

Active Southern West Virginia

May 2020

Active Southern West Virginia (Active SWV) has been providing community-based physical activity opportunities in southern West Virginia since 2015. Stakeholders in southern West Virginia, including the New River Gorge Regional Development Authority, founded Active SWV as a response to the exceedingly high rates of heart disease, diabetes, shorter life expectancies, drug abuse, and obesity in southern West Virginia, as well as the importance of a healthy workforce to improve quality of life. Active SWV is a non-profit organization charged with the goal of not only preventing chronic diseases in southern West Virginia, but also of making this region a model for health, wellness, and active living. Active SWV serves Fayette, Summers, Raleigh, and Nicholas counties, and is planning to expand to more counties in the coming years.

When asked about their successes, Executive Director, Melanie Seiler described Active SWV's unique organizational model; relying on community volunteers, or as Active SWV calls them, Community Captains, to provide meaningful programming throughout the four counties Active SWV serves. Melanie shared a story about a community member who, upon finding that Active SWV currently did not have a water aerobics program, responded with, "Well, let me see what it would take to be able to do that." Active SWV was able to help this community member find where she could get certified, where she could offer the class, and someone who could mentor her. In addition to physical activity programming offered in community settings, Active SWV partners with schools to coordinate Kids Run Clubs, in workplaces to promote the Work@Health program, and in local government by facilitating Bicycle Pedestrian Action Committees throughout the 4 county region.



Melanie, leading a dynamic warm up before the Regional Fun Run at Woodrow Wilson High School
Beckley, WV

Melanie described how Active SWV's unique approach is supporting their community in important ways:

It seems like we filled a void, where in our southern area...there is a population that didn't have...a culture to fit into, and that is where Active SWV is able to be the every-day person's organization. Any amount of walking down your street. That was the goal. That was the success. It wasn't participating in a triathlon; it wasn't leading the workout of the day...it was a much more attainable and realistic goal for a big population that didn't have a place to be.



Erin Reid, setting up signage at the Regional Fun Run at
Woodrow Wilson High School
Beckley, WV

Active SWV has been a part of the WV Health Connection initiative since July of 2018 and has done an immense job of tracking their program's attendance data, planning a referral system with local providers and organizations, sharing about their work with other partners, and looking to expand the services that they offer. Veronica Crosier, Erin Reid, and Melanie Seiler have all recently been trained as Lifestyle Coaches to offer the National DPP at Active SWV, as well. Way to go Active SWV!

To learn more about the successes of the Active SWV team and community,
head to their website at <https://activeswv.org/> !