community partners completed three [walking audits](#) during the summer of 2019 to dig deeper into the findings of the Active Community Checklist. A total of 6.4 miles were walked and audited in the communities of Keshena and Neopit. With youth in the lead, the walking audits identified areas of potential improvement including traffic calming measures and signage, lighting, and sidewalk maintenance. Additionally, the walking audits identified opportunities to enhance recreation facility destinations through art, signage, park-clean ups, and other infrastructure improvements like benches. The intergenerational approach taken in conducting walking audits was pivotal to gaining partner buy-in and reinforced a commitment to promoting health across generations.

Project partners worked collaboratively to leverage community assessment findings to inform the implementation of two park improvement projects planned by the Menominee Indian Tribe in October 2019 - January 2020: Chief Niwopet Park in Neopit and Sturgeon Park in Keshena. Extension Menominee County/Nation colleagues spearheaded community engagement efforts, provided technical assistance on incorporating Menominee language and culture as a health promotion strategy, and assisted with planning park enhancement efforts.

Results

The grand opening of Chief Niwopet Park took place on October 26, 2019. The former ballpark was renamed and revamped with sustainable design principles, informed by **Kemāmaḥceḡtaḡ** team members. Chief Niwopet Park was Indigenized through the integration of Menominee art, language, and history. This park is reflective of the Neopit community and connects the families living here with a Menominee Chief that fought to establish the current reservation for future generations. The park themes connect to Chief Niwopet's belief in planning for the future through: installation of a pollinator garden; inclusion of a physical activity obstacle course, walking trail, and traditional indigenous game structure that engages with nature and builds healthier youth; and inclusion of Indigenous art with park signage that connects to Chief Niwopet's clan and connects to Menominee language. The newly enhanced destination is within the White City neighborhood, less than .5 miles from the Menominee Tribal School and less than .75 miles to the Woodland Boys and Girls Club.

The Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin is planning a major redesign of the Keshena Falls area. This is a popular community destination and a regular community walking route, a viewing spot where the ancient sturgeon spawn each spring, and a popular swimming spot in the summer. The Tribe's redesign of this area will increase safety and improve the walking routes. This space will integrate sustainable design principles with Menominee culture and history.

Kemāmaḥceḡtaḡ team member Jennifer Gauthier met with the design firm and the Tribe's Community Development department to provide feedback on design plans through the lens of cultural appropriateness. For example, lighting structures to promote nighttime

walking were discouraged by Jennifer for cultural reasons. Jennifer also supported the Tribe in planning community engagement events to collect feedback and input on the park redesign efforts. Approximately 25 people attended the January 29, 2020 community engagement event to inform the final park design. The park reconstruction is planned for 2020-2021.

Sustaining Success

An initial focus on supporting placemaking efforts in priority settings will be balanced with efforts to improve active transportation systems of everyday routes in the next year. For example, the Tribe has planned a major sidewalk improvement project in 2021 which will connect key destinations in the town of Keshena, including Sturgeon Park, the Tribal Clinic, and the high school, among other sites. **Kemāmaḥceḡtaḡ** team members and partners are also working on review and planning for safety along routes in Neopit.

Quote

"There is a certain perspective that you can only get as a child growing up here. When I was a kid growing up on the reservation, I knew every trail. I knew where the fences were that were easiest to cross. I knew where the mean dogs were. You see the community through a different lens when you are [an adult] driving it. This walking assessment, and seeing how the kids talked about the community, it really brought me back. Working with young people was a rich experience."
-Jeremy Weso, Highway Commissioner of the Menominee County Highway Department, at an October 17, 2019 partner meeting

For more information, visit:

<https://fyi.extension.wisc.edu/news/2019/12/06/kemamaḥceḡtaḡ-project/>

This effort is made possible by Outreach Programs to Reduce the Prevalence of Obesity in High Risk Rural Areas Agreement (1809) funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Contact Information

Cooperative agreement: Outreach Programs to Reduce the Prevalence of Obesity in High Risk Rural Areas Agreement (1809) funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Recipient: University of Wisconsin-Madison, Division of Extension

Strategy focus: Physical activity

Story author name and email: Jennifer Gauthier - jennifer.gauthier@wisc.edu

