

Small Business Support for Youth Physical Activity Opportunities

Richard R. Suminski, Tonya Tota, David Dinius

Kansas City University of Medicine and Biosciences

Background: Increasing the number of youth physical activity opportunities (YPAO) (e.g., programs) may be a promising approach for encouraging physically active lifestyles among youth. To do this effectively, we need information on YPAO support systems (e.g., types [financial, in-kind]). **Objective:** To construct a comprehensive description of YPAO support systems with a focus on the involvement of small businesses. **Methods:** The first aim was to obtain detailed information about YPAO available to the public including their characteristics (e.g., amenities), operating costs, and the sources of support for the operating costs. The second aim was to describe characteristics related to supporting YPAO. Data from four minority (>70% minority) and four non-minority (<10% minority), inner-city Kansas City neighborhoods was obtained over an eight-month period using quantitative (e.g., surveys, community tours) and qualitative (e.g., key informants) data collection methods. **Results:** Of the 55 small businesses surveyed, those whose owner was middle-aged (40-50 y), white, with a sports background, and children between 5 and 16 years old were more likely to support YPAO. Only 33% of the business owners surveyed supported YPAO and less than 1% did this to advertise their business. Although YPAO support levels were low, all owners (supporters and non-supporters of YPAO) believed small businesses should support YPAO and how such support can make a difference in the neighborhood. Three main themes emerged regarding the culture of support. First, business owners were more apt to offer support for YPAO if family and friends were involved. Second, business owners tended to be aware of and offer support for broad initiatives focused on neighborhood improvements but experienced barriers to specifically supporting YPAO. For example, information about YPAO needing support was not readily available and few organizations soliciting support for neighborhood initiatives allowed for specific initiatives (e.g., YPAO) to be selected. Third, prominent stakeholders within a neighborhood heavily influenced the culture of giving which suggests they could be used to champion support for YPAO from small businesses. Several barriers to supporting YPAO by small businesses were identified. Small business owners did not track how their support was used and therefore did not receive feedback on the impact of their support. Credit was seldom given to small businesses for their support negating possible returns on their investments (e.g., positive exposure leading to increased business). Owners had little knowledge of who needed help and why they needed help within the neighborhood where their business was located, thus they did not know who or what cause to support. Some owners were not willing to give support because they

did not trust the population of the neighborhood where their business was located and did not believe the support would be used for legitimate purposes. This was particularly true for non-minority business owners with a business in a minority neighborhood.

Conclusions: Characteristics of small business owners, cultural trends regarding support, and the existence of modifiable barriers to support were identified that may help in the formulation of partnerships to promote youth physical activity.