



# Walking Their Way to Success:



## The Illinois Physical Therapy Foundation

Arthritis is a major health problem in the United States. It is a leading cause of disability among U.S. adults, causing joint pain, swelling, and stiffness, and decreasing mobility. Twenty-three percent of all U.S. adults have arthritis, and half of adults aged 65 years or older have been diagnosed with it. Studies have found walking to be a safe and effective way to manage arthritis.

### Keys to Success

Increase opportunities to disseminate WWE by leveraging local public health initiatives, like falls prevention workshops, or existing networks that reach older adults with arthritis, like retirement homes.

The Arthritis Foundation's **Walk With Ease (WWE) program** is an arthritis-appropriate evidence based intervention that reduces arthritis pain and improves overall health. In 2017, the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors (NACDD) gave grants to American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) state chapters, foundations, and other organizations to bring WWE group and self-directed programs to people with arthritis. NACDD looked for grantees that had established relationships with local physical therapy clinics that could implement WWE in the community. The Illinois Physical Therapy Foundation (IPTF) is one of several grantees that fit the bill. Their experience offers insights into how community-clinical linkages can help connect more people with programs like WWE.

### Physical therapy clinics find Walk With Ease a good fit

When **Linda Griffith**, Operations & Special Programs Manager at the Illinois Physical Therapy Association (IPTA), became aware of NACDD's grant opportunity, she knew it would appeal to IPTF—the non-profit arm that provides financial, fundraising, and other assistance to IPTA. "We were looking for ways to support [IPTF's] mission," she said, and its role in raising public awareness about physical therapy.

With the grant awarded, Ms. Griffith used IPTF's communication channels—website, social media accounts, and email lists—to connect with physical therapy clinics across Illinois and encourage them to offer WWE. Physical therapy clinics are particularly suited for offering WWE, as the program promotes physical activity, an important adjunct to physical therapy. IPTF's partner clinics could leverage pre-existing relationships to reach potential participants. To get clinics on board, Ms. Griffith positioned the program as a way they could engage with the community—both to promote local health and wellness and to raise their own profile.

In addition to the community engagement aspect, WWE appealed to IPTF's clinic partners because it is evidence-based and easy to implement, and there is no cost



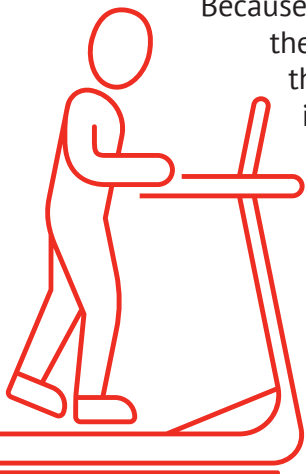
to the clinic for materials or training. “It was an easy program for me to start,” said **Renee Castellano, DPT**, a physical therapist at a greater Chicago area clinic. **Sarah Teague**, a physical therapy assistant in Springfield, Illinois, shared a similar sentiment. “I didn’t have to do a whole lot of work,” she said. “It was simple for me to do.”

Although most physical therapists were unfamiliar with WWE at the start, they found the Arthritis Foundation’s guidebook—Walk With Ease: Your Guide to Walking for Better Health, Improved Fitness, and Less Pain—a good educational resource. As Ms. Castellano said, “I wanted to make sure I read the book before I put [the program] out there.”

## Relationships are essential for participants from start to finish

To recruit participants for WWE, IPTF’s partner clinics tapped into the built-in relationships between physical therapists and their patients.

Because patients saw their therapists as credible messengers, they were more likely to trust the program; however, they also expected their therapists to be actively involved for the duration of their participation. And because this patient population tends to be older with more physical limitations, some were unsure or apprehensive about their ability to participate. The experience of the IPTF partner clinics suggests that when promoting WWE as adjunct to care, physical therapists may need to be hands-on. “Folks thought they had to walk a mile,” observed Ms. Teague. “They needed guidance on the program, especially at the beginning.” For this reason, clinics found it helpful to identify a WWE “champion” on staff—one physical



therapist responsible for overseeing the program, supporting participants, and staying on top of emails.

The ongoing connection with their therapist was a key motivator for many participants to sign up for WWE, but there were other selling points. Participants liked that the program was free, allowed them to walk at their own pace, and helped them maintain an active lifestyle. Others, said Ms. Castellano, “had personal reasons that motivated them. One patient said, ‘I’d like to be able to walk on my vacation.’”

Ms. Griffith at IPTF provided templates for clinics to support participants from recruitment to completion. Materials included a recruitment flyer, resource sheet, email templates, and a WWE information sheet. The clinics adapted and branded the materials for their own use. Having them enabled clinics to easily promote the program and engage participants.

## Early success points towards the future

By November 2018, IPTF and its 22 partner clinics had informed more than 5,500 people about WWE, distributed 600 WWE guide books, and enrolled nearly 300 people in the program—about 88% of whom completed it. As IPTF looks to continue its efforts, their initial experience suggests ways that organizations like theirs can act as “hubs” for sustainability—such as fostering a learning community among their peers and growing a library of tips, tools, and lessons learned.

## Keys to Success

Have a plan for engaging and onboarding partner clinics. Build in time for physical therapists to learn about WWE.



## Keys to Success

WWE group and self-directed formats have different advantages and disadvantages. When deciding which to offer, consider patient population, available staff, clinic resources, and tracking methods.



## Acknowledgments

Special thanks to: Linda Griffith, Operations & Special Programs Manager, Illinois Physical Therapy Association; Renee Castellano, DPT, Greater Chicago area; Sarah Teague, PT Assistant, Springfield, Illinois. Support for this project was provided by the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors through a cooperative agreement with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Westat, Inc., provided research, evaluation, and communication support.