

# Wąkšik Wago

Evaluation of Active Living by Design | Winnebago, Nebraska | 2003-2008

The Winnebago Reservation, home of the Ho-Chunk Tribe, faces many challenges. Unemployment rates are high; alcoholism, obesity, and diabetes are major health concerns. In the first issue of "The Big Voice," a newsletter published by Winnebago Youth, one teen wrote:

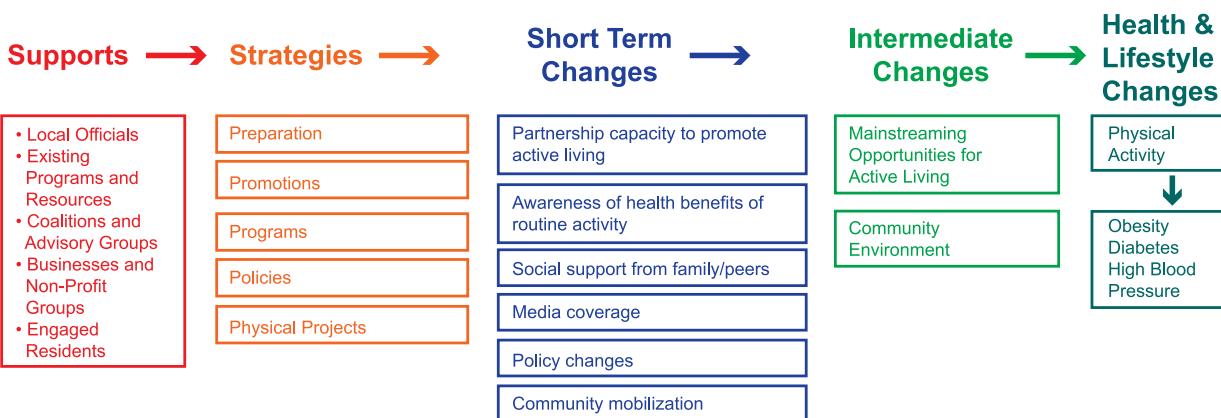
*I think that the Winnebago community needs a few restaurants that offer healthy foods... I know that we (the people) are not all about healthy foods...but if we have a few restaurants with healthy foods I think that it might help people because it will give those options of where to eat... Also we can get a fitness center that offers all day services... the biggest problem is that the wellness center is open during the day when everyone is at work... But who am I just a kid with big dreams. This is my dream for my community to make a healthy idea become a reality. I believe this will decrease the number of people that have diabetes if you people would just listen to your children.*

The Wąkšik Wago (Lively People) partnership, a group of organizations committed to creating a healthier community, was listening. The partnership engaged in a comprehensive, culturally relevant effort to not only educate community members about healthy lifestyles but also to ensure that the community's environment provided the opportunities and resources needed to engage in healthy lifestyles.

"Active living" is a way of life that integrates physical activity into daily routines in order to accumulate at least 30 minutes of activity each day. In November 2003, the Ho-Chunk Community Development Corporation received a five-year, \$200,000 grant as part of the Active Living by Design national program ([www.activelivingbydesign.org](http://www.activelivingbydesign.org)) funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF). By advocating for changes in community design, specifically land use, transportation, parks, trails, and greenways, the Active Living by Design initiative intended to make it easier for people to be active in their daily routines.

The Active Living by Design Community Action Model provided five active living strategies to influence community change: Preparation, Promotions, Programs, Policies, and Physical Projects. The 5Ps represent a comprehensive approach to increasing physical activity through short-term, intermediate and long-term community changes. This inclusive model allowed the Ho-Chunk Community Development Corporation and the Wąkšik Wago partnership to strengthen and unify the work of multiple organizations to increase availability of, access to, and education about active living and healthy lifestyles.

## Active Living by Design Community Action Model



<sup>1</sup> The Active Living by Design (ALbD) initiative was established by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) in 2001, and its National Program Office (NPO) is part of the University of North Carolina Gillings School of Global Public Health in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Twenty-five interdisciplinary community partnerships were selected across the country to demonstrate how changing community design can impact physical activity. Transtria was funded by RWJF to work with the NPO to conduct ALbD evaluation and dissemination activities. This case report draws from Transtria's evaluation efforts.

## Winnebago, Nebraska

The Winnebago Reservation is a small tribal community of approximately 2,500 residents located ninety minutes north of Omaha, Nebraska. The Village of Winnebago is the largest municipality in the area. Almost 56% of residents are American Indian; approximately 41% are Caucasian, with Hispanics, African Americans, and Asian Americans constituting the remaining 3%. The majority of residents are part of the Ho-Chunk Tribe, which is referred to by the United States government as the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska. In their native language, Ho-Chunk means “the people with loud voices.” Over one-third of the population are under 18 years of age (42.7%) compared to 25.3% in the state of Nebraska. Estimates of the percentage of residents who fall below the federal poverty level range from 28% to 49%.

The prevalence of obesity among American Indians has increased dramatically in recent decades and has been attributed primarily to the shift in dietary patterns away from traditional foods. Forty-eight percent of children have been diagnosed with hyperinsulinemia, a predictor of diabetes. Approximately one-third of the residents have been diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes. Many Winnebago residents expressed the feeling of inevitability for developing diabetes and have accepted this health condition as fate. The prevalence of diabetes in the community shaped the efforts and focus of the partnership.

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*“[My grandfathers] talked about how they gathered and prepared food... When they used to gather food, they used to have to hike and hunt and run, and food that they used to hunt was deer and elk and buffalo and whatever they could get... They had to be out in the garden and be active in gathering food, and the food was the healthy food... And, now, you do the same scenario of how we gather our food... How do we gather it? We go to a grocery store. And, how do we get there? We go by car. And probably most us in here, if we see a close parking spot to the front door, that's where we're going to park at... Now we have all these processed foods, and sugary foods, and greasy foods.” –Community member*

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The community has a number of unique opportunities for and challenges to increasing accessibility and availability of active living. A small, close-knit, family-oriented community, Winnebago offers a centralized location in which to promote physical activity and create opportunities for active living. Youth comprise a large percentage of residents, providing a chance to impact the health behaviors of future generations and reverse the trends toward greater incidence of obesity and diabetes. As a small community, Winnebago suffers from a lack of facilities and community groups or organizations that promote or support physical activity, as well as limited resources. Poverty and unemployment rates are much higher in Winnebago than the surrounding communities. Furthermore, the tribal sovereignty granted to Winnebago serves as both a facilitator and barrier to implementing and enforcing policies to support active living.

Ho-Chunk Community Development Corporation (Ho-Chunk CDC), a non-profit organization that began in 2001, served as the lead agency for the ALbD project. Originally, this organization focused solely on community development; however, over the duration of the ALbD project, staff began to understand the relationship of economic and community development with active living and health and to discuss ways that they could incorporate active living and health priorities into Ho-Chunk CDC's mission.

Through the leadership of the Ho-Chunk CDC and its strong ties in the community, the Active Living by Design (ALbD) initiative engaged residents and community businesses and organizations in efforts to improve Winnebago. Partners came together with the vision of reclaiming a balance of health, work, and family that is an intrinsic part of their American Indian heritage. All efforts are described in this report.

## Preparation

### Partnership

Since 1995, Ho-Chunk Inc. (an economic development corporation owned by the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska), Winnebago Tribal Council, Whirling Thunder Wellness Program, and Little Priest Tribal College have worked together as an ad hoc partnership to promote healthy lifestyles and active living. With the newly awarded ALbD grant funds, the Ho-Chunk Community Development Corporation (Ho-Chunk CDC) sought to formalize the partnership to more cohesively address health issues. In the past, some of the partners had worked together on an effort to enhance a local community center but were unable to reach consensus on whether to renovate or rebuild the facility, resulting in a failure of the project. Thus, primary efforts to engage partners focused on increasing and improving communications. Over time, the partners learned to work well together and enjoyed participating in partnership meetings and activities.

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*"The partners enjoy being partners. When they come to the meetings it's a lot of smiles, it's a lot of positive energy." -Staff*

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To get started, the original Wąkšik Wago Project Coordinator contacted individuals and organizations in the community that he thought might be interested in learning more about the project. Many of these organizations were identified as partners based on their areas of expertise and the goals of the partnership. Over time, this partnership evolved to include individuals, agencies, and organizations representing a diversity of fields.

The partnership met monthly during the early years of the grant, as they spent much of their time planning, and bi-monthly during the final years of the grant. During meetings, partners discussed the vision and principles that directed their efforts and developed yearly work plans, benchmarks, and timelines.

The Winnebago partnership continued to identify potential partners throughout the grant period as they expanded their efforts and as new organizations formed. For example, the partnership hosted a luncheon to recruit new members in January 2005. They also planned to invite the Boys and Girls Club, the Walking Wellness program, and other area colleges and universities to join the effort to improve active living in Winnebago.

Because Winnebago is a small community, the partnership was able to form loose working relationships with other local groups and organizations (e.g., public health nurses, student health initiatives) in addition to its recognized partners. Many health programs focused on youth shared resources and knowledge, in an effort to reduce duplication of services. This enabled the partnership to be strategic in addressing the needs of its community with the funding provided through the ALbD grant.

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*“I think the community has benefited a lot from us finding that connection to the partners and being able to use them the way they should have been used the whole time. That’s the biggest benefit that I’ve seen.” -Staff*

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Above all, staff and partners expressed the importance of having passionate partners who were able to develop strong relationships with the community. In year one, the partnership focused on creating and expanding a formal partnership in order to more cohesively address community concerns and implement large-scale projects in the community.

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*“Getting close to each other and the people you work with, I mean they gotta know why you’re there. They gotta know what your passions are and why. Not just show up to work and get paid, and head out for the day, putting in your time. Putting not just your expertise and your mind, you gotta put your heart into what your focus is.” -Partner*

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The table below lists the partners involved in the Wąksik Wago partnership.

Members of the Wąksik Wago partnership	
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Association of American Indian Physicians</li><li>• Indian Health Service</li><li>• Tribal Health Department</li><li>• Whirling Wellness Center</li></ul>
Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Little Priest Tribal College</li><li>• St. Augustine Indian Mission School</li><li>• Winnebago Public Schools</li></ul>
Urban Design, Planning & Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Nebraska Department of Roads</li></ul>
Community Leaders, Policy- & Decision-makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Winnebago Tribal Council</li></ul>
Other Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ho-Chunk Village</li><li>• Village of Winnebago</li></ul>
Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ho-Chunk, Inc.</li></ul>
Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Winnebago Indian News</li></ul>
Parks and Recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Parks and Recreation (Pool)</li><li>• Whirling Thunder Wellness Program</li></ul>
Community & Faith-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Diversion/Native Posse</li><li>• Healthy Hoops Youth Group</li><li>• Ho-Chunk Community Development Corporation*</li><li>• Ho-Chunk Hope</li><li>• Nebraska Indian Youth Council</li><li>• Red Life Youth Group</li><li>• Teen Center “Loud Voices” Youth Group</li><li>• Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska</li></ul>

\*Organization that served as lead agency during the ALbD grant period

One of the challenges faced by the partnership in the early years of the ALbD project concerned the original Project Coordinator. Some partners felt that this individual frequently made decisions about which ideas to pursue without having reached an agreement within the partnership. Partners and community members often felt as if an “outsider” was coming into their community and telling them what was best for them. At the same time, the original Project Director played an important role in kicking off the ALbD grant, initiating the trails plan, and building a relationship with the State Department of Roads.

Consistency was another challenge within the partnership. Even though many organizations were involved in the partnership throughout the funding period, individual representatives changed frequently. As a result, some organizations were unable to be as involved than those with consistent representation.

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*“The committee changed every year. The first year there was maybe about like eight or nine people and then the year after that there were eight or nine different people, completely different people.” -Staff*

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Partners, staff, and community members noted others challenges to creating and maintaining partnership:

- Negative and defensive attitudes among partner organizations slowed progress.
- While the partnership leaders recognized the importance of maintaining good relationships with former partners, it was challenging at times.
- The partnership struggled to form relationships with research institutions, which many partners felt would contribute greatly to their efforts.
- At times, the partnership struggled to gain momentum to implement its ideas.

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*“I would just make sure and keep good ties with all the partners, make sure that all the partners are on good terms with active living.” -Staff*

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*“It has been a challenge with getting the momentum going. It is like we get to the idea stage and it’s like have another meeting and talk about the ideas again. You know it takes awhile to actually get the momentum going and getting some follow-up on some possibilities that we look at.” -Partner*

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Partners, staff, and community members identified several beneficial characteristics of the Wąksik Wago partnership:

- Partnership leaders made an effort to cultivate open lines of communication in order to encourage transparency and accountability.
- The partnership benefited from existing collaborations among its partners and state entities.
- Partnership members represented a diversity of skills, expertise, interests, and resources.
- A general sense of unity among partners translated into greater success when working together to plan and implement programs.
- Partnership leaders strove to identify the individual or organization best suited to take the lead on particular project.
- Each partnership member showed a willingness to ask for help, which allowed the partnership to better address barriers and challenges.
- The partners had a passion for addressing relevant health concerns and reversing the current health trends.

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*“I think the biggest strength is that all the [partners] work together, not just with helping each other out, but also with the planning, too.” -Staff*

*“You gotta be passionate about what you do. I’m passionate about what I do because I’ve seen my relatives die painful, slow deaths from diabetes. When I lost my mother, I made up my mind that I was going to find the courage to help somebody. And you know what - the really cool thing about helping others is you help yourself.” -Partner*

*“We need to be supportive of each other and what we’re doing, because what we’re doing is trying to make that healthy community. And, I see that happening all the time. Whenever I need [partners’] support with something, then I know I have it because I support what they do, too.” -Partner*

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### ***Leadership and Champions***

The partnership benefited from the leadership and support of Ho-Chunk CDC and other key partners. For example, the Executive Director of Ho-Chunk CDC, as well as its Board of Directors, had a great deal of experience and were very supportive of the partnership and its efforts. When an idea was discussed and agreed upon, they followed through with it by seeking funding and other supports. In addition, the knowledge held by staff at Ho-Chunk CDC, Whirling Thunder Wellness Program, and other key partners about important health issues was abundant. Partners recognized this strength and encouraged each other to share their knowledge and experience in order to benefit the partnership.

The Executive Director of Ho-Chunk CDC served as the Project Director for the ALbD project. She was responsible for providing oversight for the project, as well as for fiscal and administrative duties. Two Project Coordinators and another staff member from Ho-Chunck CDC were responsible for most of the “hands-on” work, including participating in official ALbD initiative activities (conference calls, annual meetings, and other interactions with the ALbD National Program Office), organizing and leading partnership meetings, maintaining communication among partners and the community, and planning events, such as the annual Active Living Festival.

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*“I had more oversight when [the original Project Coordinator] left and I came on board simply because I had not played this type of a lead role with a project previously. We’ve been working with [the second Project Coordinator] and coaching him on some best practices and critical objectives and making things stay on time and ensuring follow through and those kinds of things.” -Staff*

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One of the strengths of the second Project Coordinator was his effectiveness in building relationships with the teens, who often felt that the community was less concerned about them than younger children. Because the partnership chose to target the teenage population, the relationships developed by the Project Coordinator were key to the partnership’s success.

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*"I would say promotion and policy are probably the two that I struggled with the most and partly because my own experience and background is probably less in those two areas than the other areas." -Staff*

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The Project Director and the Executive Director of Ho-Chunk CDC shared several lessons learned from the staff change experience. First, it was important, particularly in a community of racial or ethnic populations, that the key staff and leadership were familiar with the community and its concerns, issues, culture, and relationships. Because the second Project Coordinator was a Winnebago native, he was able to draw upon the natural ties and knowledge of his community in his work.

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*"Having a local person who really does know the parties, can relate to them, and has a relationship already built... that really is helpful. It does make a difference, especially if you are talking policy-wise and programmatic-wise. Just eases that load quite a lot that someone [is also a] community member." -Staff*

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It was important that the leadership and staff maintain an awareness of their role within the partnership and its vision. It was easy to become distracted and excited by other opportunities but important to continue working towards the goals set out by the partnership and the community.

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*"Know why you got the job, know why you're there working, and never take your mind off it because you're there for a reason, they hired you for a reason." -Staff*

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While many individuals served as integral components of the Winnebago project, partners identified a particular community member who was a champion for effective programming. A strong advocate for addressing diabetes and obesity, this community member was a catalyst in helping organizations and other individuals see how they could make a difference in the community.

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*"I think that she has played a strong role in that because she is a strong advocate for diabetics. She's the one who went up and said this is what we need, how are we gonna do this? You are in that area you should be doing this, you are in this area you guys can be working. She is a strong advocate and getting us organized, as a community in the areas that we are in, to really focus on helping the diabetics. I would have to say that she is one of the catalysts for getting effective programming on its feet and in a good direction because she is real vocal about that and she is real creative, she has come with a lot of good ideas." -Partner*

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### **Funding and Resources**

One of the main challenges identified by the partners and staff was finding and obtaining funding for their project, largely in part to geographical and cultural barriers. However, many partners also felt that having the ALbD funding was essential to their ability to leverage other funds. The fundraising experience and dedication of the Ho-Chunk CDC Executive Director and Board of Directors were crucial to the partnership's success in obtaining additional funding. In the first year of the ALbD grant, the partnership created a database of potential funding sources to track its funding requests and opportunities.

Ho-Chunk CDC and the Wąkšik Wago partnership reached out to a number of local, tribal, state, and national funding sources to expand the amount of resources available to support and nourish its active living efforts. Financial and in-kind support came from the following sources:

- Community Forestry Assistance Program of the Nebraska Arboretum
- General Mills Champion Grant
- Ho-Chunk, Inc.
- Nebraska Natural Resource District
- Nebraska Department of Roads Transportation Enhancement funds
- Nebraska Forest Service
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
- Shakopee Tribe of Minnesota
- Tax revenue from fuel and tobacco sales
- US Department of Health and Human Services Health Promotion and Disease Prevention
- US Department of Housing and Urban Development
- Winnebago Community Development Fund
- Winnebago Tribal Council
- Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska

### ***Community Supports and Challenges***

Understanding the history and context of this community was vital to the appreciation of the impact that the partnership and capacity-building, policy, physical project, promotional, and programmatic efforts have had on the residents and their opportunities for active living.

One of the most important and unique contextual factors was related to the strong family ties among American Indians. Extended families typically stay together and often live in one household. The community hosts a homecoming each year that is well-attended by tribal members, even those who have moved away. As a result, the community is close-knit.

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*“Homecoming is really what it’s all about. There are 4,000 members. We have people that have moved away for years, but they always come home once a year. To come home to see their family, to come to the pow-wow, to celebrate, dance. All that stuff. Bring them back to their roots.” -Staff*

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One challenge to the partnership’s efforts was a lack of formal community groups and support organizations. Rather than drawing upon the resources and membership base of such groups, the partnership had to build community support for its efforts in other ways.

In addition, many partners expressed the need for more American Indian leaders and role models in their community. For example, there was only one American Indian teacher in the school system. Community members, particularly youth, may not have the same level of respect and trust in an “outsider” who comes into their community and may view them as trying to “fix” the problems without truly understanding their community and culture.

Many of the partners lived in the community and had been members of the community for many years. This enabled them to have a close relationship with those they were serving and encouraged trust and collaboration among all those involved. Because partners understood the community and were able to communicate cross-culturally, their capacity to create community change and influence active living was strengthened.

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*“Well, as with most reservations in any country, the advocate needs to be an Indian person and someone who has the ability to communicate cross culturally and someone who understands what the needs are, the circumstances, you know, what the culture is on the reservation or in these communities, the native communities, not necessarily the reservations, but native communities. And I have noticed that that is successful, even if that is a non-Indian person who is familiar with the community, you know, grew up there or spent time there, someone who understands and can communicate at the level the community needs. I think that is really beneficial to be successful. That has been my experience.” -Partner*

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The complexity of jurisdictional power (i.e., tribal, county, state, and federal) was also an important and unique contextual factor. On reservation lands, a tribe has sovereign rights and does not have to abide by state or federal regulations. The Winnebago Reservation is a multi-jurisdictional area—tribal, state, and federal government—with cross-deputizing agreements in which each governmental body is supposed to work cooperatively with the others. However, there are often disagreements about who should take responsibility for certain projects or actions.

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*“What we encounter a lot of is that the county does not fulfill their obligation so it ends up being the tribe that actually ends up doing it. You know the three jurisdictions just want to kind of point and say: ‘You know that should be your responsibility.’ ‘No, that should be yours.’ and then, ultimately, that something does not get done that needs to get done. So, it’s a struggle.” -Staff*

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The reservation's geographically small and centralized community has great potential to be walkable and bikeable. However, there were a few key issues preventing an active living-friendly environment. The most significant of these was a high volume highway that runs north and south through the community. The highway had incomplete sidewalks alongside and no crosswalks or stoplights. As a result, the pedestrian and bicyclist accessibility was extremely limited, and residents typically drove even short distances. Children were often seen walking or bicycling on the highway shoulder.

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*“One thing that this reservation has is that it is small and centralized. This is the community right here, whereas a lot of reservations are larger and people have to travel. I mean like travel 60 miles to get to the fitness center. So this community [has] got it good because everything is right here on their finger tips.” -Partner*

*“I feel that [highway improvements are] very important, especially for the kids that live out there. At night, I see kids riding bikes on the highway and walking and sometimes they have dark clothes on, you can’t even see them.”*  
-Community member

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Seasonal weather also limited the amount of outdoor physical activity. Extreme heat and cold during the summer and winter months, respectively, prevented many residents from being outside. There were few indoor opportunities for activity. The community center, youth center building, and outdoor swimming pool were closed at various times during the grant due to construction or staffing/programming issues. However, the community had a football field with surrounding track that was used frequently during nice weather.

Overall, the Wąksik Wago partnership received much community support for their efforts to improve the community and to increase opportunities for active living. Beautifying the community was a priority to most residents, and they viewed the active living efforts as addressing this concern.

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*“I think the collaborative efforts were working really well. And I know that the community wants to see that...more of those walking paths and the landscaping projects at the college. Beautifying the community is [a] priority.” -Partner*

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The partnership sought community buy-in throughout each step of the project, and community members participated in the collaborative efforts of the partnership. For example, community forums to discuss projects were well-attended and generated thoughtful and useful feedback. Schools and parents were also supportive of physical improvements such as trails and stop signs.

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*“We involved a lot of community members. It was a week-long process where the design team came in and they had basically their doors open the entire week for community members to come in. We had special invites to certain groups. For example, we had invited students from Little Priest Tribal College at a specific time where they could come down and learn more and give their input. A specific time when the seniors were invited down. And then we also had just sort of an open public process as well. And so we actually had a lot more participation than we had expected... It's a really good process, and I think we got a lot of buy-in from people at that time. Because I do think to move forward, you really have to have a good community buy-in at times.” -Staff*

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Active living events had high rates of participation, and partners noticed residents wearing promotional t-shirts and other items. Some community members even became engaged in the implementation of programs by participating in trainings and workshops in order to become peer educators on important health issues, such as diabetes. Seeing this type of support, as well as people utilizing newly developed facilities (e.g., residents using trails daily to walk to work, church, and school), had a re-energizing effect on the partners and staff and reminded them that this work was worthwhile and meaningful to the individuals living in their community.

Although there was a high level of community support, there were some individuals who did not yet understand the benefits of active living. The partnership continued to work with residents to build support for this project. In addition, the Tribal Council did not actively participate in the partnership, but was supportive of the partnership’s efforts. Tribal Councilmembers often attended and participated in the annual Active Living Festival and other events held by the partnership.

### ***Community Assessment***

The Wąkšik Wago partnership employed a number of assessment methods to identify community supports and barriers to physical activity, including facility audits, focus groups, surveys, and health screenings.

In the first year of the grant, the partnership conducted an audit of the wellness facilities and sidewalks in the community to assess the accessibility of active living opportunities. They also conducted focus groups and surveys with community members and youth to determine how to engage all ages in their efforts to increase physical activity as well as the types of activity in which residents, particularly children, were already participating.

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*“We've done a survey, kind of questionnaire recently and a lot of the kids, we ask the kids questions like what do you do for your daily activity or daily exercise, and a lot of them give good answers.” -Staff*

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The partnership also conducted an assessment of available community foods in order to identify healthy food options. Vending machines throughout the community, including those located in convenience stores and gas stations, as well as the types of beverages and snacks these machines carried, were recorded. A notable lack of healthy foods in vending machines and at points of purchase near store counters was recognized. As a result, the partnership began working with store managers to provide healthy food options at points of purchase and to report the volume of fruits and vegetables sold.

## Policies and Physical Projects

The partnership identified physical projects as its most successful strategy. Although most partners and staff expressed limited experience in policy change, they had many successes, in part, due to a concentrated effort in the first year of the grant to educate policymakers and community agencies about active living and its benefits to the community. Policy influences and physical projects, related partner, staff, and community implementation activities, and associated outcomes are described as follows:

### ► **Subdivision Regulations**

- Prior to receiving the ALbD grant, Winnebago passed subdivision regulations that required the incorporation of pedestrian-friendly attributes in all future developments.
- These regulations included the provision for streetlights, sidewalks, curb-cuts, and other pedestrian safety features.
- During the grant period, partners and staff focused on encouraging policymakers and developers to adhere to and incorporate these guidelines into new projects.
- In the fourth year of the grant, the Winnebago Joint Planning Commission completed a land use plan and zoning ordinances to be used in future development plans.

### ► **Ho-Chunk Village**

- Prior to the ALbD grant, RWJF provided a planning grant to support charrettes and planning activities and hire a planner (HDR) from Omaha. Key partners Ho-Chunk CDC and Ho-Chunk, Inc. initiated the development of Ho-Chunk Village, a new native-themed New Urbanist style subdivision consisting of over 100 housing units and commercial and industrial space located in the north end of Winnebago.
- The development was intended to emphasize active living principles and provide a place where walking and other activities could be easily integrated into the daily routines of its residents.
- The partnership had a profound influence on the development of the village and its connections to the broader community through active living concepts such as walkability, mixed use, and connectivity.
- Features such as wide sidewalks, trails, and design that encouraged stair use were incorporated in the development plans.
- The partnership encouraged the community to provide input through a number of audience-specific charrettes (e.g., older adults, college students); each meeting had 30 to 50 participants.
- Tribal Council members were also engaged and attended many charrettes and development meetings.



*"I would say that the final look [of Ho-Chunk Village] was very much influenced by active living because initially I don't think we would have considered a 12- to 14-foot sidewalk in the downtown sector. Initially, we wouldn't have considered mixed use. Most tribes don't; it's just either all residential or all commercial. We wouldn't have considered the walkability between residential and commercial where you work. [Active living] had a huge amount on influence on, ultimately, what was done there to develop the community." -Staff*

### ► School-based Policies and Physical Projects



- The partnership worked closely with schools throughout the grant period and was able to influence two specific policy changes.
- Schools typically provided recess time during the lunch period, which often meant children had little time left for activity after eating.
- In 2006, after meeting with ALbD partners, school leaders agreed to move recess prior to lunch to allow children to utilize a full recess period; the change was presented to the School Board.
- Partners and staff also advocated for policy change related to safety for children arriving to and departing from the school, which is located on a busy highway with no crosswalks, stoplights, or crossing guards.
- Partners and community members requested a crosswalk in front of the school for a number of years, but issues of liability proved to be a challenge.
- School officials felt that once children left the school property, they were no longer the responsibility of the school, but the Tribe and county were hesitant to claim jurisdiction of the highway crossing because of insurance costs and other liability concerns.
- Teachers and community members, who might serve as crossing guards, were also concerned about their responsibility if a child were to be harmed.
- Eventually, the School Board, Tribal Council, and Village of Winnebago pledged \$3,000 to support a crossing guard in front of the school for the 2005-06 school year.
- After the end of the ALbD grant, the Parent Association started a volunteer crossing guard program.

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*"We would have liked to have someone [at the crosswalk] that would walk with the kids and be there... Both jurisdictions, mainly tribal, didn't do it because of some insurance issue and they kind of wanted us to, but then I thought that really does lie within their realm and if they can't step up to the plate where they really should, then I don't think we should expect that that is going to make that happen when, really, it is something that is their responsibility." -Staff*

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### ► **Blackhawk Community Center**

- Prior to the ALbD grant period, the Blackhawk Community Center, which housed a gymnasium, swimming pool, youth shelter, meeting rooms, tribal officers, a dental clinic, post office, and other community services, experienced maintenance issues.
- Efforts to renovate the community center, specifically the swimming pool, had been ongoing for several years, but key stakeholders (i.e., Whirling Thunder Wellness Program, Little Priest Tribal College, and the Tribal Council) were unable to reach consensus on whether to renovate or completely rebuild the swimming pool.
- The efforts were invigorated by the ALbD grant and the Wāksik Wago partnership; a \$1.8 million architectural and engineering plan for renovating and enclosing the pool was completed in 2006.
- The partnership planned to offer new, year-round activities and programs at the community center after renovation was completed.
- The enclosed pool held a grand opening in the summer of 2009; partners raised the necessary funding to enclose the pool but were unable to find funding for all the amenities they desired due to increased construction materials costs following Katrina.
- Partners and staff described important lessons learned that might benefit other communities that take on a similar project:
  - ensure adequate planning time
  - conduct a formal cost-benefit analysis
  - speak with an architectural and engineering firm early in the development process
  - obtain adequate funding
  - evaluate the needs of potential patrons
  - maintain appropriate and timely communication among key stakeholders



*"I do know that the conversation that created the impetus to put forward to make the pool - something that can be used on year-round basis, offer therapy, and just encourage more activity around that - happened during the project, and probably pretty directly as a result of the project as well." -Staff*

### ► **Master Trails Plan**

- In the first year of the grant, the partnership completed a three-phase Master Trails Plan for the project area, in collaboration with a planning firm.
- In order to increase the usability of the trails network, the plan identified and integrated principle destinations in the community, including schools, commercial areas, public parks, Little Priest Tribal College, the tribal administration building, cultural center, and library.
- In addition, the partnership hired a consultant who understood the nuances of working with transportation agencies and was responsible for working with the Nebraska Department of Roads.
- Partners planned to complete 50% of the trail development in 2005-2007 and place benches and bike racks along the trails to encourage multi-modal use.
- Two priority trails were identified by the Master Trails Plan: the Ho-Chunk Trail (Phase I) that connected the town center to Ho-Chunk Village located one-half mile to the north and the Thunderway Trail (Phase II) that linked the town center to the Thunderway housing development, one mile south.
- The Village Board passed a resolution to accept responsibility for maintaining trails throughout the community.
- Because beautification of the community was a priority for many Winnebago residents, partners also hoped to involve community members in planting flowerbeds and trees near these trails.
- The partnership planned to support a variety of programs that utilized the Ho-Chunk and Thunderway Trails.

- Ho-Chunk Trail
  - The Tribal Council supported the development of the Ho-Chunk Trail because of pedestrian safety concerns and, in 2004, passed a resolution to build the trail; engineering plans for development of the Ho-Chunk Trail were completed in 2006, and construction of the trail was finished in early 2007.
  - The Bureau of Indian Affairs engineers and the Tribal Council also agreed to incorporate the Ho-Chunk trail into an existing road improvement project in order to use some of the funding appropriated for that project.
  - Community members responded favorably to the Ho-Chunk trail and expressed that they had greater access to the community; in particular, youth enjoyed using the Ho-Chunk Trail to socialize and “be seen.”



- Thunderway Trail
  - Phase II of the Master Trail Plan, a trail extending one mile south to the Thunderway housing development, was approved in the fall of 2005 by the Tribal Council.
  - The Thunderway Trail project stalled when partners were forced to wait initially on the Nebraska Department of Roads and the Federal Highway Transportation Administration to approve all plans.
  - In 2009, partners reported that the project was on the fast track to receive recovery funds and begin construction by March 2010.
  - There was interest in developing a Walking School Bus program using the Thunderway Trail after it was completed.
  - Although additional trails outlined in the Master Trails Plan were planned, partners felt that Phase III of implementing the trails plan should be postponed.

*“Phase Two, what it will do, is there is a housing development that is about a mile south of town. And it will pick up.... people are going to have to cross a US highway. By where the grocery store is, and the Tribal Court. They’ll have to cross the highway, and that area to access the trail. But it will give them then a safe walking path to walk from the village in that respect down to this housing development.” -Staff*

*“One of my main ideas is the beauty of putting the beauty in all planted flowers, shrubs, trees, all those kinds of things around the areas where people walk will contribute and possibly help encourage people to get out and walk.” -Community member*

### ► **Traffic Calming Projects**

- Traffic calming projects were selected to increase safe access to the school located along the highway.
- Initially, partners planned to construct an underpass across the highway that would link Ho-Chunk Village and other residential areas to the school, but the plan was abandoned early in the project in order to focus on less resource- and time-intensive traffic calming measures.
- A traffic-calming plan was developed in the first year of the grant, in collaboration with Nebraska Department of Roads traffic engineers and other partners.
- Several improvements were made as a result of this collaboration, including a center turn lane on the highway, a new school zone with lowered speed limits, a roundabout, and stop signs.

### ► **Worksite-based policies**

- As key partners and community role models, Ho-Chunk, Inc. and other tribe-operated agencies and facilities instituted policies that allowed employees to take an extra half-hour for lunch if they used the time to exercise.

### **Challenges and Successes**

Staff, partners, and communities members noted a number of facilitators to developing and implementing policies and physical projects:

- Because the tribe had sovereignty, it was able to develop and implement its own policies that were specific to the needs and desires of the community with fewer barriers to implementation and enforcement; the partnership worked with other government bodies to provide continuity when possible and appropriate.
- Local agencies and organizations frequently adopted and institutionalized new innovations and formal policies and procedures.
- The partnership grew to have a good working relationship with Nebraska Department of Roads.
- Obtaining approval for the development of trails was a relatively easy process because all of the trails were contained within the easement from the Department of Roads.
- Partners realized that, when designing and constructing physical projects of any sort, there would be differing opinions and desires; they acknowledged that they would be unable to accommodate every desire but made a concerted effort to incorporate at least one aspect into the final plans that would please everyone.

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*“The group we had on the design team was excellent. They came in and said, We can’t accommodate everyone’s specific wish. But we want to find a balance so that everyone feels that they got SOMETHING out of what they wanted. It was really good.” -Staff*

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Staff, partners, and communities members noted a number of challenges to developing and implementing policies and physical projects:

- While the Winnebago Joint Planning Commission intended to collaborate with the ALbD partnership to form a group responsible for land use and zoning issues, the commission dissolved shortly after developing the ordinances.
- There were often disagreements about jurisdiction and responsibility; partners often had to approach multiple governing bodies for approval in order to remain on good terms.
- One of the major challenges in implementing the Master Trails Plan and building trails was maintaining public involvement throughout the slow process.

## **Programs and Promotions**

The partnership utilized a number of promotional and programmatic strategies and made an effort to ensure such efforts were culturally appropriate and relevant. Programmatic and promotional efforts, related partner, staff, and community implementation activities, and associated outcomes are described as follows:

### **► Annual Active Living Festival**

- The first Annual Active Living Festival was held in the fall of 2004 and was coordinated by the Project Coordinator and the Whirling Thunder Wellness Program.
- Whirling Thunder Wellness Program provided the facilities and staffing for this event and took the lead on promoting it throughout the community.
- As one of the main partnership activities, this festival brought partners and community members together for fun activities and incentives related to active living as well as the general promotion of health.
- A variety of activities were offered during the Active Living Festivals, including blood pressure testing, informational flyers, individual consultations with health professionals, a healthy cook-off using buffalo meat, a family kickball tournament, volleyball, soccer, a basketball tournament, a dance contest, a healthy baby contest requiring proof of immunization, a track and field day, a progressive walking poker game, and inflatable play toys.
- Community members looked forward to the Active Living Festival each year; the Project Coordinator and a planning committee met to determine which activities to offer for different age groups and welcomed suggestions from community members.

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*"You get all these people to get into the poker walk, they start and then they've got 5 stops. Each stop they get, they get a card. And then at the end, depending on when you get there and what place you get there, you get a card. So at the end, you take your five cards and make the best poker hand out of it. And that's your incentive right there. And if you get a straight flush or a royal flush somehow, then you are more likely to get that first place prize." -Partner*

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## ► Youth Newsletter

- The Winnebago partnership conducted a social marketing campaign with youth in the community during the third year of the grant.
- Partners found that most teenagers felt that once they reached a certain age, the community no longer cared about them (community programs tended to focus on children and older adults).
- As a result, partners decided to develop a youth newsletter in which teens could share their thoughts and opinions on current health issues with the community; partners also hoped that this creative opportunity would encourage teenagers to begin thinking about their own health.
- Four community groups consisting of 12-19 year olds were asked to participate in creating a monthly health newsletter entitled The Big Voice: Red Life Youth Group, Diversion/Native Posse Program, Healthy Hoops Youth Group, and the Teen Center “Loud Voices” Youth Group.
- The Teen Center provided computers that teens could use to write stories for the newsletter until the partnership received the Active Living by Design Special Opportunities Grant, which funded the purchase of a new computer designated for this purpose.
- The first issue of The Big Voice was published in February 2007; according to project staff, teenagers in Winnebago enjoyed having the opportunity to voice their opinions to the community and have taken ownership of the newsletter, contributing to the design and content of each issue.
- Partners were able to use the newsletter content to assess specific areas of interest for teens in order to inform their outreach to this particular population; likewise, the newsletter was well-received by the community, and many individuals showed interest in better understanding the youth perspective.
- The Project Coordinator and editor of the local newspaper, Winnebago Indian News, played key roles in the development and implementation of this effort by engaging youth, assisting with layout and design, and distributing the newsletter.
- The newsletter did not continue after the initial ALbD funding cycle.

*“When I lead my youth group it was the lack of enthusiasm of taking care of yourself. They just felt like nobody cared about them after they reached a certain age.” -Partner*

*“The newsletter is all health, whether it’s nutrition or physically active or any kind of opinions they have like on school lunches, maybe P.E. class at the school you know. We’re trying to make these kids speak out their opinions or their suggestions that they might have for the community,” -Staff*

## “THE BIG VOICE”

Published by our Winnebago Youth on a Healthy Lifestyle

### Teen Center Introduction

### Red Life Youth Group...

### New Times Have Changed

By Scott E. Borodige

The Red Life Youth Group was founded on October 8, 1994 at the request of a regional director of the American Indian Teen Center. As the Chief Clerk/Adjutant of the Tribe/Court, Scott Borodige was asked by a journalist if she would pray with him before they went into his hearing room. This is why the Red Life Youth Group was born.

Over 70 young natives and a couple of non-natives have had the experience of the Red Life Challenge since October 8, 1994. Some have been taught what they learned from the Christian youth group and have applied it to their own lives. The Red Life Youth Group, Young Native Christians, will have sponsored by St. Augustine's Indian School the 2nd Annual Native American Health Fair on Saturday, June 14, 2003.

I am very proud of the Red Life Youth Group because they have been successful in their goals.

### ► Local Media

- The local newspaper, Winnebago Indian News, played a key role in promotions for the entire ALbD project in Winnebago by providing media coverage for events and donating advertising and column space.

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*“The very local media which is the Winnebago Indian News, they print our ads. They do come to all our events and they promote the Active Living. So I would say they are a positive force.” -Staff*

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### ► Walking Wellness

- The Walking Wellness, a family-oriented support program, was held in the spring and fall each year.
- Participants were asked to commit to walking and/or hiking for six weeks, beginning at half a mile and building up to seven miles at the completion of the program.
- At the beginning and end of the program, certain indicators were measured (e.g., BMI, number of push-ups and sit-ups they could do) to determine the health impact of the program on the children.
- At the end of the program, students were given an incentive, depending on their level of participation; students and parents who participated at least 80% of the time received a gift certificate up to \$75 for a pair of athletic shoes.
- Over 100 students enrolled in the program.
- Partners identified the Walking Wellness program as an opportunity to promote the use of the new community trails with children.

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*“That walking program is probably one of the most successful programs because they get the highest percent of kids participating, and I think they do get a pretty good incentive at the end, too. I think they get a gift certificate for shoes so they go get themselves some walking shoes or basketball shoes, or whatever kind of shoes that they want.” -Staff*

*“If [parents] couldn’t do it they would send an older brother, or sister, or cousin, or whoever they could send that was older who could spend that time walking with them down. So that seemed to motivate parent involvement: If they didn’t participate their kids didn’t get the incentive.” -Partner*

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### ► School-based programs

- Partners collaborated with Whirling Thunder Wellness Program to host an after-school program that targeted children in first through eighth grades.
- The Project Coordinator effectively recruited students for this program by speaking to classrooms and talking with individual students.
- Flyers and other passive recruitment techniques were found to be ineffective with this group of students.

### ► ***Other Promotional and Programmatic Efforts***

- Representatives from Little Priest Tribal College and other partners expressed interest in offering an active living course. In 2004, a course syllabus was presented to the dean of the college and the curriculum committee.
- The partnership also participated in other events that proved to be very popular and successful in the community, such as sharing information at an annual health fair and presenting information to youth at camps in conjunction with the health education and women's center.
- The Indian Health Service also implemented a new employee program for any tribal employee to encourage walking using the new trails and community paths.
- In addition to the Walking Wellness program for students and families, a new walking club for adults was implemented by Whirling Thunder Wellness Program.

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*“At the Indian Health Service they have an employee wellness program and that is for any employee that is on that reservation. They can join the employee wellness and they have different activities and that is one of the things they try to encourage is walking programs. So, that is where different paths around the community would come in. Utilizing those for all the different walking programs we have going on, not just with our program, but also at Indian Health Service.” -Partner*

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### ***Challenges and Successes***

Staff, partners, and community members identified a number of facilitators to implementing programs and promotions:

- The Winnebago partnership found that their efforts to implement effective programming were strengthened by their commitment to work together.
- Sharing resources, staff, and ideas as well as reducing the duplication of programs targeting a particular age group or population increased partners' ability to develop relevant programs for the community.
- Programs that targeted children between the ages of 8 and 13 were most successful; at this age, children were eager to participate in new programs and activities.

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*“Working together is the best way for us to get our programming in place and have it be effective programming. Anytime we can share resources you know makes our program more successful.” -Partner*

*“I think it is because they are eager, curious, they haven't really set anything as far as how cool they are going to be. You know whatever those things are that the older teens get to that point where you know they just want to do their own thing. So I find that it is easier to work with the younger group.” -Partner*

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Staff, partners, and community members identified a number of challenges to implementing programs and promotions:

- Although the local media was very supportive of the Winnebago partnership and its efforts, partners felt that their promotions could have been more impactful if they had explored additional avenues and media outlets.
- One of the largest challenges related to programming in Winnebago was the lack of facilities and safe pedestrian access; the partnership continues to address this concern by making physical improvements in the community.
- Parents were the most difficult group in which to gain participation in programs and other activities, perhaps because of constraints of work and childcare.
- Teenagers were also a challenging age group to engage in the programmatic efforts of the partnership, due to a lack of interest in a program unless it involved food, money, or a trip, a lack of concern over their health, a lack of commitment, and a desire to be independent.
- Other challenges to implementing programs described by partners and staff included weather conditions, a lack of interest in biking, and the limited influence of incentives on participation.
- Community members sometimes did not realize the extent of the partnership's efforts; some partners felt that it was important that the community understood what active living was and how the various organizations that served as partners were addressing related issues.
- Hosting smaller events throughout the year, rather than one large event, may have also helped to identify active living as an important part of the community.

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*“A lot of kids say, oh, I’ll be there, I’ll be there, but then when it comes time to show up, maybe half those kids show up. So, a challenge would be to get that other half that said that they’ll be there to be there. A challenge would be how to get those kids there, how to get those kids that say they’re going to be there, that don’t show up.”* -Staff

*“I think there may need to be a little more understanding of what [the partnership] is. Because the community is so small and [partner] has been here for awhile. Whenever something happens, community members just assume that [the partner] is doing it... So I think there may be a need to get the word out there what is active living, what do they do, and who are they. I don’t think they really care where it is coming from as long as it is happening. That is the main thing.”* -Partner

*“I think I would kind of spread some of the funding around, instead of having the one annual event... I think if we did it once a month and kind of split the money up a little bit... I think that the name Active Living would be more out there instead of just once or twice or three times a year.”* -Staff

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## Sustainability

Partners felt strongly that, even after the ALbD grant ended, their efforts to improve active living in the Winnebago Reservation would continue. During the grant, the partnership members began to work together for the benefit of their community, rather than serve only personal or organizational interests. Specific projects that were initiated by the partnership became part of partners' work and priorities in their own organizations or agencies. For example, a number of organizations continue to advocate for the development of a Walking School Bus. The health department has also established a circuit training program that targets women and strives to make their events more fun, and family-oriented.

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*“Instead of being big obstacles for each other, we’re opening up every place. Everybody’s opening up their minds, opening up their schedules to help each other out.”* -Staff

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The lead agency, Ho-Chunk CDC, also began to discuss ways that it could incorporate active living and health priorities into its mission, which has traditionally been focused on community development. Other organizations followed suit. The health department and other community agencies have embraced walking and are working with employees to incorporate this activity as a part of a daily work routine.

In addition, partners felt that the mindset of community members and government officials changed over the ALbD grant period. The community became more aware of how physical activity and health are related as well as the benefits of improving the built environment to support physical activity.

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*"I really feel that the [project] is sustainable. We already have our new infrastructure in place in the village which is, you know, incorporates the Active Living by Design concept and we've changed people's perceptions and people are very much, much, much, more aware of the things you can do to make your community more walkable and to keep people more active. And so really the mindset of governmental leaders, non-profit leaders, the people that really do advocate for those trails and keep the public aware. Their mindset changed and we have that physical infrastructure that kind of reflects that mindset." -Staff*

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