

# Mass in Motion: Stories from the Field

## Pumping up Park Safety in Fitchburg

**F**itchburg's most precious gems just need a little polishing," agree the city's Mass in Motion steering committee. Fitchburg has 39 different parks offering many activities for youth – yet most of these parks remain untouched due to what many consider an unsafe image. Safety, however, isn't the only issue keeping people away.

*Fun 'n FITchburg* (Fitchburg Mass in Motion) conducted four park and walk audits along with stakeholder interviews with the Parks Board, which revealed that used needles and syringes, graffiti, burnt trash cans, and isolated areas of the parks keep parents from letting their kids play freely. "While we found issues with safety, we realized from talking to community members that a lot of people don't know all of these parks exist. That was something we also wanted to address," says Ayn Yeagle, part of the *Fun 'n FITchburg* Steering Committee.

The city lacks both funding and an effective way to increase the parks' safety and use – but Fitchburg can't afford to sit around and wait. The city currently has the second highest rates of childhood obesity in Massachusetts. "The children

living here are in desperate need of safe options for physical activity that are close to their neighborhoods," stated Yeagle. So she and the rest of the Mass in Motion team took the issue to the streets and local policy experts.

*Fun 'n FITchburg* is one organization that never underestimates the power of partnerships. Using a team approach with representation from a diverse cross-section of Fitchburg including professionals, adults, and youth as part of *Fun 'n FITchburg* Community Mobilization Network, *Fun 'n FITchburg* partners teamed up with key community stakeholders and departments such as the Parks Board Commissioner, City Police, the Board of Health and the Parks and Recreation Department. Together they reviewed the park assets and barriers related to safety, accessibility and attractiveness, and brainstormed possible solutions for increasing the safety and use of the play areas.

This summer, *Fun n' FITchburg* is launching a long-term media campaign encouraging residents to learn about the parks and visit them with their families; volunteer for an adopt-a-park program to keep a park safe and clean; and



*Fun 'n FITchburg members conduct park and walk audits.*

*Kids are more likely to use Fitchburg parks that are clean and safe.*

report any crimes or people they spot at a park after it closes at night as a cost-effective solution to stop crime.

*Fun 'n FITchburg's* progress has been fast-paced and well planned. Influential community departments jumped on board from the start, and have undoubtedly helped this plan take shape. The in-depth assessment process and effective meeting activities led to strategy development, strong partnerships, and an effective plan to pump-up park safety in an inexpensive way so youth and families can feel safe playing freely in some of Fitchburg's hidden gems.

**Contact:** Mass in Motion Coordinator, Ayn Yeagle > [aberthiaume@mocinc.org](mailto:aberthiaume@mocinc.org)

Mass in Motion is generously supported by: Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts, the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation, the Boston Foundation, the Harvard Pilgrim Health Foundation, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, the MetroWest Community Health Care Foundation, and the Tufts Health Plan Foundation.

