



# 2017

## WALK WITH A DOC: COLUMBUS NEIGHBORHOOD WALKING CLUBS – *EXECUTIVE SUMMARY*



# PROGRAM

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Walk with a Doc: Columbus Neighborhood Walking Clubs provides Columbus residents with a unique opportunity to engage in physical activity while also providing a casual setting for interaction with medical providers.

The fifth season of the program spanned from April to November 2017, offering a total of 60 community walks across four locations. Walks were held twice per month at four community recreation centers around Columbus; Woodward Park on the North side, Marion Franklin Park on the South side, Dodge Park on the West side, and Big Walnut Park on the Far East side. These health-vulnerable areas were targeted to provide an opportunity for physical activity in neighborhoods where those opportunities are limited. The program also allows the residents of these communities to access medical providers on a regular basis and receive valuable medical advice that extends beyond physical activity. Walking paths at each site are paved to ensure wheelchair accessibility, and people of all ages and abilities are encouraged to attend. Walkers are invited to walk as long as they choose, with no minimum distance or pace required to participate. The selected community centers were centrally located in the neighborhoods, and provided an indoor space for set-up and in inclement weather. Light refreshments were provided at each walk.

## Walk Details

Walks begin at 8:30 AM, and are led by a medical professional after a five-minute talk about a relevant health topic. Mount Carmel physicians led the majority of walks, with other medical partners who support Walk with a Doc attending when Mount Carmel physicians were unavailable. Topics included many relevant health issues such as immunizations, diabetes prevention and management, and Alzheimer’s disease. After their presentations, the medical professionals led the group on an hour-long walk along a designated path. During the walk, participants were encouraged to engage in discussion with the visiting physician or health professional. Many providers were “regulars,” attending multiple walks and developing relationships with community members. In addition, once per season, each side was visited by the Mount Carmel Mobile Medical Coach, a 40-foot mobile clinic that provides a variety of medical services intended for individuals without access to health care. Walkers were able to tour the mobile clinic and speak to a community liaison officer. Walks were staffed by volunteers from YMCA of Central Ohio.



Walkers on the Far East Side take a brisk walk in April through Big Walnut Park



North Side volunteer Paul Weber kicks off the season with Dr. John O’Handley

## Incentives

Throughout the season, a variety of incentive items, including t-shirts, pedometers, hats, sunglasses, and cinch bags were offered to increase attendance and enthusiasm about the program. Incentives were offered simply for attending the walks on certain dates, with the exception of the t-shirts, which are earned by attending at least three walks. Participants frequently and proudly wear and use their incentives at walks throughout the season, and in their neighborhoods during the rest of the year.

## Evaluation

Participants were asked to complete short surveys at the end of each walk to assess their satisfaction with the program. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive across more than 1,800 responses. This year was another difficult year for physician recruitment, which was the most significant issue reported in evaluations both last year and this year. Unfortunately, 12 out of 60 walks did not have a physician in attendance – 6 on the South Side, 5 on the North Side, and 1 on the West Side. Efforts are being made to improve physician recruitment after this second year of difficulties.

Many walkers wrote in positive comments about the program. For example, one Far East Side walker wrote: *“This is fantastic, wish I knew about it last year. Thank you so much!”* and North Side walkers wrote: *“I was able to help a friend with the doc. Everyone was friendly. I felt very welcome and encouraged”* and *“It was a best kept secret. I had no idea how wonderful this would be. I had no idea what to expect. Thank you!!”* It is clear that Walk with a Doc: Columbus Neighborhood Walking Clubs has made a positive impact in the health and wellness of the Columbus community.

## Partnership with Fleet Feet Sports

Starting in 2016, Fleet Feet Sports became a sponsoring partner of Walk with a Doc: Columbus Neighborhood Walking Clubs. They funded eight “Shoe Scholarships” at a total value of \$500 (achieved by matching a \$250 donation from one of their vendors). Those scholarships gave shoes, socks, and insoles to eight walkers across the program who had been nominated by their peers for their commitment to Walk with a Doc and strong example of living a healthy lifestyle. In 2017, Fleet Feet was not able to secure a matching donation from their vendors, but again put forth \$250 of their own money to sponsor four shoe scholarships.

## ATTENDANCE

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In total, 383 unique community members participated in the Walk with a Doc: Columbus Neighborhood Walking Clubs. Average attendance at the walks increased by 7% overall, which falls slightly short of our annual goal of increasing attendance by 10%.

Considering the 26% increase from 2016, however, the program has still outperformed expectations over the past four years. The commitment of our walkers is outstanding: Twelve walkers attended every single walk at their respective locations, and 44% of walkers attended 5 or more walks! Participants walked more than 7.3 million steps, equaling approximately 3,650 miles – that’s almost 10% more than 2016!



Far East Side walkers listen intently to Dr. Bryan Ghiloni’s health advice

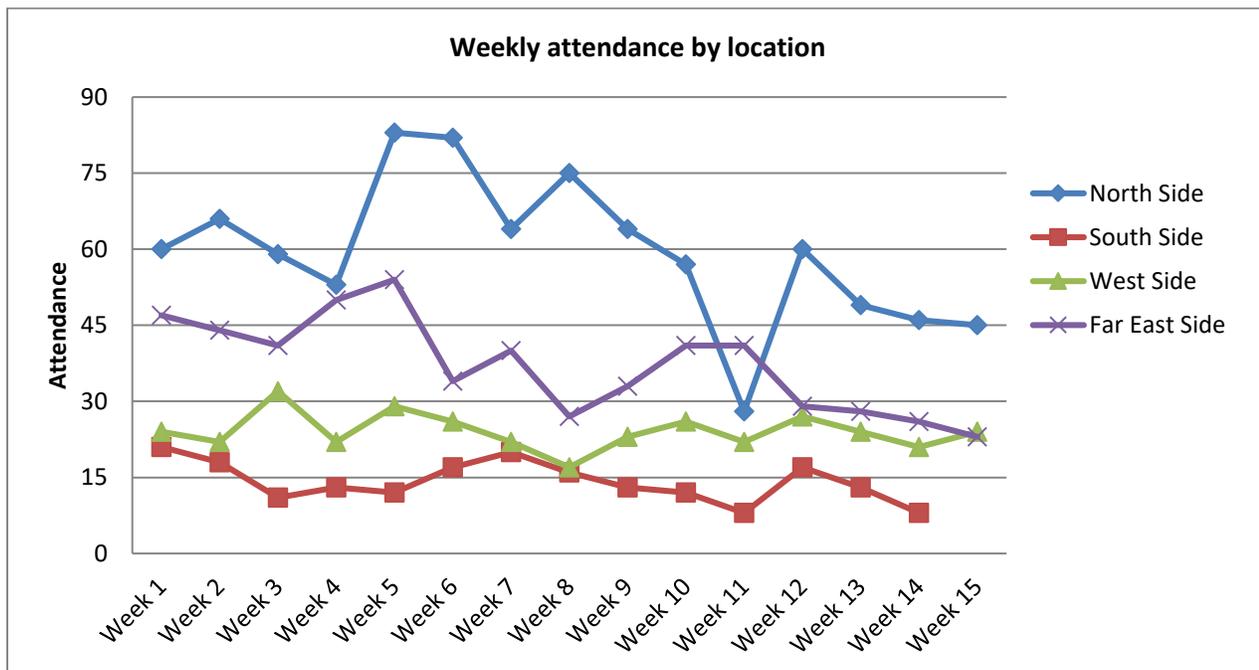
**Table 1: Average attendance, 2015-2017**

Side	2015 average	2016 average	2017 average	2016 to 2017 change
North	48	60	59	Decreased by 0.3%
South	15	13	14	Increased by 10%
Far East	18	33	37	Increased by 14%
West	20	22	24	Increased by 12%

While attendance showed modest increases this year at three of four locations, there continues to be a decreasing trend in attendance across the course of the season, particularly at the North and Far East locations. As seen in the graph below, West and South sides remained more consistent, though South saw a slight decrease in attendance over the second half of the season.

North and Far East are more inconsistent, and while the overall trends may be explained by weather and holidays, they present an opportunity for improving attendance within our existing audience. Attendance at North, Far East, and West each saw an uptick after weeks 3 or 4, when weather began to warm in mid to late May. Outliers for the North side are Weeks 7 and 11, which fall on the Fourth of July and Labor Day holidays. Ignoring for a moment those two outliers, the attendance at North shows a clear downward trend from week 5 to week 15. Decreases could also be impacted by the holidays and summer vacation schedules, though the differences at other locations or weeks are not as stark. Weeks 12 to 15 typically begin to mark the return of colder weather, though temperatures remained quite warm until Week 14 in 2017.

Working to understand these trends and help to incentivize more consistent participation will be a target of the 2018 season. A certain amount of attrition is to be expected, but perhaps improved communication, incentives, and management of the program could attenuate the losses and maintain higher participation levels.



## END OF YEAR CELEBRATION

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On November 18<sup>th</sup> 2017, walkers were invited to the third annual End of Year Celebration breakfast at the Mount Carmel College of Nursing Lounge. This event brought together all walkers, doctors, partners, and community members to mingle and share stories from the 2017 season. Approximately 100 individuals attended, and awards were distributed to recognize outstanding volunteers, physicians, and walkers who made the season a success. A special award was presented to the Far East Side walking club for having the highest percent increase in attendance from 2016 to 2017. Far East was a repeat winner this year after narrowly edging out the West side. This event was emceed by Dr. David Sabgir, founder of the national Walk with a Doc program.



## CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

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Walk with a Doc: Columbus Neighborhood Walking Clubs marked its fifth season in 2017, and continues to provide participants the opportunity to be physically active in their communities and learn about health in a relaxed and supportive environment. The program will return again in April 2018, and will continue to look for new ways to grow and support the health of our participants.

As with each year, our goal remains to increase overall attendance by 10%. We aim to accomplish this goal by increasing recruitment efforts to reach new participants, and by improving physician scheduling, participant communication, and incentives to increase and maintain attendance of current participants.

## PARTNER ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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The program would not have been a success without the collaboration of the following partners:

**Columbus Public Health-** Columbus Public Health staff promoted, implemented, and evaluated Walk with a Doc: Columbus Neighborhood Walking Clubs. In addition, Columbus Public Health staff provided updates to partners, information to community members' inquiry, trained the YMCA of Central Ohio volunteers, and performed outreach.

**Columbus Recreation and Parks Department-** Columbus Recreation and Parks Department provided the use of their facilities and walking paths. Staff also assisted with program promotion and programmatic support.

**Department of Public Safety-** Community Liaison Officers attended one walk at each site. The Community Liaison Officers walked with the participants and answered questions from community residents about the neighborhood.

**Health Advisory Committees -** Columbus Public Health partners with the Health Advisory Committees to offer community residents a relevant and successful program, and the committees assist with promotional efforts.

**Institute for Active Living-** The Institute for Active Living, based out of Columbus Public Health, strives to increase the opportunity for Columbus residents to be get active and consume nutritious food. The Institute for Active Living provided promotional support of the program on its Facebook page and the "Get Active Columbus" online event calendar.

**Mount Carmel Health System-** Mount Carmel Health System was instrumental in recruiting and scheduling the volunteer physicians and Mount Carmel Mobile Medical Coach for the walks, program promotion, providing funding for printing, and programmatic support.

**YMCA of Central Ohio-** The YMCA of Central Ohio not only promoted the program to their members, but also recruited and offered volunteers. Volunteers from the YMCA of Central Ohio set up and tore down the walk each week. The volunteers were crucial in coordinating program logistics, encouraging participants to sign-in and fill out surveys, and promoting the program throughout the season. The YMCA of Central Ohio provided information about its chronic disease prevention programs too.

**Walk with a Doc-** Walk with a Doc is a national non-profit walking advocacy organization based in Columbus, Ohio. Walk with a Doc provided program branding, promoted the Walk with a Doc: Columbus Neighborhood Walking Clubs on its website and listserv, and provided programmatic information and support.

**Fleet Feet Columbus-** As the program's newest partner, Fleet Feet Columbus added a lot to this year's walks. Fleet Feet provided a \$250 donation that was used to provide new socks and shoes for four program participants who were nominated by their peers.