

## Summer is the time to be active and get healthy in Mendocino County

As summer heats up, we are drawn outside to play and get active. Mendocino County enjoys a wealth of youth recreation opportunities to choose from, from yoga and hiking to martial arts and BMX bicycling. There is something to fit every interest.

There is probably no better single thing to do to improve health than to get active. Numerous studies show that the closer one lives to places to exercise, such as parks and recreation centers, the more likely one is to get the recommended amount of physical activity.<sup>1</sup> The 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans recommend that adults get at least 150 minutes a week of moderate to vigorous physical activity, and that kids be active at least an hour each day.<sup>2</sup>

Exercise yields both physical and mental health benefits, as well as increasing social connections and community well-being.

People who get regular physical activity are less likely to get diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, stroke, osteoporosis and certain kinds of cancer, including cancers of the colon, breast, and lungs. Exercise lessens the risk factors for these illnesses, such as belly fat, obesity, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and insulin resistance.<sup>3,4</sup> Fit people also get sick less, have fewer hospital stays, fewer doctor visits and use less medication. In fact, people who get regular physical activity even live longer. On average, every hour spent exercising increases life expectancy by two hours.<sup>5</sup>

Being active also alleviates depression, stress and anxiety, and raises energy and self-esteem. People who engage in recreation activities regularly report greater life satisfaction and sense of success. It seems that recreational activities make us happy! Recreational activities also strengthen families and can bridge ethnic and cultural differences to result in more tolerance of diversity.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, not everyone has equal opportunities to get active.

According to the County Health Rankings<sup>6</sup> about 3 out of 4 residents of Mendocino County have access to opportunities for exercise, compared to 93% of Californians overall. Slightly fewer than 3 of 4 youth respondents to the California Health

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<sup>1</sup> Guide to Community Preventive Services. Environmental and policy approaches to increase physical activity: creation of or enhanced access to places for physical activity combined with informational outreach activities. [www.thecommunityguide.org/pa/environmental-policy/improvingaccess.html](http://www.thecommunityguide.org/pa/environmental-policy/improvingaccess.html).

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.health.gov/paguidelines/guidelines/summary.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> California State Parks. The Health and Social Benefits of Recreation. 2005.

<http://www.parks.ca.gov/pages/795/files/benefits%20final%20online%20v6-1-05.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Guide to Community Preventive Services. Increasing physical activity.

<http://www.thecommunityguide.org/pa/index.html>

<sup>5</sup> ARC, 2000, cited in California State Parks. The Health and Social Benefits of Recreation.

<sup>6</sup><http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/app/california/2015/rankings/outcomes/overall>

Interview Survey said a park or playground was within walking distance of their homes.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the large amount of open space and forest in our county, only 1 in 5 Mendocino County residents live within a half mile, or easy walking distance, of a park.<sup>8</sup>

People with disabilities are faced with fewer options and insufficient support to engage in active recreation, yet their need for its physical, psychological and social benefits are at least as great. It is important for recreation providers to make an effort to have activities in which people with disabilities can participate.

People of color and people with low incomes are also less likely to have recreational facilities in their neighborhoods, making it harder to reap all the benefits of physical activity.<sup>9</sup> For this reason those who administer recreational programs must consciously recruit young people from communities of color and provide low-cost or free recreation opportunities for families with low incomes, in order to level the playing field.

One strategy to increase access to recreational facilities that does not involve building new sites is to let the community use existing recreation facilities owned by school districts, cities, or other entities. Such shared use or joint use agreements are in place in many of our county's school districts, as evidenced by kids playing on playground equipment or in school fields in evenings and on weekends.

The Alex Rorabaugh Recreation Center (ARRC) has agreements to share use of the gym with Grace Hudson Elementary School, the Boys and Girls Club, and City of Ukiah recreation programs. The ARRC opens the gym up for free futsal (indoor soccer) and basketball once a month each, and two Sundays each month the entire ARRC is open for family recreation. Other groups use the ARRC to play ping-pong, pickle ball and badminton, and the City of Ukiah holds dozens of youth and adult sports activities in the gym.

Here is a sample of the many providers of recreation activities in Mendocino County. Check out the City of Ukiah Recreation Department (<http://www.cityofukiah.com/recreation/>) for all manner of classes for individuals and groups to get active. Similar opportunities abound on the coast through the Mendocino Coast Recreation and Park District (<http://www.mendocoastrec.org/index.php>). Kids and adults with intellectual disabilities can participate in sports through Special Olympics (<http://www.sonc.org/sports/county/mendocino>). Soccer is huge in Mendocino

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<sup>7</sup> UCLA Center for Health Policy Research. California Health Interview Survey, 2010.

<sup>8</sup> National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network, available at <http://maps.communitycommons.org/viewer/?mapid=1111>

<sup>9</sup> Active Living Research. Parks, playgrounds and active living. February 2010. [http://activelivingresearch.org/files/Synthesis\\_Mowen\\_Feb2010\\_0.pdf](http://activelivingresearch.org/files/Synthesis_Mowen_Feb2010_0.pdf)

County, whether on the coast (<http://www.mendocoastsoccer.org> ,  
<https://www.facebook.com/CoastYouthSoccer> ) or inland  
(<https://www.facebook.com/UkiahValleyYouthSoccerLeague?fref=nf> ,  
<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Willits-Youth-Soccer/121633414523856> ).  
The Mendocino College Athletic Department offers an array of sports for kids and  
adults (<http://www.mendocino.edu/athletics>). Mendocino County has many  
stunning parks to visit (<http://mendoparks.mcn.org>,  
<http://www.co.mendocino.ca.us/gs/parks/>). The Sherriff's Activities League  
(<http://www.ukiah.com/SAL/index.html> ) offers baseball, boxing and karate for  
kids. Find the Walk & Bike Mendocino and Ukiah Valley Trails Group outdoor event  
calendar here <http://walkbikemendo.org/teamup-mendo-outdoors-calendar> .  
For something out of the ordinary try circus arts at CircusMecca  
(<https://www.facebook.com/circusmecca/>), or kayak on a river  
(<http://www.mendocino.com/HikeBike.html>).

I hope to see you on the court, on the field, or in the park this summer.

Linda Helland, MPH, CPH, is the Executive Director of the Alex Rorabaugh  
Recreation Center (ARRC), in Ukiah. The mission of the ARRC is to engage, inspire  
and mobilize people, programs, partners and funding to provide a safe place,  
especially for kids, to learn, play and recreate. Please find the ARRC on Facebook.  
<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Alex-Rorabaugh-Recreation-Center-ARRC/368761859827029>