

3 WINS Fitness—Student-Delivered Free and Sustainable Exercise Programming in Public Parks: A Scalable Public Health Solution

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3 WINS Fitness is a student-delivered free exercise program for the community delivered in public parks. We believe this program, which operates without external funding and has been sustained for 6 years, is one significant solution to reducing the level of physical inactivity in the United States. The operative 3 WINS in our program are participant health, community health, and student professional development. The primary focus has been underserved communities, and our current eight programs in Los Angeles, serve over 300 participants regularly. Three challenges to the program are student empowerment, faculty understanding and involvement, and establishing the relationship between university and parks, which represent a vital partnership. However, the accomplishment of undergraduate students having such a dynamic impact on public health underscores the need for encouraging this sustainable and innovative strategy to increase the physical activity levels of communities across America.

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Never in the history of our profession has there ever been the desperate and specific need for what we in kinesiology study, teach, and preach: human movement. Physical inactivity alone causes 9% of premature mortality (Lee et al., 2012); it is the fourth leading cause of death around the world (Kohl et al., 2012) and, in 2013, the total economic burden of physical inactivity ranged from a conservative yet staggering estimate of \$67.5 billion international up to a less conservative \$145.2 billion (Ding et al., 2016). With almost 80% of the United States population not meeting the 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2014) and over 5 million worldwide deaths tied to physical inactivity, there is a need for community-based programs. A large-scale solution to physical inactivity must be sustainable and have strong political support equaled by a high degree of feasibility for implementation (Reis et al., 2016).

Faculty and students at California State University, Northridge, have identified an effective solution to physical inactivity in their surrounding community. It is not simply telling people what to do. They are applying their classroom knowledge in local parks in neighborhoods identified as having health inequities by

teaching those who are not active how to become more active and helping them understand what is physically required to achieve better health. It's also about addressing participants' hopes and dreams relative to physical activity and to help create the passion that encourages them to continue exercising for a lifetime. Despite the media attention and the availability of information via the internet, the majority of the public does not know where to start and how to safely progress. We should share our knowledge with the masses in their own communities if we are to be successful preventing disease with physical activity.

It is fortuitous for us that the growth of our major is the greatest at a time when there is the greatest need for what we know. In our university, we have felt the numbers reported by the American Kinesiology Association (AKA), reflecting the 50% increase in majors from a survey (2003–2008) of 46 AKA member departments (Morrow & Thomas, 2010). The numbers have continued to increase with our student count at California State University, Northridge (CSUN) rising from ~1,500 in 2012 to over 2,400 in 2016. This represents the second largest major on campus. Rapid growth creates academic challenges but that same growth can be translated into unique opportunities. This explosion in student numbers juxtaposed to the numbers of those physically inactive encouraged us to tap into this massive talent and energetic pool of undergraduate kinesiology students to create and develop a free community-based exercise program called 100 Citizens, now rebranded to 3 WINS Fitness.

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What is 3 WINS Fitness?

In a story recently reported in CSUN TODAY (2016):

“Mary-Anne Saffon-King was involved in a car accident in 2013. The crash left her in a coma for two days and then, when she awoke, seriously limited her mobility on the right side of her body. Three years later she is exercising, dancing and smiling at San Fernando Recreation Park three mornings a week – without any physical sign of the injuries from her accident. Saffon-King is one of the more than 250 participants (6 parks) in 3 WINS Fitness, which started in San Fernando as the 100 Citizens program in 2011, born from California State University, Northridge’s Department of Kinesiology. Saffon-King, who recovered her mobility after her car accident said 3 WINS Fitness helped her to regain physical and psychological strength. “Everybody who knows me and what happened in the accident is amazed now,” she said. “These exercises help you to handle pain better. I still feel pain, but my attitude toward it and my movements are better. We wake up in the morning and look forward to the session. If I can’t make it, I feel sad and lonely. When I’m here, I smile the whole time.”

3 WINS Fitness is a free exercise program (accessible in a neighborhood park) that is sustainable (no external funding) and scalable. Kinesiology students, educated and skilled in human movement, lead community members in group exercise appropriate for all levels of fitness. From one park program in San Fernando, CA, in 2011, we are now in eight parks in Los Angeles County, serving over 300 participants. We have expanded to parks near three of our sister CSU institutions, bringing us to 11 parks total, with steps taken to be in over 50% of the CSU system’s 21 kinesiology programs this fall. We aspire to spread 3 WINS Fitness across the United States through 700+ kinesiology departments. 3 WINS Fitness was selected to represent CSUN as part of the Clinton Global Initiative University Commitment to Action. Through an online funding effort, we raised sufficient monies to install a 3 WINS Fitness infrastructure in eight additional Cal State Universities in Spring 2017, with five graduate students traveling to the universities to recruit students, establish community relationships, conduct training, replicate the infrastructure when possible, and provide for a \$1,000 equipment start-up. Our programs require no external funding. The program runs out of public parks with our students serving as volunteers of the parks and, if desired, they receive academic internship units.

In 2012, we were recognized by First Lady Michelle Obama’s Let’s Move! campaign, which challenged community organizations to share their programs in a nationwide video competition. We professed that a public health solution to end childhood obesity must begin with the family, and we reach children by helping adults become healthier role models. Our video submission [http://](http://letsmovecommunities.devpost.com/submissions/6815-100-citizens-role-models-for-the-future)

letsmovecommunities.devpost.com/submissions/6815-100-citizens-role-models-for-the-future won the Popular Choice vote and we visited the White House in 2013 to receive recognition.

We changed our name to 3 WINS Fitness to reflect the WINS focused on: participant fitness, student career benefit and professionalism, and community health (www.3winsfitness.com), which are described in more detail below. We have recently collaborated with the American Council on Exercise, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, Providence Health & Services, Los Angeles County Parks and Recreation, and Los Angeles City Recreation and Parks to expand the Northridge program to 16 locations beginning in August 2017 for 1 year. We will conduct a robust research effort to demonstrate the effectiveness of the model of 3 WINS Fitness, public health, and parks and faith-based organizations working together to improve community health. With this effort, attendance will be rigorously monitored to document fitness changes associated with the program in addition to responses on a public health survey created by our public health colleagues. It is worth noting that each park, including San Fernando, initiated in 2011, have many of the original participants still attending regularly.

WIN 1: Participant Fitness and Health

Our established model delivered by kinesiology students will be replicated in all 16 locations. There are four exercise groups to choose from: A senior group to be called Champions for Life and three additional levels of fitness from beginning to advanced. Sixty-minute classes are offered 3 days per week, which exceed the CDC (2014) minimum requirements of 150 min of moderate intensity exercise per week. Cardiovascular and resistance exercises with appropriate individualized modifications are taught in each class utilizing bodyweight exercises, agility ladders, resistance bands, medicine balls, kettle bells, battle ropes, park benches, and playground equipment. Participants have the option of attending a free diabetes prevention program we call Healthy You, after their exercise. The program goal is for prediabetic participants to lose 5–7% of body weight. For the prediabetic, this has been documented to reduce the risk of diabetes by 58%. Healthy You is a program of nutrition and health education modified from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2017).

WIN 2: Student Professional Development

At Northridge, we found that self-empowerment came when students were given ownership of the program and they accepted the responsibility that comes with ownership. The challenge provided to the students was as follows. You want to expand? Demonstrate that you have the capacity to create an infrastructure that is replicable. Learn from the mistakes you make and teach your team not to make the same mistake. Create the stability and quality of leadership that permits “institutional

knowledge” to be transmitted from semester to semester, year-to-year. These were all lessons learned that build professionalism and establish career-beneficial habits for our students, a hallmark signature WIN of the program.

The growth of the programs emanating out of Northridge only occurred because the students were empowered to make change in the community and expand their mission. For example:

- They found themselves more than capable of creating the administrative infrastructure required (e.g., levels of responsibility designated by position titles such as Program Director, Exercise Director, Instructor, Assistant Instructor, etc.).
- They created the requirement of a three strike system to help students understand responsibility and give them a means to enforce the rules that would allow for an operation that would be able to function semester after semester.
- Development of an instructor training program. All students don't come to the park with the same degree of preparation and experience. This is caused by the inability to register for classes in the desired order and time due to the overabundance in student majors; again, challenges can become opportunities as mentioned earlier.
- Need for documentation in an “owner’s manual” which can be adapted for any university’s situation and has been a guide for our CSU expansion.

Interestingly, the graduate students who have been expanding the program to additional CSUs have generally found empowered students to be in short supply (keep in mind these graduate students came into 3 WINS Fitness after it had been 2–3 years in existence, so they did not experience some of the early growing pains). We hypothesize that the universities who have a faculty member with at least some interest and is willing to encourage involvement is valuable. This faculty interest can be as simple as an e-mail communication or a class conversation, not necessarily having to be “cheerleading” the program or being omnipresent. On average, there appears to be a minimum number of 5–6 students required to maintain program-starting momentum, though, within that number, at least 1–2 must be the primary drivers of the program. Our take-home message is that it is beneficial to have a reasonably involved faculty member give the students the “permission” to be empowered (i.e., give them the ownership of the program and as we have experienced, once this is done, the empowered students will then empower others rapidly).

Though very helpful, a faculty member is not required to deliver a program. Our graduate students promoted empowerment to the students at the various universities. Once the students bought in and began to feel program ownership, students demonstrated traits of independence and contributed to program development. We think, over time, greater recognition of 3 WINS Fitness will result in students stepping up sooner, thus

requiring less faculty involvement. We have seen this repeatedly at CSUN.

WIN 3: Community Health

3 WINS Fitness has the capacity to improve public health and strengthen communities. Research in San Fernando conducted with RAND Corporation (Han et al., 2015) concluded that creating a partnership between parks and kinesiology programs is a promising health promotion model. This is particularly important given prior research findings that parks are often underutilized for physical activity (PA), particularly in low-income communities (Cohen et al. 2012), and that parks’ facilities, programming, and supervised and organized activities can have a significant impact on the amount of park-based moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA) (Cohen, 2015). 3 WINS Fitness can be that park supervised exercise program. The evaluation (Han et al., 2015) found that 3 WINS Fitness (formerly 100 Citizens) attracts new park users and can yield important health dividends for participants and, potentially, the community at large. Participants complete park required liability forms and informed consent forms that have been approved by the CSUN Institutional Review Board.

What Are Our Biggest Challenges to Grow the Program?

From our experiences expanding the program locally to initiating programs at distant universities, we have identified three significant challenges: (1) student empowerment, (2) faculty understanding and involvement, and (3) university and Park cooperation.

Challenge 1: Student Empowerment

Ironically, the very same trait spoken earlier that was responsible for program growth and expansion is a challenge to initiating a program. Faculty must instill confidence in their students that they can change the world with their education and proceed to provide them opportunities to create that change. Our experience has been that students seek permission to engage in activities and behaviors that are not directed by faculty and not all faculty are willing to cede their control over students’ education. However, once encouraged and engaged, as we have indicated, students are quite remarkable in what they can accomplish while in school.

Challenge 2: Faculty Understanding and Involvement.

This is tied to Challenge 1, and, while students can be resourceful and independent, it is helpful to have at least one faculty involved. We believe there is value in significant faculty involvement but only to the extent that the students do not perceive that faculty own the program.

This perception will result in students waiting for direction and they will not experience the same personal and professional growth. At 3 WINS Fitness we wholeheartedly embrace the concept that the public's health is our responsibility, given our resources and education regarding physical activity. Importantly, we must capitalize on our enormous resource of thousands of capable students.

This is not the forum for a debate of faculty and department buy-in to our responsibility to public health. However, faculty scheduling of classes occupying the prime time of 9:00–10:00 a.m. reduces the students available to serve in 3 WINS Fitness. The Northridge program runs in the morning hours, typically between 8:00–10:00 a.m. This is the time when parents and grandparents drop their children off at school and were available for exercise. Reducing the number of classes offered before 11:00 a.m. can provide many more students to deliver 3 WINS Fitness. This change in class time-of-offering can be a strong statement to the department's commitment to increasing physical activity in the community.

We recognize that individual faculty scheduling of classes may revert back to the discussion of our profession's responsibility to public health. Two points are clear. The experience and growth acquired by students participating in 3 WINS Fitness has been valuable in their professional growth and subsequent acquisition of jobs and admission to graduate programs. It is a clear WIN for the students. Freeing student time to engage in 3 WINS translates into hundreds of students delivering the program throughout the community, thereby increasing the potential health benefit and healthcare cost savings possible.

Challenge 3: University and Park Cooperation

It should not be surprising that even within the same CSU system, the rules and regulations regarding student internship involvement and university relations with the outside community are very different. Similarly, the community and the parks rules are also different from city to city. We hypothesize that if universities, parks, and public health acknowledge that together, in a collaborative effort, they could provide a solution to physical inactivity, we might be able to streamline the agreements that would have the different entities work together more efficiently and effectively. Our experience at Northridge, working with three different park agencies has been relatively easy. Conversations with the parks explaining the program and understanding each other's needs and requirements have been vital. The problem of physical inactivity has reached a pandemic level. There is a need for large-scale interventions created by unique partnerships. Innovative solutions often ask for unprecedented cooperation and we must work together to be effective. The cost of physical inactivity is too high for us to ignore feasible and sustainable solutions.

Initially, we did not provide equipment. We were able to persuade the parks to purchase it since the program

was conducted at their park. Recently, with the CSU expansion effort and the present ACE supported addition of 10 new locations for 1 year, we incorporated a \$1,000 equipment budget per location to make it easier for our new locations to say, "yes!" Beyond that, to get the program started, faculty coordination time is helpful, but, as mentioned, it can be minimized, particularly if there is a service learning community engagement office on campus.

Shirl Hoffman (2012) reported on the 100 Citizens (now 3 WINS Fitness) program. Two of his comments deserve mention because they add context to the challenges faced by the 3 WINS Fitness program in today's university as discussed above. First, "100 Citizens ventures where many in kinesiology haven't dared to tread, forging the expertise of kinesiology departments with public recreation in an effort to motivate people unlikely to visit gyms or exercise centers to make physical activity and healthy eating part of their daily lives" (p. 18). Communities must be identified who are most in need of what we have to offer, often the underserved neighborhoods, and negotiate agreements with potential partners to be able to deliver the program. WINS need to be identified for all your partners.

His second comment is interesting, as we have come to the same conclusion. We think there may be a place for a major that is more interdisciplinary in nature (e.g., health education, kinesiology, nutrition, and recreation). Hoffman says, "The program is novel, too, in that it forges kinesiology with recreation, areas that, at least since the mid-1960s, have developed into separate disciplines" (p. 18). There may be value in going back to the future!

Conclusion

This discussion takes us full circle to why the program was begun. It was to address a worldwide health concern and to empower students to create change while they were in school, thus controlling their destiny during and after their education. We believe it is imperative for kinesiology to take its rightful place in providing a solution for physical inactivity. 3 WINS Fitness can be replicated as we have done so already in the CSU system. We are in the process of formulating a consultant group with interested universities and partners paying a consultant fee for program creation, which could easily be built into a grant.

The following quote from John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address, January 20, 1961 has been shared with our students who were not unanimously familiar with his words. As appropriate as it was then, perhaps it is an even greater imperative now. "And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you — ask what you can do for your country." In kinesiology, our students can make a difference while they are in school and establish the kinesiology profession and physical activity as vital for the health of our country. We do not have to ask what we can do for our country, we know the answer. Kinesiology students can lead communities to better health

by helping them increase their physical activity. In this next year, we will provide research evidence to support the benefits of 3 WINS Fitness.

Acknowledgment

At this time, it is important to acknowledge the contributions of our students and the role students can play in the 3 WINS model. As the advisor to these students, predominantly graduate students, I know the program today is a product of six years of graduate student development of the program and infrastructure and hundreds of undergraduate students delivering this community-based program. The author would like to acknowledge those students who contributed to the success of this program: Chris Balam, Brittney Barfield, Esteban Campa, Marisol Diaz, Jade Fackler, Cathy Francisco, Liane Fujita-Ahmed, Jazmyn Jasso, Corina Martinez, Nicole Mayo, Steven Mendoza, Sarah Oglesby, Jamie Phillips, Davey Ramos, Matthew Reinig, Dario Senftleben, Mike Wong, and Chelsea Yanagida.

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