

## INTERVENTION

### Kids in Parks

Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation



## INTENT OF THE INTERVENTION

By turning existing, outdoor trails into kid-friendly hiking trails, the Kids in Parks (KIP) program increases access to and the number of places for physical activity. KIP influences multiple levels of the socio-ecologic model by directly changing the community environment and by providing incentives and organizational supports to promote physical activity through hiking, disc golf and other outdoor activities. Kids in Parks is a practice-tested intervention.

## OVERVIEW

The Kids in Parks program is a self-contained, packaged program (a trailhead sign, self-guided brochures, and webpages) available at low-cost to community partners who control suitable, pre-existing hiking trails. The program's materials, created as templates, are modified easily to fit sites throughout the country. The Kids in Parks concept uses partnerships to maximize existing resources; thus requiring no major infrastructure changes and minimal staff/resources to sustain the program. Kids in Parks offers three program options for adoption by national, state and local parks:

- TRACK Trails are designed as a nature scavenger hunt with game rewards to incentivize behavior change. Each TRACK Trail has a series of self-guided, brochure-led adventures. TRACK Trails target children and are currently located in six states (NC, VA, SD, MD, WV, CA) and in Washington, DC.
- Nature Trail Disc Golf Course TRACK Trails offer a series of self-guided scorecards doubling as field guides and tee-signs acting as interpretive panels that turn an ordinary round of disc (Frisbee) golf into a fun, educational nature experience. Disc golf trails serve teens and currently are located in North Carolina and South Dakota.
- Pediatrician Office Trailheads provide backyard adventures. Pilot-testing has begun in Asheville, NC at a pediatrician's office and at Mission Children's Hospital. A medical practice lobby as "trailhead" provides local TRACK Trail information to kids and their parents and can promote family-friendly opportunities for outdoor activity near home. These trailheads allow pediatricians to be on the forefront of the Park Prescription movement, enabling them to prescribe the Kids in Parks TRACK Trails program as preventative "medicine" for childhood obesity.

### Background

In 2008, the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation, the Blue Ridge Parkway and the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation partnered to form the Kids in Parks TRACK Trails program, a program designed to get kids "unplugged" and outdoors for their health. The Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation has invested more than \$900,000 into the Kids in Parks program through two different grants, enabling the program to spread across North Carolina while creating a template-able, franchise-able program that is easily replicated nationally. Each time a new trail opens, partners at the local level are responsible for implementation and maintenance. KIP has brought together more than 35 partners, including multiple state, federal and local agencies. At the time of the TRT review,

six states and Washington, DC had KIP TRACK Trails; they are North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, West Virginia, South Dakota and California.

**Intended population:** Youth; TRACK Trails are geared toward children and Nature Trail Disc Golf Courses are for teens

**Setting:** Parks located on lands under all types of jurisdictions: national, state, city/county, private, tribal

**Length of time in the field:** first Kids in Parks TRACK Trail opened in 2009

## HEALTH EQUITY CONSIDERATIONS

Kids in Parks reaches kids and families who live in the region(s) of public land site(s), or who visit the sites where one of the TRACK Trails is installed. The KIP program collects data about its users through its website where kids register their hikes and earn incentives. These data indicate that the average age of registered kids is 7.5 years for standard hiking TRACK Trails and 15.5 years for the Nature Trail Disc Golf Course Trails. Some adults have also registered their hikes. Kids answer 12-15 questions about their trail experience; however, they are not asked to provide demographic information (i.e. race, ethnicity, social status, etc).

To encourage economic activity in less prosperous areas, the N.C. Department of Commerce, ranks the state's 100 counties based on economic well-being and assigns each a tier designation. The 40 most distressed counties are designated as Tier 1, the next 40 as Tier 2 and the 20 least distressed as Tier 3. A review of North Carolina's 28+ TRACK Trails reveals that approximately one-third are located in Tier 1 counties, another third in Tier 2 and the remaining third are in Tier 3. Some of the city/county parks in Tier 1 have received their trails for free through KIP's partnership with the North Carolina Recreation and Parks Association. The financial assistance they receive is the installation of the trail for free. Many of these park sites are underfunded, and would not have been able to complete a project of this nature without the aid of the KIP program.

Trail users can go to the Kids In Parks website to learn which trails comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

## RESOURCES REQUIRED

The following information is for partners wishing to join the Kids in Parks program. The KIP program has a national reach; partners can apply from any state/region.

**Staff:** The Kids in Parks TRACK Trails program requires that a local staff person serve as Trail Manager and primary contact. Existing park staff typically assume the KIP responsibilities and no new FTEs are required to implement the program.

**Materials:** Kids in Parks charges its partners/grantors a base price of \$5,000 per TRACK Trail. For that cost, each trail site receives a trailhead sign/kiosk, four sets of self-guided brochures, integration into the program's website, quarterly data reports about the registered kids from their site, and prize dissemination for kids who register their trail adventures. KIP estimates the retail value of each TRACK Trail project (design fees, printing, fabrication of

kiosks, installation, webpage integration and prize dissemination) to be approximately \$18,000. The percentage of staff time and other costs associated with building and maintaining trails are the responsibility of the local partner.

**Other Costs:** Maintenance of the TRACK Trail(s) trail surface and trailhead, the trail Grand Opening ceremony, reordering brochure stock as needed, and other PR events to promote trail usage.

## IMPLEMENTATION

### How It Works:

The Kids in Parks program provides the following materials to participating partners: trailhead sign and kiosk, four different brochures, a website page, data collection, and prizes for participants.

- I. *Key program components are:*
  - Standard hiking TRACK Trails designed to be nature scavenger hunts with game rewards to incentivize behavior change.
  - Nature Trail Disc Golf Course TRACK Trails offering a series of self-guided brochures (or scorecards) designed for a game of disc (Frisbee) golf.
  - Pediatrician Office Trailheads provide backyard adventures. This backyard experience uses the *Nature's Backyard Hide n' Seek brochure*, an introductory brochure to the Kids in Parks program that can be used in any outdoor setting. It is designed so that kids of all ages can step outside and discover common things that are often overlooked in nature. This effort has been endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics.
  - The KIP website has two main purposes:
    - a. To incentivize physical activity behavior - Trail users register their hikes, making them eligible to receive prizes and join the online Trail TRACKer Team. The KIP program mails out prizes. The more hikes a youth tracks on the KIP website, the better the prizes get.
    - b. To collect participation data which KIP shares with its partners. To receive their prizes, kids have to answer 12-15 questions about their adventure, their likes and dislikes, who they were with, date and time of visit, etc.

### II. *Program Implementation*

#### Partnerships

To implement the KIP program on the ground, many partners are needed to make the program work in the different trail localities. Kids in Parks has partnerships with:

- 1) Federal Land Management Agencies
  - National Park Service
  - the US Forest Service,
  - the Army Corps of Engineers,
- 2) State land management agencies
  - State park systems (NC, VA, SD)
- 3) City and county land management agencies
  - City and county Parks and Recreation Departments
  - School systems

- 4) Other Nations
  - Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians
- 5) Private Land Owners
  - Two trails are on located on private land

Program partners aid the KIP staff in trail selection at each public land site, in the development of the brochure-led adventures, with the installation of the trailhead sign, and with the ongoing maintenance of the trail and trailhead site.

#### Trail openings

To open a new trail, KIP works with a partner who has jurisdiction over a suitable pre-existing hiking trail. KIP and partners follow this process:

- Form a partnership and formalize a general agreement through a Memorandum of Understanding.
- Select and vet a trail for difficulty and safety. KIP uses existing trails so program maintenance rests at the partner level and involves no KIP staff cost. Average trail length is 1.25 miles.
- Local partner(s) adapt the KIP Trailhead kiosk for a specific site, including text and map portion of sign.
- KIP has developed more than 20 different self-guided brochures for trail use. From this group of brochure options, a local partner will select a series of four brochure-led trail adventures.
- At the trailhead, the local partner will install the KIP kiosk that posts the trail map and holds the four brochures.
- Three weeks in advance of the Trail Grand Opening, invitations are sent out and the press is invited.
- A webpage is developed for the new trail to go on the KIP website; a trail webpage includes trail information, driving directions, pictures, brochure downloads, etc.
- For each trail opening, a grand opening is held to publicize the event.

#### Partners reporting requirements

- Trail locations are required to designate a TRACK Trail manager.
- Trails are required to report regularly using the Partners Reporting Form (see Intervention Materials for sample form). KIP provides partners with results of data collected.

#### **Barriers to Implementation:**

- Funding. Even though the Kids in Parks program charges a modest fee of \$5,000 to install a TRACK Trail, funding is still a barrier to implementation.
- Site Standards. Some national parks and state park systems have sign standards that have to be met. Therefore, the KIP trailhead sign or kiosk needs to be modified to fit within the standards of that agency.

## EVIDENCE REVIEW SUMMARY

### Strategies Used:

According to the Guide to Community Preventive Services, "[creation of or enhanced access to places for physical activity combined with informational outreach activities](#)" is an evidenced based strategy to increase physical activity. The Kids in Parks Track Trail program enhances existing walking/hiking trails (and disc golf courses) with signage and promotes their use through self-guided activity tracking and website incentive programs. Additionally, a 2012 systematic review published in Lancet on the correlates of physical activity (Bauman AE, et al., 2012;318:258-71) describes evidence for the important role of several factors also found in the Kids in Parks program, including support for physical activity from parents and family. Also listed among the built and natural environmental determinants in this article were parks and recreational facilities, aesthetics and pleasantness, walking and cycling facilities, vegetation, topography, national parks, trails, and walking routes.

Additional information about a similar evidence-based strategy for Kids in Parks that captures many of the factors described above can be found on the Center TRT website: [Increasing access to and number of places for physical activity](#).

[Decreasing screen time and other sedentary behaviors](#) is an evidence-based strategy supporting Kids in Parks, which promotes physical activity and reports this time as "unplugged hours." This premise assumes that if you are outdoors, you cannot watch TV or your computer screen, therefore, screen time and sedentary behaviors are reduced in children on trails.

### Research Findings or Evaluation Outcomes:

**Formative Evaluation:** The Kids in Parks program is backed by formative study. The program organizers used components of a national parks visitor use survey and Blue Ridge Parkway visitor assessment data to inform development. Particularly, the data about the usefulness of self-guided materials shaped the self-guided, brochure-led approach to their program. The national parks study showed 81-86% of survey respondents found self-guided materials to be very valuable to their experience at the park.

**Process Evaluation:** Process evaluation is ongoing in the Kids in Parks program. User data are continually collected on the website about trail use as well as limited demographic information. These data are compiled and sent back to the local TRACK Trail manager. Additionally, the trail manager is required to send reports on activities and usage to the KIP staff. Using the online data from approximately 600 registered users, over 40% stated that they came to the park specifically to hike the TRACK trails, 60% reported never having been to the park before and 25% had never been hiking before their hike on a TRACK Trail.

An observational study conducted by the North Carolina Center for Health and Wellness at the University of North Carolina Asheville provided useful information on trail and self-guided brochure use. The observational data helped inform program planning.

**Outcome Evaluation:** One of the outcome goals of KIP is to modify and increase the appeal of existing parks with hiking trails to children and their families. As of 6/29/13, there were 56 TRACK Trails in 5 states\* and the District of Columbia (NC, VA, MD, SD, WV), a website tracking and incentive program, and a system of criteria for developing new trail

sites. A secondary outcome goal is to increase outdoor physical activity and indirectly decrease screen time among children and teens. Because information on baseline physical activity of users is not reported, it is difficult to assess this behavior change.

\* In September 2013, California became the sixth state to open Track Trails.

## POTENTIAL PUBLIC HEALTH IMPACT

**Reach:** The intended population for KIP includes families with young children (TRACK Trails) and teens (Nature Trail Disc Golf Course). The *potential* for KIP to reach families with young children from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds has been demonstrated in NC. The NC Department of Commerce annually ranks the state's 100 counties based on economic well-being and assigns each a tier designation (Tier 1 as the most economically distressed, to Tier 3, as the least distressed). A quick review of the NC Trails (28 listed trails as of 6/29/13) showed that they are almost equally located in counties of low to high economic distress (Tier 1 = 8 trails; Tier 2 = 10 trails; and Tier 3 = 10 trails). The KIP program is now in 5 states and the District of Columbia, and since its start in 2009, there are now approximately 56 Trails, with several planned openings of new sites. (In September 2013, California became the sixth state to join the KIP program by opening three Track Trails.)

Estimating the number of children (including teens) reached by KIP is somewhat challenging with the data currently available. There are three sources of data: 1) the online registration data from program participants (over 800 children and teens have registered online); 2) data collected by direct observation of park users at three of the most popular parks, (a June 2011 observational study conducted by UNC-Asheville); and 3) reports submitted by KIP program partners. Since online registration is voluntary, the number of children and teens registered does not provide a good estimate of the total number reached. Additionally, the reports completed by KIP partners do not indicate how many of the trail users are children/teens. Using the data from the UNC-Asheville study provides some information, but generalizations cannot be made to the larger group of KIP program users in all participating states. From this unpublished study data based on user observations at 3 sites in NC, we have the following estimates: 32% (318/982) of users were children with an average age of 7.2 years; 46% of groups that approached the trailhead sign actually went on the hike; and 11% of all groups took at least one of the self-guided brochures on the hike. Applying the estimate of 32% of users being children to the monthly reporting by KIP partners, provides a very rough estimate of the number of kids using the trails, and thereby gives an estimate of program reach.

**Effectiveness:** Center TRT reviewed the KIP Program for its objective to increase the appeal of existing parks with hiking trails and thereby attract families with young children and teens. By getting 'kids in parks' the program potentially increases outdoor physical activity. With an increase in outdoor activity, KIP programs indirectly target decreasing screen time among children and teens. For its objective to increase the appeal or attractiveness of parks, there are data from registered users that support this level of effectiveness. Using the online data from approximately 600 registered users, over 40% stated that they came to the park specifically to hike the TRACK trails, 60% reported never having been to the park before and 25% had never been hiking before their hike on a TRACK Trail. Additionally, reports from KIP program partners show that the trails are being used.

**Adoption:** The KIP program focuses on increasing the appeal of *existing parks* with hiking trails, to kids and their families. Over a 3-year period (and as of 6/29/13), five states and the

District of Columbia have adopted the KIP program at one or more of their existing park trails for a total of 56 TRACK Trails in operation. (In September 2013, California became the sixth state to join the KIP program by opening three TRACK Trails.) Once adopted, the KIP program has been sustained because there is very little maintenance required by agencies that adopt KIP. Currently in NC, there are about 28 TRACK Trails and another 20 being planned. As of June 2013, KIP trails were in 19 of the 100 NC counties (19%). There is the potential for broad adoption and sustainability of the KIP program.

**Implementation:** Implementation of the KIP program involves installation of the trailhead sign and brochure holders (4) with brochures. Brochures are designed for participants to be 'self-guided' while on the trails. This installation process appears to be relatively easy. Other requirements for implementation include designation of a trail manager, planning outreach events, and reporting trail usage to the KIP organization. Costs for implementation include a minimum \$5,000 charge for the agency partnering with KIP.

**Maintenance:** The KIP program is pretty easily maintained. After the initial investment in installing the trailhead sign with the brochures for 'self-guided' hikes, the additional costs are mainly for replacing the used brochures.

## INTERVENTION MATERIALS.

### [Installing a Track Trail at your site](#)

Grant Guidelines (Sample)

Start Up Costs

Kids in Parks – Partners Reporting Form)

Brochures can be downloaded from the KIP website. Click on a Trail name to see the brochures for that trail.

KIP website: <http://www.kidsinparks.com/>

## TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Please contact Jason Urroz for technical assistance. (See Additional Information section.)

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

**Web links:** Kids in Parks [www.kidsinparks.com/](http://www.kidsinparks.com/)

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/pages/Kids-in-Parks-Blue-Ridge-Parkway-Foundation/112697285418](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Kids-in-Parks-Blue-Ridge-Parkway-Foundation/112697285418)

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