

# Renovated Stairwells Provide Physical Activity Opportunities for Omaha Residents

Tameshia Harris

## At A Glance

More than 330 residents of three low-income housing towers in Omaha, Nebraska, have safer places for physical activity thanks to a partnership between Creighton University and the Omaha Housing Authority (OHA). In September 2016, Creighton and OHA set out to encourage residents and OHA staff to use tower stairs instead of elevators. Coalition partners renovated the poorly lit, seldom used stairwells. The results not only encouraged more physical activity but inspired the creation of walking clubs, dance classes, and more.



## Public Health Challenge

Twenty-five percent of Nebraska adults got no leisure time physical activity at all in 2015, but almost 40% of lower income adults were inactive, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans recommends that adults get 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity per

week to lower their risk of chronic diseases. Little changes like taking the stairs instead of the elevator can help increase active minutes. However, residents told OHA staff that they didn't feel safe in the stairwells because of poor lighting, unwelcome activity, and loitering.

## Find Out More

This project is supported by CDC's Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) cooperative agreement. Creating access to physical activity opportunities can help people of all ages be more active and lower their risk of chronic diseases. For more information, visit <http://www.creighton.edu/reach>.

*Increasing visible signage and improving stairwells has cultivated an environment that is more conducive to physical activity. Not only that, the increased activity along with the improved stairwells enhanced the building.*

- Rachele Tucker

## Contact

### Tameshia Harris

Creighton University  
2500 California Plaza  
Hixson-Lied Science Bldg,  
Suite G-13  
Omaha, NE 68178  
Phone: 402-280-4112  
Fax: 402-280-4030

## Approach

OHA has 11 multi-unit towers, each with 11 stories. OHA renovated the first three levels of stairwells in three of the towers to encourage more stair use for residents. OHA painted the stairwells purple and gold because residents said they were eye-catching and made them feel good. Staff also placed motivational messages on the walls like "Every journey begins with just a single step." OHA also developed "health ambassador" training for residents who were willing to serve as healthy role models. Ambassadors are encouraged to develop customized physical activity policies and opportunities for the towers where they live.

## Results

OHA residents embraced the renovations, encouraging messages, and the health ambassador program. Twelve residents received health ambassador training and serve as health champions for their towers. Because residents are now using the stairs regularly, they say loitering hasn't been an issue and the stairwells remain clean. The improved stairwells also cultivate an environment that promotes physical activity. Residents formed walking clubs and dance classes at two additional towers. Each week, the walking clubs and dance classes draw a total of about 75 participants.

## What's Next

Creighton University and OHA will continue to encourage residents and OHA staff to use the stairwells for daily physical activity. OHA is educating other tower managers on ways to implement the stairwell program in their towers. Messages to other managers include suggestions on how to keep the painted areas fresh and assure the motivational messages remain intact.