



## Enhancing Menominee Routes and Destinations for Movement

The residents of Menominee County/Nation are disproportionately affected by obesity and experiencing limited access to places to be physically active. The **Kemāmaceqtaq** team of Extension Menominee County/Nation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, brought together community partners and youth to assess opportunities to be active everyday and to generate strategies for enhancement. This community-engaged process led to park revitalization projects, sidewalk and crosswalk improvements, a network of bicycle racks and bicycle safety trainings, and new walking trails featuring Menominee language, art, and cultural teachings of local plant life. Additionally, this experience has established a new standard for development and transportation planning that emphasizes community engagement and collaboration among government agencies.

### Public Health Challenge

Over 4 in 10 Menominee County/Nation residents live with obesity, reflective of a long history of systemic oppression of Indigenous people by white colonists that has limited economic opportunities, access to healthy foods, and places to be physically active. Only about 1 in 15 people in Menominee County/Nation have access to places to be physically active.

### Approach

To better understand current opportunities for being physically active everyday in the Menominee community, the **Kemāmaceqtaq** team convened government agency partners and local youth to complete Wisconsin's [Active Community Toolkit](#) assessment tool in Spring 2019. Participants included individuals from the Menominee County administration (e.g., Highway Department, Sheriff Department, Department of Land Conservation, Forestry, and Zoning), the Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin administration (e.g., Community Development, Transit Services), and community youth members. These various units had little opportunity to collaborate with one



*Grand opening of Chief Niwopet Park in Neopit, Wisconsin*

another previously, and no prior experience in community engagement in their planning. Results from the Active Community Checklist identified opportunities to improve community design and land use, promote active transportation, enhance places to be physically active, and improve coordination and support across partners.

Youth leaders, agency partners, and other community partners then completed three [walking audits](#) during the Summer 2019 to dig deeper into the findings of the Active Community Checklist. A total of 6.4 miles were walked and audited in the communities of Keshena and Neopit. With youth in the lead, the walking audits identified areas of potential improvement including traffic calming measures and signage, lighting, and sidewalk maintenance. Additionally, the walking audits identified opportunities to enhance recreation facility destinations through art, signage, park-clean ups, and other infrastructure improvements like benches. The intergenerational approach enhanced partner buy-in and reinforced commitment to promoting health across generations.

Project partners worked collaboratively to translate the assessment results to the planning and implementation of two park improvement projects of the Menominee Indian Tribe in 2019 and 2020: Chief Niwopet Park in Neopit and Sturgeon Park in Keshena. **Kemāmaceqtaq** team members

assisted with planning park enhancement efforts, led continued community engagement efforts, and provided technical assistance on incorporating Menominee language and culture into the health promotion strategy.

## Results

The grand opening of Chief Niwopet Park took place on October 26, 2019. The former ballpark was renamed and revamped with sustainable design principles, informed by *Kemāmaḥeḥtaq* team members. The park was Indigenized through the integration of Menominee art, language, and history and connects the Neopit community with a Menominee chief that fought to establish the reservation for future generations. Park themes connect to Chief Niwopet's belief in planning for the future: installation of a pollinator garden; inclusion of a physical activity obstacle course, walking trail, and traditional Indigenous game structures; and park signage that features Indigenous art and Menominee language and reflects Chief Niwopet's clan. The newly enhanced destination is within the White City neighborhood, less than one-half mile by bicycle or on foot for youth at the Menominee Tribal School and ¼ mile for youth at the Woodland Boys and Girls Club.

Results from these assessments and the planning process also informed the Menominee Indian Tribe's redesign of the Keshena Falls area. Keshena Falls is a popular community destination and community walking route, a viewing spot where the ancient sturgeon spawn each spring, and a swimming spot in the summer. The Tribe's redesign increased safety and improved the walking routes and integrated sustainable design principles with Menominee culture and history. *Kemāmaḥeḥtaq* team member Jennifer Gauthier met with the design firm and the Community Development department to provide feedback on design plans through the lens of cultural appropriateness and planned community engagement events to gain further feedback.

This process of community-engaged and collaborative inter-agency planning has set a new standard for partners in Menominee County/Nation. Since these park improvements, partners have worked together to respond to community members' other priorities for active route and destinations, including sidewalk and crosswalk enhancements, "slow down" signs and other pedestrian safety measures, new bicycle racks at 5 highly-visited businesses, and benches, tables, and murals painted by

local artists in various public spaces. With support from the *Kemāmaḥeḥtaq* team, the Menominee Indian Tribe undertook a major sidewalk improvement project to connect key destinations in the town of Keshena, including Sturgeon Park, the Tribal Clinic, and the high school. Additionally, a new walking trail near government workplaces features signage with Menominee language, art, and teachings about the local trees to promote outdoor activity alongside cultural connections.

## Sustaining Success

Initial efforts to bring together government agency partners and engage community members in placemaking has established a new way of working and helped enhance active routes and destinations throughout Menominee County/Nation. Partners describe this work as a new way of planning that they will carry forward into future projects. From the experiences in the *Kemāmaḥeḥtaq* project, partners and community members report reconnection to Menominee identity as "movers" and shared commitment to providing one another opportunities to engage in movement across Menominee spaces.

## Quote

*"There is a certain perspective that you can only get as a child growing up here. When I was a kid growing up on the reservation, I knew every trail... You see the community through a different lens when you are [an adult] driving it. This walking assessment, and seeing how the kids talked about the community, it really brought me back. Working with young people was a rich experience."*

-Jeremy Weso, Highway Commissioner of the Menominee County Highway Department

## For more information, visit:

<https://fvi.extension.wisc.edu/news/2019/12/06/kemamaḥeḥtaq-project/>

*This effort is made possible by Outreach Programs to Reduce the Prevalence of Obesity in High Risk Rural Areas Agreement (1809) funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.*

## Contact Information

**Cooperative agreement:** Outreach Programs to Reduce the Prevalence of Obesity in High Risk Rural Areas Agreement (1809) funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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**Strategy focus:** Physical activity

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