

Community Health Needs a Personal Trainer

The Public Square Process Helps Communities Lay out a Fitness Program

“The Public Square colleague is the personal trainer who helps the community keep on course.”

BY JEANETTE SIEMENS



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You can't pick up a publication or turn on TV without hearing about the importance of eating well, exercising and paying more attention to overall health. There are all kinds of ideas on how to do this, from taking five minutes to walk away from your computer to slipping on those Nike's and running a couple of miles.

Healthy habits are not only important for individuals, but also for communities as they seek to become fit and energized. So what are the good health habits that activate grassroots, community development efforts like those aligned with the Public Square Communities process?

Having been involved in guiding Pratt's Leadership 2000 PLUS program for 20 years, going through community leadership training with the Kansas Health Foundation (KHF), then being trained as a leadership coach for the Kansas Leadership Center (KLC), I can't help but see a vital relationship between strong community leadership and vibrant civic health.

Community leadership equates to healthy community. This principle is foundational to KHF, and to KLC and to Public Square Communities. As we facilitate conversations across the state, we ask "How do communities become healthier: civically, economically, in building and maintaining housing infrastructure? Rebuilding the public square is, in fact, a community health intervention.

The Public Square process helps communities lay out a "fitness program" for community development that stretches and builds strength. Easy is it? Of course not! Exercise regimes require motivation, support and dedication to produce results. KLC teaches that leadership is an activity which anyone can exercise anytime

and anyplace. To accomplish that, communities need "personal trainers" to help produce their wellness plan, hold them accountable and provide ongoing encouragement.

Those working in the arena of civic leadership are increasingly aware that process is as important as strategy. We get to where we want to be by exercising a process. Public Square brings a healthy process to our communities. The Public Square colleague is the personal trainer who helps the community keep on course. The process is holistic, intentionally exercising the four muscles of a community: business, education, human services and government.

In our personal health, before we formulate a treatment plan, there must first be a diagnosis. In community health, KLC teaches organizations and communities to "diagnose the situation." That's why Public Square's process begins with surveys and interviews to determine the self-image and assets of the community. The Community Conversation that follows proposes new exercises and civic action to promote health and vitality for the community. Community Action Teams take these ideas and develop a more intense and targeted routine to move the community forward.

As with physical health, community health requires dedication, support and a deliberate routine if we are to create a healthier life for all. If you have questions about the Public Square process, visit us online at www.PublicSquareCommunities.com. **KCL**

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