

Walking Path Gets A Neighborhood Moving, Says Tulane Study

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A public walking path is enough to inspire an entire neighborhood to become more physically active, according to a new Tulane University study.

“Minor changes to the built environment, like walking paths, can make a difference to physical activity levels and health of residents,” said lead author Jeanette Gustat, whose study is in the latest issue of Preventing Chronic Disease.

The Prevention Research Center at Tulane University (PRC) measured residents' activity levels throughout New Orleans' St. Roch neighborhood in 2006 and 2008, before and after the center helped build a six-block walking path along the median on St. Roch Avenue. Observed outdoor activity increased by nearly 12 percent in the neighborhood after the path was installed. The increase included activity around the path, as well as other parts of the neighborhood.

“What we saw was a significant increase in outdoor activity compared to two other neighborhoods that did not have a walking path,” said Gustat, associate professor of clinical epidemiology at Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine.

The project, called Partnership for an Active Community Environment (PACE), collected data in St. Roch and two comparison neighborhoods through observations taken of people being active outside on streets, sidewalks and public areas. The study found that physical activity levels in St. Roch increased compared to the other two neighborhoods without walking paths or other public recreation spaces. The two comparison neighborhoods had similar demographic compositions, neighborhood characteristics and percentage of residents who participated in physical activity before the path was built.

The study is available [here](#).

PACE worked with local community organizations and the city of New Orleans to build an 8-foot-wide walking path on the tree-covered neutral ground of St. Roch Avenue in 2007.