

# Isanti County Active Living

Evaluation of Active Living by Design | Isanti County, Minnesota | 2003-2008

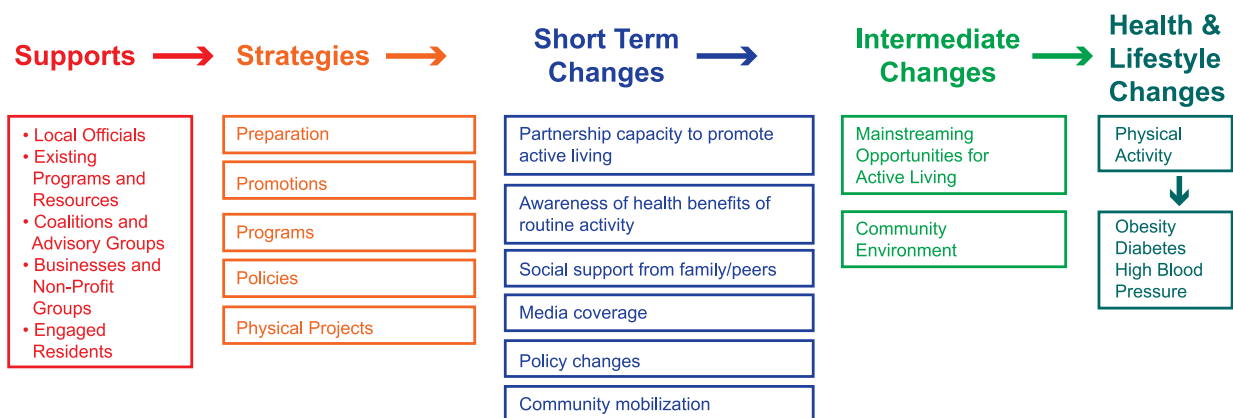
Braham, Minnesota, is the self-proclaimed “Pie Capitol of Minnesota.” Each year, the Pie Day Committee holds an event promoting its infamous pies and a myriad of pie-related activities, ranging from pie eating contests, to arts and crafts, to group walks. In recent years, a Braham resident was inspired to create several walking trails, all named after pies and marked with pie-themed trail markers. The resident was inspired by the work of a group of community leaders to promote active living in Isanti County.

“Active living” is a way of life that integrates physical activity into daily routines in order to accumulate at least 30 minutes of activity each day. In November 2003, Isanti County received a five-year, \$200,000 grant as part of the Active Living by Design national program ([www.activelivingbydesign.org](http://www.activelivingbydesign.org)) funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. By advocating for changes in community design, specifically land use, transportation, parks, trails, and greenways, the Active Living by Design initiative intended to make it easier for people to be active in their daily routines.<sup>1</sup>

*“It’s really trying to design your community so that you can get exercise in your regular routines of the day. And, to create interesting destinations, too. And, to make it more walkable, bikeable, friendly so that people can walk out their back door and walk to visit any other back door or go to church or... go to the post office without having to get out of your car. And, in some ways, we have a good shot at it here, you know, between Isanti and Cambridge, of doing it.” -Staff*

The Active Living by Design Community Action Model provided five active living strategies to influence community change: Preparation, Promotions, Programs, Policies, and Physical Projects. The 5Ps represent a comprehensive approach to increasing physical activity through short-term, intermediate, and long-term community changes. This inclusive model allowed Isanti County Active Living to create safe transportation routes connecting multiple communities, promote the benefits of daily exercise, and work to overcome barriers that inhibit healthy lifestyles.

## Active Living by Design Community Action Model



Ultimately, the partnership was able to accomplish many of its goals, including walking route markers, new sidewalks, annual promotional events, a Master Plan to guide future development, and Walk to School Days. The successes of the ALbD grant encouraged residents to learn more about active living and healthy lifestyles. Many residents began to take advantage of the existing and newly created active living amenities in the community. Most importantly, the partnership influenced the decision-making process at the planning and policy level, creating a strong support for change.

<sup>1</sup> The Active Living by Design (ALbD) initiative was established by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) in 2001, and its National Program Office (NPO) is part of the University of North Carolina Gillings School of Global Public Health in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Twenty-five interdisciplinary community partnerships were selected across the country to demonstrate how changing community design can impact physical activity. Transtria was funded by RWJF to work with the NPO to conduct ALbD evaluation and dissemination activities. This case report draws from Transtria’s evaluation efforts.

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*“If I look back quite a few years, I would have said that when the City did a street project – be it new or reconstruction of an existing street – you basically thought of water, sewer, storm water, and then a new street on top and maybe gutters on the side. And, that was about it. And, now it just becomes part of our mentality that there should be sidewalks, there should be trails, there should some type of connection between one area of the city and other parts of the city and between a park in the city and another park in the city.” -Partner*

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## **Isanti County, Minnesota**

Isanti County, located in East Central Minnesota, is home to approximately 35,000 residents, who live in 13 townships dispersed across a 438-square-mile area. The ALbD grant focused on three cities, Braham (population 1,276), Cambridge (population 5,520), and Isanti (population 2,324), all within 15 miles of each other. Isanti and Cambridge lie along the Rum River, and the county, as a whole, has a rich agricultural history. Residents are predominantly white (97%), and many can trace their roots back to one specific area in Sweden. The average household income is \$55,996, and many residents commute to jobs in larger metropolitan areas. The county experienced a growth period prior to the ALbD grant. Between 1990 and 2000, the population grew 20%. Since the communities are small and located close together, recreational amenities and facilities are dispersed across the county, requiring residents to travel to other towns to access resources they may not have in their own communities.

To create more opportunities for active living, the Isanti County Active Living partnership combined policy influences and physical projects with promotions and programs to promote a physically-active and healthy citizenry. This was accomplished by creating safe biking and walking routes throughout the three main cities and county, promoting the healthy benefits of daily exercise, and working to overcome the psychological barriers and habits that inhibit a healthy lifestyle. All efforts are described in this report. Overall, the partnership stressed the importance of grassroots organizing, engaging local champions, and developing relationships with decision-makers.

## **Preparation**

### ***Partnership***

Isanti County Active Living was an outgrowth of a partnership that began in 1999 when the Cambridge-Isanti Bike-Walk Trail committee reinvigorated a plan to create a trail connecting the two cities. Momentum for the project continued to build as the proposed trail gained support from various leaders and decision-makers. The partnership believed the ALbD grant was a good match for its mission and vision for Isanti County. The county government elected to serve as the lead agency for the grant.

The first goal of leadership was to form the Isanti County Active Living partnership. To accomplish this, the staff recruited a variety of residents, government employees, and city representatives from each city within the county. In addition, a number of disciplines were represented, including health, law enforcement, planning, transportation, and schools. The partnership served three main functions: 1) increase awareness of ALbD-related activities, 2) engage other organizations in supporting active living, and 3) coordinate different activities between groups. All members of the partnership joined specific activity sub-committees based on their unique interests, resources, and expertise. The partners held quarterly meetings to review tasks assigned and report on progress.

The partnership also established a Steering Committee, composed of a small group of dedicated partners responsible for shaping the overall vision and direction for Isanti County Active Living. The Steering Committee met at least monthly to write grants, coordinate with government partners, conduct research, handle publicity demands, and tend to administrative needs.

Key partners maintained a consistent level of involvement over the course of the grant. Several partners cited their connection to the community and their passion for active living as reasons for their engagement. It was easy to engage partners who already shared a similar healthy living agenda.

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*“I think with most programs you need to look at the history of what you are trying to put together because you might find a lot of people that have been interested in the past that could bring a lot to the table right away. So, I think you need to do your homework and see what has been done in the past, who was involved with it, and then bring those people back together so that you don’t waste time on maybe something that has already been invented before.”*

*-Partner*

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Partners and staff mentioned several strengths of the Isanti County Active Living partnership:

- The partnership was fortunate to be able to identify and call on a number of organizations and individuals with similar beliefs and agendas related to active living.
- The various disciplines represented in the partnership were able to engender a collaborative environment.
- Partners were able to focus on the goals and work plan of the ALbD project rather than their own agendas.
- Partnership staff put a special emphasis on maintaining partner relations, as they believed partnership was a critical component to a successful initiative.
- The goals set forth by the initial partners were very ambitious, but generated a certain excitement around accomplishing active living work.
- The partnership benefited from the connectedness of their small communities.
- Typically, each organization had more than one person involved in the partnership, which facilitated communication and contributed to institutional memory.
- Presenting hard data and evidence strengthened the case for the inclusion of active living amenities into community initiatives.
- Accomplishments, whether on a large or small scale, kept people vested in the partnership and its mission.

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*“We wanted to change childhood obesity. We wanted to change diabetes grades. We wanted to have people healthier. We wanted to change the world.” -Partner*

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Partners and staff also noted several challenges of the Isanti County Active Living partnership:

- The level of engagement of partners varied, but maintaining a consistent level of engagement was difficult over the five-year grant period, due to staff turnover.
- As the partnership accomplished more and more tasks, some partners became less involved in the partnership, as they believed that their participation was no longer needed.
- The level of change that the partnership hoped to accomplish was dependent on external sources, such as political support and funding.
- The partnership was working in three communities, which essentially tripled the effort necessary to gain political buy-in needed to conduct its work.
- Conflict of interest, especially in securing funding, kept partners from participating.

The following table lists partnership members by sector.

Members of the Isanti County Active Living Partnership	
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be Active Minnesota</li> <li>• Blue Cross Blue Shield of Minnesota</li> <li>• Cambridge Medical Center</li> <li>• Isanti County Health Department*</li> <li>• Minnesota Department of Health</li> </ul>
Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anoka Ramsey Community College – Cambridge Campus</li> <li>• Cambridge-Isanti Independent School District 911</li> </ul>
Parks & Recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Isanti County Parks and Recreation</li> </ul>
Urban Design, Planning & Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City of Cambridge Planning and Zoning Department</li> <li>• East Central Regional Development Commission</li> <li>• Isanti City Planning Commission</li> <li>• Minnesota Department of Transportation</li> </ul>
Community Leaders, Policy- & Decision-makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City Councils (Cambridge, Isanti, Braham)</li> <li>• Congressman James Oberstar</li> <li>• Isanti Township Supervisor</li> <li>• Mayors (Cambridge, Isanti, Braham)</li> <li>• Senators (Norm Coleman, Mark Dayton)</li> </ul>
Other Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City of Braham</li> <li>• City of Cambridge</li> <li>• City of Isanti</li> </ul>
Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Isanti County Commission on Aging</li> <li>• Isanti County Environmental Coalition</li> </ul>
Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cambridge Area Chamber of Commerce</li> </ul>
Community & Faith-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cambridge Lutheran Church</li> <li>• Community residents</li> <li>• First Baptist Church</li> <li>• Grandview Christian Ministries</li> <li>• Isanti County Sportsman Rotary Club</li> <li>• Isanti JayCee's</li> </ul>

\*Organization that served as lead agency during the ALbD grant period

## ***Leadership and Champions***

The presence of Isanti County Active Living provided several local champions with the opportunity to have a larger voice and influence in the community. The synergistic nature of such collaboration spurred a grassroots movement among community residents to advocate for active living changes. The partnership reached out to and supported several community champions who advocated for active living in a variety of community settings:

- Community residents sat on local government boards and were persistent in their attempts to inform government officials about active living.
- A city planner who had previously worked for Cambridge advocated for the inclusion of active living amenities in city plans.
- Government officials imparted the active living messages into other areas of government.
- A former school coach and another local resident championed active living within schools, including walking to school and creating safe routes.

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*“You almost always need a champion in some community that is going to kind of start the ball rolling. It may be more than one person, but you really seem to need a focal point or a couple focal points to get something like this organized. And, then it just like a flower, it starts blossoming.” -Partner*

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The partnership was also lucky to have the support of a Congressman, who first introduced the ALbD grant to active living proponents in Isanti County. The Congressman continued to work to generate support, funding, and other resources to create policies and environments supportive of active living.

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*“You know, [the Congressman has] really been a backer of active living in all these cities and... he really wants to show that he cares about Cambridge and he’s brought a lot of help to us.” -Staff*

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The Project Director selected to lead Isanti County Active Living was a natural fit, a long-time champion of active living. He had a long history of advocating for active living in the community and had previously volunteered with local trails and greenspace groups to lead efforts to increase access to opportunities for active living. The Project Director had been an established resident of the community for many years, and he made many connections within the community. He had ties to both government (local, regional, national) and residents. This was very advantageous to the partnership because the partnership was more easily able to leverage support for the active living cause. He was a catalyst and source of encouragement for others to become involved in the active living movement. Partners and community residents described him as motivated and persistent and a talented networker.

After the ALbD grant was secured, a part-time Project Coordinator was hired to assist the partnership with planning and administrative work. She had a background in mass communications, public relations, finance, fundraising, and special events planning and became a valuable resource for maintaining momentum and keeping in touch with the national movement. The Project Coordinator was described as being “perfect,” someone who possessed the skills, personality, and energy necessary to do the job.

### ***Funding and Resources***

Staff and partners reached out to a number of local, state, and national funders to introduce the Isanti County Active Living project and to expand the amount of financial and other resources available to support the local active living movement.

The partnership secured monetary and in-kind resources from the following sources:

- Blandin Foundation
- Cambridge Medical Center
- City of Braham
- City of Cambridge
- City of Isanti
- Initiative Foundation
- Isanti County
- Isanti County Public Health
- Federal Transportation Bill
- Great River Energy
- Minnesota Department of Health
- Minnesota Sesquicentennial Grant
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Special Opportunities Grant
- Rotary Club
- Rum River Bike Classic Event
- SAFE-TEA LU (Safe Accountable Flexible Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users)
- State Bonding Bill

### ***Community Supports and Challenges***

While Isanti County had a 20-year history of promoting recreational enhancements (e.g., trails), the partnership still faced challenges to promoting active living in the community. Staff and partners identified a number of potential barriers to engaging residents in ALbD activities. First, the partnership recognized that residents depended on automotive transportation for a majority of their needs and tended to exercise for leisure. The partnership was also concerned that the commuter status of many Isanti County residents would hinder involvement in civic matters. In addition, some land owners were reluctant to accept changes to their longtime homes and were unwilling to sell their property for any further development.

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*“People tell me all the time they see more people out walking but most of them are walking as an exercise, you know, very few do you see walking to get the mail, pick up the prescription, and go to the store.” -Staff*

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Intersections, main roads, country roads, and highways were not accommodating to the needs of bicyclists and pedestrians due to aggressive drivers, lack of bike lanes/shoulders on some roads, and/or lack of adequate crossing signs.



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*“But yeah we don’t have any bike lanes, we don’t really have wide enough streets oftentimes and then you don’t really want to take away parking. We just haven’t had that access. Although the bike club is trying to get them... we’ve got too many things that need to be done, we can’t get them all.” -Staff*

*“And right now, it’s very dangerous to ride on county or on state road highway 95 between Cambridge and North Branch. In fact, a congressman tried to bike it one day coming from North Branch over here on his bicycle. He realized it is terrible, it’s really dangerous.” -Partner*

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The partnership also recognized the need to develop activities to meet the needs of participants of varying skills and abilities (e.g., older adults with mobility barriers, individuals looking for social interactions, people who did not see the need to exercise outside of their physically-active jobs).

A majority of Isanti County residents commute to work by car. Public transportation was not highly developed in Isanti County; however, there were limited public transportation resources available to community residents. For instance, Call-a-Ride, which provided door-to-door service, was available to county residents. This service was not widely known, as it was not well publicized or people believed that the service was only available for certain populations.

In general, Isanti County Active Living had good relationships with policy- and decision-makers. For example, the partnership was able to procure funding for the bike/walk trail because of its relationship with the congressional representative. However, the partnership acknowledged that conflicts could hinder political support for active living. Working across multiple governments required staff and partners to understand and navigate a variety of power dynamics. Staff, partners, and community residents described a number of strategies used to facilitate political support building:

- Build collaboration among political entities
- Remember that government representatives are there to represent the community and advocate for what the community wants
- Develop and maintain relationships with policy and decision-makers
- Encourage policy and decision-makers to participate in programs and events
- Show policy and decision-makers that the community has a vested interest in the projects/programming
- Relay broader implications of active living projects (e.g. effects on other cities, return on investment, benefits to the city/region)
- Report all of the partnership's accomplishments regardless of the scope
- Understand that government processes may be slow
- Understand that turnover within government offices/departments can affect political buy-in and participation

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*“I think the key has been to get the political units to work as best we can together and making them aware. And as things have gone on, we’ve gotten better and better at changing their mindset.” -Staff*

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### **Community Assessment**

In order to inform the planning and implementation of their ALbD work plan, the partnership conducted a number of assessment activities.

In 2005, the Minnesota Department of Health funded an Activity Survey, which assessed active living motivators, active living barriers, possible community changes to encourage active living, and commute times. The Isanti County Public Health Department administered the survey to residents of Isanti County and received over 2,900 responses. In addition to the surveys, two psychologists in the partnership conducted focus groups with residents. They developed a summary of their findings based on the Stages of Change. Results from these assessments were used to help the partnership identify target populations, develop a communications plan, compare Isanti County to national averages, and understand perceived barriers to active living.

At the end of the grant, a follow-up survey was being conducted to look at any changes that may have come about from the ALbD initiative. The partnership planned to use the results from this pre-/post-study to provide evidence to policy-makers on the importance and benefits of ALbD. The partnership encountered one challenge related to the survey: because the survey was being administered by the Health Department, residents thought that their tax dollars were being spent on the survey, making them displeased.

Midway through the grant, an engineering study, including soil borings, soil testing, and preliminary bridge design, was conducted to assess the wetlands for developing a bike/pedestrian crossing and to determine construction constraints for a planned bike trail. The partnership also received a \$10,000 grant from the Blandin Foundation to conduct a feasibility study for a pedestrian/bicycle crossing of the Rum River.

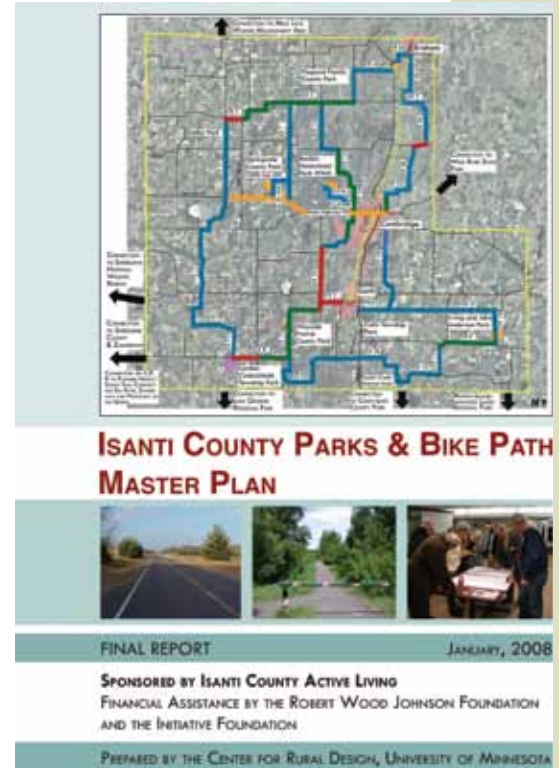


## Policies and Physical Projects

Isanti County Active Living saw the growth and new development in Cambridge, Isanti, and Braham as an opportunity to inject some of the active living ideas into the planning process. Policy influences and physical projects, related partner, staff and community implementation activities, and associated strengths and challenges are described as follows:

### ► **Policies for New Developments/Redevelopments**

- The partnership ensured that new developments must incorporate physical infrastructure for walking and cycling into their plans.
- Cambridge adopted a city policy that requires sidewalks on at least one side of the street and trails connecting to the rest of the city for new developments as well as redevelopment projects; the policy resulted in a number of sidewalks on reconstructed streets.
- New developments in Braham, Cambridge, and Isanti have included trails in neighborhood plans.
- The partnership was able to influence a local developer to incorporate active living principles into Heritage Green, an 86-acre subdivision, to create a mixed-use community that included homes, parks, a community center, pedestrian-friendly streetscape, open space, a portion of the Cambridge-Isanti Bike/Walk Trail, sidewalks, and linkages to surrounding neighborhoods.
- The partnership developed a Park Plan and Master Plan for Active Living for Isanti County that was included in the 10-year Comprehensive Plan.



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*“They’ve been pretty aggressive in trying to make sure that sidewalks and trails and the infrastructure and parks are actually in each of the developments so that residents do have the opportunity to use these types of facilities.” -Partner*

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### ► **Cambridge-Isanti Bike/Walk Trail**

- The partnership invested a considerable amount of time and resources in the development of the Cambridge-Isanti Bike/Walk Trail, which was intended to connect communities in Isanti County through a network of in-town, on and off-street bike lanes, a suspended path over wetlands, and other bike/walk trail design elements.
- This connection had long been desired by residents, and the Active Living by Design grant allowed for the funding necessary to bring the trail to fruition.
- The Rum River Bicycle Classic was held to raise money used to buy easements, hire an engineering firm, and create a project memorandum.
- At the end of the ALbD grant period, the partnership had successfully secured funding for the trail and planned to break ground in 2010.

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*“[The Project Director] had this vision of this trail between Cambridge and Isanti and at that point the transportation advisory committee kind of said all the pieces are not together quite on it, and I think active living became the catalyst for pulling those pieces together.” -Partner*

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### ► *Rum River/Spirit River Nature Walk*

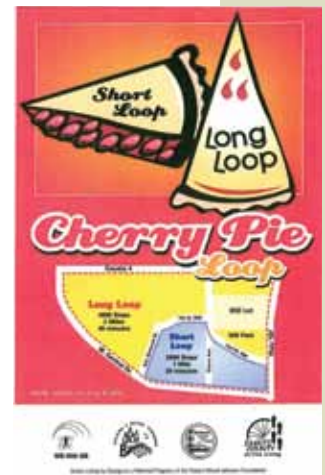


- The Isanti County Active Living Project Director led an effort to convert an underused area of the West Bank of Rum River alongside Anoka Ramsey Community College into a nature walking trail with benches, directional signs, kiosks, interpretive signs describing species, and informational placards.
- The project received strong support from the local government, community residents, and the local community college.
- As part of the trail kick-off, a Rum River Ramble was held in 2004 to highlight the revitalized trail.
- A crossing was also built to accommodate increased traffic, both automobile and foot.

### ► *Other Policies and Physical Projects*

- The following physical projects were completed in the City of Isanti:
  - A stoplight was installed to create a safe pedestrian crossing.
  - Isanti installed a trail along a county road, to provide a safe route for children walking to a nearby middle school.
  - Sidewalks were installed along major streets.
  - An outdoor hockey rink was installed in one park, with attention paid to accessibility.
  - Preliminary planning began for a pedestrian bridge crossing a highway near the site of a new development including schools and housing.
- The following physical projects were completed in the City of Braham:
  - The city constructed a skateboard park for kids, with attention to providing easy, safe access to a highly visible site.
  - The city also worked to improve continuity in their trail system.
  - Steps were taken to create a safe walking route along one street by filling a culvert and creating a plan to stripe roads in order to slow traffic.

- The following physical projects were completed in the City of Cambridge:
  - The city reconstructed a main thoroughfare to include sidewalks on both sides of the street (before there had been none), traffic calming medians, striped bike lanes on both sides of the street, lighting, and streetscaping.
  - Sidewalks were added to a number of streets, and trails were installed to increase linkages between neighborhoods.
  - The city built a skatepark.
- Because of the partnership's influence, other communities in Isanti County began to adopt active living design principles; for example, Athens developed street design policies that required new roads to have an extra three feet on each side for walking and biking.
- The local governments, local organizations, and community residents were supportive of the development of competitive fields, such as baseball/softball diamonds, and soccer fields.
- For many paths, route markers were developed that included information about the length of the path in miles and steps and the amount of time needed to walk the path.
- Cambridge, Isanti, and Braham painted hopscotch stencils in parks and on sidewalks that included the partnership logo. Braham also started a sidewalk art campaign that included dance step stencils.



### **Challenges and Successes**

Partners, staff, and community members identified a number of strengths related to implementing policy and physical project strategies in Isanti County:

- Due to growth and new development, the partnership received the ALbD grant at an ideal time to reach out to policy-makers to ask for their support for active living principles.
- One partner had connections to a local government agency that may have eased the process of trying to get several ordinances passed.
- The governmental support was a catalyst for the partnership to influence physical projects.
- Some of the local governments took it upon themselves to make their communities more activity-friendly.
- Experienced and knowledgeable partners helped guide the partnership on potential costs and barriers as it began planning physical projects.

Partners, staff, and community members identified a number of challenges to implementing policy and physical project strategies in Isanti County:

- Having multiple government entities from several different cities was cumbersome at times, but having someone willing to mediate the process and working to make active living a priority was imperative for project success.
- Some of the physical change projects had some unexpected downfalls; for instance, Isanti installed a stoplight for a safe pedestrian crossing, but there was an initial delay since the bid for the stoplight came in \$100,000 over the original proposed budget.
- The local governments showed good intentions by trying to improve street designs and crossings; however, the designs they chose were not always ideal.
- The partnership had to overcome, and continues to come up against, some community resistance to the development of sidewalks. They have done this by highlighting the benefits of safer walking routes for kids and the aesthetic appeal of sidewalks.
- Some community physical projects were not feasible due to challenges with the terrain (e.g., poor soil for gardens) and/or physical structures already in place (e.g., railroad tracks and gas pipelines forced the trail to take a different route away).

- It was difficult to get the buy-in from some policy-makers; to get the support of local government leaders, the partnership had to help them overcome their reservations about the liabilities associated with the physical projects.
- The governmental process for the development of new parks and facilities tended to be lengthy and intimidating for laypeople; it was important to find a person who was willing to become involved and invest the necessary time and effort to influence government plans.
- Trying to incorporate physical improvements in the community was difficult when working with city departments that were not on-board with the project.
- For some bigger scale, city-sponsored projects, it was hard to get community support if the partnership could not justify the cost and use of tax dollars; there was some fear that the partnership might lose community support by associating itself with projects that community residents opposed.

## Programs and Promotions

Promotional and programmatic efforts of the Isanti County Active Living partnership helped build support for policy and physical projects by increasing awareness of active living and the connection between policies, the built environment, and health. Promotions and programs, related partner, staff, and community implementation activities, and associated strengths and challenges are described as follows.

### ► *Mass Media*

- At the beginning of the grant period, the partnership received considerable media attention from a number of sources, including local newspapers and television channels. Throughout the grant period, the partnership engaged newspapers (articles, and reduced-rate or free advertisements), magazines (articles), and radio stations (interviews and reduced-rate advertisements) to promote ALbD activities.
- For two years, Isanti County Active Living purchased billboard space along a popular county road connecting Cambridge and Isanti to relay its active living messages to the broader public with a new active living message each season.
- The Isanti County Active Living website ([www.co.insanti.mn.us/activeliving.htm](http://www.co.insanti.mn.us/activeliving.htm)) listed community activities and updates and provided links to other community partnerships and organizations.
- The partnership utilized the Community Education brochure, a direct mail document reaching over 11,000 Isanti County residents three times a year, to provide information about active living activities and events.

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*“So, if we got a big backlash, we would really go to the media. We would make presentations at city council meetings. If we were anticipating some pushback, we would get on their agenda and talk about all the benefits of it, you know. And, we would get on the county board agenda because the press is always there and they pick up on these stories. And, so if we have pushback, we usually went with kind of a media blitz to counteract what the pushback was. And, we would do it through the paper and presentations at city councils and county boards.” -Partner*

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### ▶ **Walk the Town**

- Early on in the grant, the partnership realized that many residents were not aware of walking routes in their community.
- Two volunteers developed simple, black and white maps of walking routes, trails, and parks for Isanti, Cambridge, and Braham.
- The maps were distributed at several partnership events and through community publications, such as the triennial Community Education brochure.
- The maps, with prescriptions on the back, were distributed in waiting and examination rooms at the Cambridge Medical Center in conjunction with a prescription program.
- Included on the back of the maps were prescriptions for walking that doctors at local clinics used to “prescribe” exercise to their patients.
- The Chamber of Commerce worked with the partnership to publish the walking routes for the three main cities on the general Isanti County map.
- Later in the grant period, colored versions of the routes were created by a local artist and distributed by the partnership.

### ▶ **Walk to School Day**

- As part of their work with schools, the partnership approached the Community Benefits Council for Cambridge Medical Center to promote Walk to School Day each year, beginning in 2007.
- This event was held in Cambridge and encouraged students and adults to walk for a day.
- Participation, which totaled several hundred people, included: hospital staff, principals, and community members.
- Overall, the event was considered such a great success that the Cambridge Medical Center took over leadership of the walking to school program and walking school buses.

### ▶ **Walkable Community Workshops**

- The partnership worked with the Minnesota Department of Health to host three Walkable Workshops in the cities of Isanti, Braham, and Cambridge.
- The workshops invited local elected officials, public administrators, health officials, transportation planners, local stakeholders, and community residents to explore how land use and transportation decisions affect walking habits, personal health, and overall physical activity.
- These workshops were beneficial in gaining interest and support for making physical changes to the environment to encourage physical activity and received notable attention from the local newspaper.

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*“Some of the walking workshops may have helped open a few eyes... and, maybe it helped to see that yes we do need this. I think we were walking and we saw the kids get off the bus and they had to walk down Whiskey Road and it was winter. There is no place to walk. There wasn’t a sidewalk; there wasn’t a trail.” -Partner*

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### ► *Rum River Bicycle Classic*

- The partnership held the Rum River Bicycle Classic event each year of the grant to raise awareness of active living and to generate funds to support the Cambridge-Isanti Bike/Walk Trail.
- The ride started and ended at Anoka Ramsey Community College with rest stops in Isanti and Braham.
- The routes (14, 21, 40, or 60 miles) led participants throughout the county, exploring the cities such as Athens, Crown, Cambridge, and Isanti.
- At the conclusion of one event, a congressman spoke to the participants about the importance of Active Living by Design, trails, and healthy living.
- The success and sustainability of the event was attributable to the generosity of local businesses (e.g., local outdoors store, Cambridge Medical Center) and the support of the bicycling community.
- The event raised approximately \$20,000 over five years, which was used to buy easements, hire an engineering firm, and create a project memorandum.

### ► *Walking Programs*



- The partnership collaborated with “Faithfully Fit,” a non-denominational faith-based program combining physical activity, healthy eating, and meditation, to offer a senior walking program, which had nearly 30 older adult participants during the spring, summer, and fall.
- The partnership provided the Cambridge Medical Center with pedometers at a reduced cost to support their Obesity Program; in return, the Center provided data from its program, which showed a correlation between the number of steps participants took each day and weight loss. Interest for these walking groups was generated through advertising in newspapers and word-of-mouth.
- The Wheel It, Walk It program developed by the partnership and the Public Health Department of Isanti enabled residents to record the number of steps they took each day by using an inexpensive pedometer; a project coordinator monitored the progress of the participants and used the program to stimulate competition among older adults to encourage slightly longer walks.

### ► **Other Efforts**

- Isanti County Active Living adopted a logo depicting footsteps and a bicycle wheel to convey a consistent message and image; the logo was used on promotional materials, partnership reports, and incentives.
- The partnership participated in a number of community fairs and events to promote active living and inform citizens of the various opportunities to be active.
- Each year of the grant, the partnership sponsored the Isanti Jubilee Run/Walk in Isanti.
- The Isanti Jubilee Run/Walk was a free event that showcased the ease of using the existing community for safe walking or running activity.
- The Senior Commission on Aging permitted the partnership to include flyers in their mailings to promote senior activities.
- The partnership capitalized on an existing Community Education Program to offer free passes to residents interested in joining an indoor walking program in schools and malls during the winter months.

### **Challenges and Successes**

Staff, partners, and community members described several successes related to developing and implementing promotional and programmatic strategies:

- There were external circumstances that strengthened the partnership's messages; for example, high gas prices made residents more amenable to messages that promoted walking as a form of transportation.
- The partnership developed very colorful and appealing promotions that excited people about active living (e.g. Walk the Town signage) and had a lasting presence in the community.
- The partnership leveraged all communication channels to bring about a change in how residents view active living.
- The local media reported frequently on the partnership's activities.
- Some of the smallest promotions were found to be the most successful (e.g., hopscotch, loop signage, and speed signage).
- Several active living messages were reinforced by health care providers, creating a greater sense of urgency and accountability for residents to engage in physical activity.
- Participants of walking programs reported feeling better after participating in group activities and appreciated that the program's flexibility allowed them to attend the sessions of their choice.

Staff, partners, and community members noted several challenges to developing and implementing promotional and programmatic strategies:

- There were some physical barriers that limited the partnership's ability to hold certain promotions in different areas; for example, Walk to School day could not be held in Braham because the road leading to the school was unsafe.
- Schools had limited participation in some promotions, such as the walking school bus, because of the associated liability.
- Many community residents identified the harsh winter weather as a barrier to being active outside during the winter months.

## Sustainability

To have a lasting impact in the community, the partnership prioritized changes to policies that influence the walkability and bikeability of the community (e.g. sidewalk ordinances, trails, bike lanes). These policy changes were intended to promote the inclusion of active living principles in the communities without the continued work of the partnership. Moreover, the policy changes brought about a shift in culture to one that was more supportive of active living, enabling partners to develop long-range planning that incorporated active living principles.

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*“Another big thing that will be good for sustainability is all three cities in the county have agreed to pass ordinances on sidewalks, bike trails, paving roads for walking, so we managed to get that into policy... during the comprehensive planning phase for all three cities in the county, we were able to move forward a park and greenspace plan through... so all these techniques that we have done have been incorporated into policy that is going to survive [the partnership].”*

*-Partner*

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With the 18-month sustainability grant offered by ALbD, the partnership planned to look at ways to institutionalize several of the active living initiatives under the umbrella of partners’ organizations. The partners also sought ways to allow the formal ALbD partnership to continue in some fashion concerning the implementation of health improvement projects in Isanti County. The partnership intends to use the experiences and skills acquired during the ALbD grant to work with other rural areas in Minnesota to generate interest in incorporating active living their communities.

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