

A New Way to Walk the Talk

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How do you make the idea of walking more inclusive to people with various levels of mobility? What can we do to make sure that health promotion programs are accessible for all who would benefit?

That's what the Oregon Office on Disability and Health and the University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities in the Institute on Development and Disability at Oregon Health & Science University are working on. In partnership with Oregon State University (OSU) Extension Service, they are developing ways to make the Walk With Ease (WWE) program more inviting to all participants. Started by the national Arthritis Foundation, WWE is an exercise program that can reduce pain and improve overall health. This program is traditionally offered to people with arthritis through local groups that provide support, promote physical activity, and offer resources.

Exercise to improve pain management and health is important for many populations beyond people with only arthritis. People with other mobility, self-care, cognitive, hearing, visual disabilities can also have arthritis. Yet, it is fairly uncommon for condition specific self-management programs, like WWE, to have an approach that addresses elements of accessibility and inclusion for people with disabilities.

The participation rate in the project's recent cohort of WWE participants is a testament to improved, and ever improving, program implementation. We had 30 participants who range in age from their 20's to their 70's with a wide variety of disabilities. An average of 23-27 participated in weekly live virtual sessions, while only 3-6 watched the session video recording. Engagement was very active for the six week class, so much that the class was extended from 30 minutes to an hour because they wanted time for social connection in an 'after hours party.' Participants gave overwhelming positive feedback and all said they would continue physical activity after the class.

Recruiting and supporting all participants has required program changes beforehand and continued flexibility throughout. Program coordinators addressed accessibility of promotional information, registration, and program content and implementation, as well as modified the language used throughout the curriculum to focus on "movement" instead of "walking." All updates to program materials will be used by OSU Extension Service going forward.

As the partners continue to strive to make public health truly inclusive, the National Center on Health, Physical Activity and Disability (NCHPAD) offers us a new way as a society to shift our thinking. In their rebranding walking initiative, called "How I Walk," they say, *"Walking is an inclusive physical activity term that is individualized. There are various ways to walk, and now is the time to rebrand the word walking so that everybody is included in walking initiatives."*