



RECREATION WORCESTER

UMass Memorial Medical Center | Worcester, MA

Overview

The concept of the “Recreation Worcester” program (formerly Wheels to Water), now in its ninth year of operation, began in 2008 when antiquated pools in the City of Worcester were permanently closed due to the economic recession. As a result, the city was at risk for increased youth violence and gang involvement due to a lack of access to recreational activities. The city manager reached out to UMass Memorial’s executive leadership for help. Hospital funding enabled the launch of the program and leveraged private funds. Operated by the City of Worcester Youth Office, the program provides inner-city youth with free, supervised recreational activities at 10 neighborhood sites after school and during the summer months.

This program aligns with UMass Memorial Medical Center’s youth target population objectives of reducing violence, as well as increasing access to physical activity opportunities and healthy nutrition for inner-city youth. Students are engaged with Recreation Worcester staff and community partners in athletic, artistic and academic enrichment activities. The program incorporates a healthy nutrition intervention by providing three meals and a snack to participants daily. In partnership with the Worcester Public Schools, Recreation Worcester also incorporates educational programming to reduce summer learning loss by utilizing a curriculum developed by the Worcester Education Collaborative. The neighborhood program sites are conveniently located throughout the city for easy access to address barriers of transportation and affordability for at-risk youth. This partnership leverages funding to employ a minimum of 100 inner-city youth during the summer months each year. Since 2008, UMass Memorial



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has provided a total of \$800,000 in funding for this program. In the past five years alone, the hospital’s support has leveraged approximately \$1.4 million.

Impact

Recreation Worcester is a highly accessible neighborhood-based summer program that minimizes

summer learning loss and promotes positive youth development for approximately 1,700 children (ages 7 to 13) annually. At least 12,500 youth have been served since the program's inception. The majority of youth in this program are eligible for the free/reduced lunch during the school year. For many participants, Recreation Worcester's provision of three healthy meals each day can represent their only opportunity to eat healthy during the summer months. In addition to access to physical activity and summer learning, this program addresses food insecurity. Recreation Worcester provides approximately 100,000 meals to inner-city youth each summer.

Lessons Learned

This project shows the impact of UMass Memorial as an anchor institution in being able to help the City of Worcester secure private funds and resources to address community needs. Due to the success of this program, Recreation Worcester is recognized as an example of how to address budgetary challenges faced by cities across the state.


Future Goals

We plan to continue to help secure long-term resources and sustainability from the private sector to invest in the health of the community. Additional goals include expanding youth development opportunities, increasing the number of neighborhoods where the program is offered, and increasing culturally competent recreational activities for the city's highly diverse youth population.

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