

## **Spotlight on the Creston Walking Program**

An Age-Friendly Grand Rapids partner organization, the North End Wellness Coalition (NEWC), created a walking program to improve access to outdoor spaces and activity for all ages.

### **Details About the Walking Program**

The North End Wellness Coalition is made up of thirty organizations that collaborate to promote health and wellness in the Creston and Belknap neighborhoods. Residents reported that they would like to be more physically active, but they could not afford a gym membership. NEWC conducted a walking audit to find a pedestrian pathway through the Creston neighborhood that residents of all ages and abilities could safely use. With the help of a Neighborhood Match Grant and sponsorship of Creston area businesses, they created a walking route called the North End Pathways, a series of five loops each approximately 1 mile long.

In the spring of 2020, NEWC was awarded an AARP Challenge Grant to place five ADA approved benches along the Pathways for individuals who may need to rest or wish to socialize along the way. With help from various partners including the City of Grand Rapids, a total of seven benches were installed along the Pathways in June of 2021.

In addition to encouraging individual walking, NEWC has scheduled a weekly intergenerational walk every Tuesday morning led by a fitness instructor. Twice yearly a planned event is held to bring the community together to walk and socialize, ending with a treat at a participating business.

### **Why Walking Matters**

Walking has become even more important during the pandemic. Walking is also increasingly tied to equity as a walkable community is a just community. Walking provides considerable benefits for health as well as social connectedness. It is a way to encourage an attachment to the neighborhood that will help residents, visitors, and businesses alike.

### **The Low Cost Advantage**

According to the CDC, walking is a great way to get the physical activity needed to obtain health benefits. It does not require any specific skills, equipment, or a gym membership. You can simply step outside your door to do it.

NEWC was able to successfully implement and promote their Pathways program with grants, sponsorships and mostly, a great many committed community partners.

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