The University of Iowa Prevention Research Center (UI PRC), first funded by the CDC in 2002, focuses on rural health, using a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach. Rural Americans are more likely to be poorer, older, obese, and less likely to partake in physical activity than urban Americans. The overall objective of the UI PRC’s core research project is to determine the effectiveness and implementation of Community Guide strategies with a community-based physical activity intervention called Active Ottumwa.

Ottumwa is a micropolitan new destination community in Iowa. Micropolitan communities represent an important classification of nonmetropolitan areas when considering rural public health. A micropolitan community is a population center of <50,000 with outlying rural counties that have strong social and economic ties with the core. These communities are often “new destination” communities for the growing Latino population in the US. Ottumwa, like other micropolitan communities in the Midwest, has an increasing elderly population, a shrinking overall population, and many populations that suffer from health disparities (e.g., poor, rural, Latino).

Why a research project about physical health? In 2013, the partnership in Ottumwa conducted a community survey to identify community health issues. The random-digit dial survey (n = 1011) assessed health behaviors. Results showed that only 36% Ottumwa residents met the physical activity recommendation, compared to 43.9% of Iowans. Additionally, lower income residents (25%) were less likely to meet the recommendations when compared to others (50%).

What is Active Ottumwa? Active Ottumwa, a community-based physical activity intervention, uses Physical Activity Leaders (PALs) to encourage physical activity among Ottumwans by providing social and behavioral support and advocate for social and environmental changes.
PALs are volunteer Ottumwa community members who are natural leaders, and work within their social groups to carry out project activities which are free and open to all community members. The UI PRC is recruiting, training, and supporting PALs to adapt and deliver evidence-based physical activity interventions such as Mall Walking and a Walking Trail Program. Additionally Active Ottumwa will increase the usage of community parks and trails to help meet this goal.

Our primary hypotheses is that Active Ottumwa will increase observed minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity among the community’s adult residents leading to an increase in the proportion of residents meeting US physical activity recommendations. The evaluation includes telephone surveys and the use of an accelerometer to measure physical activity of a random sample of community members.

Contact Information:
To learn more about Active Ottumwa like us on Facebook or visit us on our website http://cph.uiowa.edu/prc/. To view our Active Ottumwa video please go here http://www.public-health.uiowa.edu/prc/active-ottumwa/