

UNM PRC Anniversary Story November 2016

PRC Takes Rural Community Project Statewide

VIVA Connects is a program developed by the University of New Mexico Prevention Research Center (UNM PRC) and funded by the CDC. It began as a community-academic partnership (VIVA-Step Into Cuba) between the small rural village of Cuba, New Mexico, and the UNM PRC, when local residents approached the PRC requesting assistance with identifying, implementing, and evaluating strategies to get people moving. The rest, as they say, is history.

Cuba became the “beta” site and core research project for the UNM PRC. Using recommendations from *The Community Guide*, the project focused for the first 5 years on increasing access to places to walk through the development and enhancement of walking trails and sidewalks, improvement of the local park, and social support for physical activity through community walks and a community-wide campaign. It included collaboration between the PRC and various local, state, and federal agencies, such as the US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and NM Department of Transportation and the local school district, a local non-profit organization, and the local clinic.



Word of VIVA-Step Into Cuba’s successes quickly got around. And since Cuba is similar to many other communities in New Mexico, it became the buzz. Everyone wanted to know “HOW did you do it?” That’s where VIVA Connects took off. Building on the successes of VIVA-Step Into Cuba, and guided by the lessons learned, the UNM PRC is creating a network of Action Communities across New Mexico. To date, 14 communities have joined. VIVA Connects includes in-person contact and a web-based platform that serves as an engagement and communication portal for promoting active communities. It provides current evidence-based recommendations, user-tested prevention strategies, best practices and lessons learned, “ask the expert” facilitation, training modules, and webinars. The excitement of scaling up the successful evidence-based strategies from Cuba is growing. The UNM PRC will soon have a day of learning and sharing at the “beta” site.

“I ask them where they walk (not what are they doing to stay active) and where—because I am curious. More people are walking...they take one look at me and start walking. I’m not a fanatic, but I don’t see anything else that is such a win-win thing to talk about. I think there is a sort of momentum—critical mass phenomenon—that gets a community going.”

