



Hosting Activity Fairs: Our Experiences

During the 2015-2016 academic school year, the Temple University Collaborative on Community Inclusion hosted two wellness fairs focused on encouraging community based recreation. Both offered guests opportunities to learn about the importance of being involved in their communities and to connect to free and low cost resources for fun and wellness. Events were organized by a small group of dedicated staff, interns and volunteers. While it was important that we offered fun activities, the driving force behind these events was to encourage participants to use these events as a springboard to living more active lives.

These events welcomed all and were advertised to students and neighbors, but we primarily focused on encouraging attendance by people with severe mental illnesses. This population is typically more isolated, sedentary and less likely than the general population to meet recommended physical activity levels. Individuals with mental health conditions may have fewer friendships, engage in less meaningful roles in their communities, and experience increased rates of metabolic syndrome and a life expectancy that is up to 30 years less than the general population. These issues are mostly avoidable and community based recreation is a sustainable tool that people can use to improve their health and quality of life.

While we made some fine-tuning between events, the overall structure of the events remained similar. We offered lectures, activity sessions, and information tables. Guests learned about things they can do independently in the community. Recreation Therapy students also met with people one on one to facilitate leisure interest surveys, which identified activities of interest and steps toward participation. This is so important because it's often true that people become complacent in their recreation. They do what others suggest or join trips organized by agencies. Many rarely, if ever, consider what other options are available. These events were orchestrated to be opportunities for people to take time to think about their personal interests.

Exit surveys collected at the event were overwhelmingly positive and indicate the people found the events meaningful and entertaining. Many responders included comments mentioning that they look forward to attending future events. Some also stated, "It was an awesome experience," "great event," "...wide range of information that I'm taking with me." There were also lots of laughs and high fives!

We hope that events like these will generate collaborations between mental health agencies, local businesses, consumers, and us. We hope to start conversations about how to enhance community access for individuals who experience mental health conditions and other vulnerable populations. Dancing together, doing yoga in a group, or showing people how to ride a bike can help increase an individual's confidence and inspire interest to seek out new opportunities.

We designed a [manual](http://tucollaborative.org/sdm_downloads/physical-activity-fair-manual/) (http://tucollaborative.org/sdm_downloads/physical-activity-fair-manual/) based on our experiences organizing community access fairs in an effort to help you organize a similar event.

Below is some information about each event.

Physical Activity Fair

- October 8, 2015
- Mission: Educate, entertain and inspire people to get movin’
- 125 guests
- [Press](http://temple-news.com/lifestyle/physical-activity-and-accessibility/) (http://temple-news.com/lifestyle/physical-activity-and-accessibility/)
- [Pictures from the event](https://www.facebook.com/170688803001469/photos/?tab=album&album_id=1060999740637033) (https://www.facebook.com/170688803001469/photos/?tab=album&album_id=1060999740637033)

What’s Happening? Getting to know your city

- April 28, 2016
- Mission: Entertain and inspire people to get active in their communities
- 150 guests
- [Press](http://philadelphia.cbslocal.com/2016/04/28/temple-holds-mental-health-fair/) (http://philadelphia.cbslocal.com/2016/04/28/temple-holds-mental-health-fair/)
- [Pictures from the event](http://philadelphia.cbslocal.com/2016/04/28/temple-holds-mental-health-fair/) (http://philadelphia.cbslocal.com/2016/04/28/temple-holds-mental-health-fair/)

While we hosted the event as the Collaborative, this type of event could be hosted by many different organizations, including parks and recreation, libraries, universities, religious organizations, and community mental health centers, among others. Anyone with the desire to promote community engagement and connect consumers to community-based activities has the capacity to host an activity fair! If these events have inspired you to offer a similar event or create other initiatives to individuals with serious mental illnesses, please do not hesitate to reach out to us. We are happy to brainstorm ideas, provide resources, offer trainings, and support you in your endeavors to promote independence and community engagement. The [fair manual](http://tucollaborative.org/sdm_downloads/physical-activity-fair-manual/) (http://tucollaborative.org/sdm_downloads/physical-activity-fair-manual/) is a great place to get started!

We are grateful to the community organizations who participated in these fairs, including:

Consumer organizations: COMHAR, Fairmount Health Clinic, Friends Hospital, Girard Medical Center, Hall Mercer, Horizon House, Mental Health Association of Southeastern PA, New Kensington Community Development Corporation, Pathways to Housing, Philadelphia FIGHT, Pro-ACT Recovery Walk, Project Home, Temple Episcopal

Presenters: Back On My Feet, Bicycle Coalition, City of Philadelphia Parks & Recreation, Career Wardrobe, COMHAR, Deck Conspiracy, Get Healthy Philly, Indego, Katie Pizziketti Yoga, Philly Gets Fit, Project Home, Roots Philly Yoga, Stephen Klein Wellness Center, TU Collaborative on Community Inclusion of Individuals with Psychiatric Disabilities, Temple University Recreation Therapy students, Wardrobe Boutique, YMCA Columbia North Branch

Recreation Therapy Interns: Lydia Cotter, Carson Hearn, & Maggie Maurice

Thank you!

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