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Building Active Communities

The Ever Active Adults Project

Jennifer Dechaine, Older Adult Coordinator, Alberta Centre for Active Living

Increasingly, Alberta is evaluating its programs and services for its aging population in order to develop strategic plans for the future. One major concern is how to keep older adults healthy and aging successfully. Intersectoral community projects not only pool funding, but other resources such as ideas, time, support, and marketing. The more people you get on-board in the beginning, the more likely they are to adopt or contribute to your new initiative.

Purpose and Background

Ever Active Adults is an Alberta Centre for Active Living project funded by the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation. This intersectoral project aims to improve physical activity opportunities in publicly funded seniors' housing by training practitioners in housing and care facilities. This project will develop, distribute, and implement training for practitioners who provide programs in seniors' housing.

Ever Active Adults responds both to government policy and current research. The driving force behind the project was Recommendation 18 in the Alberta Active Living Strategy:

That all operators of housing and care institutions for older adults be required to provide facilities and resources, including appropriate staff, in order to provide opportunities for their residents to engage in regular physical activity (Alberta Active Living Task Force, 1998).

Ever Active Adults is also based on what is currently known about older adults and physical activity. A recent report by the Alberta Centre for Well-Being explored the components of healthy active aging (Poon, Spence, Watchman, & Carlson, 1999). The Centre also developed a video and discussion guide to help practitioners understand the physical activity successes, barriers, and challenges faced by older adults (Carlson & Tuininga, 1999).

Research also indicates that although long-term care facilities provide physical activity programming for residents, fewer than 50% of the continuing-care facilities in Alberta meet Health Canada's frequency and duration guidelines for endurance, flexibility, and strength activities (Poon et al., 1999). Alberta also currently lacks a standardized training program for physical activity practitioners in seniors' lodges. Existing leadership programs

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Alberta
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Active Living

Research and education for the promotion of physical activity



do not offer training specifically for practitioners working in Alberta senior citizens' lodges, nor do these programs incorporate the determinants of health into their design or delivery.

Where Are We Now?

Ever Active Adults is in the second of three phases. We have completed the curriculum and have trained facilitators to deliver the program to activity coordinators. With the support of our advisory committee, we have successfully increased awareness, interaction, and collaboration among stakeholders in seniors' housing and wellness. As a result of this project, decision-makers responsible for Alberta senior citizens' lodges know more about:

- the importance of physical activity programming;
- the supports for and barriers to physical activity programming in lodges;
- the policy/guideline development process for physical activity programming in lodges;
- best practices for older adult physical activity.

We hope that the project will continue to increase partnerships among those responsible for Alberta senior citizens' lodges and that activity coordinators will use the training in daily practice.

Ever Active Adults: Reasons for Success

The Project Advisory Committee

The Ever Active Adults advisory committee guides the project and works to improve standards for physical activity programming in seniors' lodges. This committee is made up of decision-makers from:

- seniors' health and housing government departments;
- health and fitness organizations;

- physical activity professionals and researchers;
- seniors' lodges;
- housing and community services;
- gerontology experts.

An Evidence-Based Project

Ever Active Adults includes three components: research, education, and policy. We surveyed activity coordinators, lodge managers, and residents from across the province to ensure that the project was evidence-based. We also audited the physical environment of lodges as related to physical activity. Information from these studies led to the curriculum and has helped us develop policy.

Ever Active Adults "aims to improve physical activity opportunities in publicly funded seniors' housing by training practitioners in housing and care facilities."

—Jennifer Dechaine, Alberta Centre for Active Living

Partnerships

Ever Active Adults and the University of Alberta Technologies for Learning Institute have ensured that the educational component and curriculum followed best practices for instructional design and adult learning. We have produced a manual and course framed within the determinants of health that bring together pre-existing Alberta physical activity resources and older adult services.

Another key partnership is with the Alberta Fitness Leadership Certification Association (AFLCA) who helped to develop the course. Ever Active Adults will become an AFLCA certificate course and will eventually be delivered completely by AFLCA. The advisory committee, AFLCA, Be Fit For Life Centres, and regional health authorities will create awareness about the project and the importance of physical activity in seniors' housing.

Intersectoral Collaboration

The project's policy component relies on intersectoral collaboration, critical both to improving physical activity in seniors' housing and the sustainability of the Ever Active Adults project. Our advisory committee is developing recommenda-

tions for standards on the "life enrichment" services offered in publicly funded seniors' lodges, the level of training required for leaders of physical activity programs, and what to include in an appropriate physical activity program.

Keys to Successful Community Projects

Four elements are critical to the success of community projects.

The first is to *involve all stakeholders from the outset of the project*. Although more time-consuming, everyone, from the lodge residents and their families, to the manager of seniors' housing policy, to decision-makers in Alberta Health and Wellness, helped develop the Ever Active Adults project. Work done in isolation often stays that way.

The second element is to *position the project in the current political and social environment*. For example, you need to know whether there is a need and support for the project and whether the government will make it a priority (and, if not, how to increase interest in the project).

Evaluation, the third component, both guides the project stakeholders and ensures that objectives are achieved. People are more likely to get involved if they know where a project is going, how it is going to reach that point, and how they can help to achieve that result.

The fourth element depends on the first three—*funding*. Continued funding is more likely for projects with detailed plans and budgets, realistic goals, and measurable outcomes.

References available on request or from the Alberta Centre for Active Living web site at www.centre4activeliving.ca.

The Ever Active Adults Course

Designed for activity coordinators in seniors' lodges, the course includes information on:

- class design and programming;
- safety;
- working with residents who have special conditions; and
- using the resources in your community to improve your programming.

For more information about course dates and registration, please contact:

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Corporate Social Responsibility: We All Win

Daniel Marzantowicz (BCom), Communications and Marketing Assistant, Edmonton YMCA

All organizations, including health and wellness centres, are responsible to the larger community. Social responsibility can take many forms—it may be as simple as donating a part of sales to charities or as involved as starting a corporate policy to promote volunteerism. A well planned, executed, and controlled social responsibility initiative benefits both community and organization. Health and wellness centres also stand to benefit from being socially responsible.

Social Responsibility

1. Then and Now

In his essay "The Social Responsibility of Business Is to Increase Profits," Nobel Laureate Milton Friedman said that a business' only social responsibility was "to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase profits so long as it stays within the rules of the game" (Friedman, 1970). Today, many would disagree with such a profit-oriented statement. At the very least, an organization is responsible to its stakeholders, who include customers and employees as well as stockholders. Companies whose products are unsafe will not be profitable for long.

The Tylenol case is a good example of social responsibility. In the 1980s, after reports that Tylenol bottles were laced with cyanide, Johnson & Johnson recalled 31 million bottles (worth more than \$100 million) to protect the public and the brand's reputation. Today, Tylenol remains one of the best selling brands (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 1994).

Business has now accepted a wider view of social responsibility: ethical organizations consider the external costs of daily operations to the wider society. An external cost, such as pollution from a company's factory, can harm innocent community members. In addition to government sanctions against the company, a socially irresponsible company can lose the loyalty of its customers, since consumers are becoming increasingly concerned both about their environment and public welfare. Employees also want to know that they work for an ethical company (Colvin, 2001).

2. Promoting Community Well-Being

A socially responsible organization also believes that the well-being of its community affects the success of its operations (Business in the Community, 2001). For example, IBM's Reinventing Education program trains public school teachers (IBM, 2001).

This type of initiative can influence the health and well-being of the larger community, since well educated people are more likely to:

- work full-time in rewarding jobs;
- suffer from fewer economic hardships;
- report a greater sense of control over their lives;

"Health and wellness centres can educate the public about fitness and promote a more active culture, while at the same time improving their own financial performance."

—Daniel Marzantowicz, Edmonton YMCA

- exercise;
- get health check-ups;
- drink moderately;
- not smoke (Frankish, Milligan, & Reid, 1998).

These factors and lifestyle behaviours are all associated with good health and enhanced well-being (Frankish et al., 1998). IBM understands that if the people within a community are healthy and skilled, it will have a larger pool from which to hire. Moreover, if people have jobs, consumer spending increases.

Cause-related marketing is another way organizations can contribute to community well-being by donating a portion of revenues to non-profit causes. For example, Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream donates 7.5% of its pre-tax profits to charities (Kryhul, 2000).

3. The Organization's Bottom Line

Good corporate citizenship can result in concrete benefits, e.g.,

- more effective recruitment;
- higher employee and customer retention;
- enhanced company reputation and brand image;
- higher financial returns (Verschoor, 2001).

Shared Vision, a New York technology consulting firm, gives its employees one paid week off each year to volunteer for a charity, a policy that helps the company to attract and retain talented people. Giving employees an opportunity to volunteer is both a job "perk" and can increase job satisfaction. Furthermore, a satisfied employee is more likely to stay with the organization (Koss-Feder, 2000).

An organization's position on social responsibility can also be the "tie breaker" in consumer purchases, especially if a company aligns itself with a cause that its customers believe in (Mastromartino, 1993). As Angela Kryhul (2000) puts it, "More than ever, consumers want to feel good about the products they buy." According to the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy (Imagine: A New Spirit of Community, 2000), corporate charitable donations in Canada have more than doubled over the past decade. But, to influence purchase decisions, an organization must publicize its social responsibility work through advertising and other public relations initiatives. (Of course, financial performance does not depend entirely on good corporate citizenship—other important factors include sound marketing and financial planning.)

Social Auditing to Ensure Success

Careful planning, implementation, and monitoring using a social audit can help ensure that a social responsibility initiative benefits both the organization and its community. For an effective social audit, an organization needs to carry out the following steps (Berkowitz, Crane, Kerin, Hartley, & Rudelius, 1995).

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Recognize the rationale for implementing a social responsibility plan and the social goals your organization wants to promote. Society now expects more community involvement from organizations—research can help identify the needs of that community.

Identify causes that are consistent with the organization's mission, values, goals, and strategies. The entire organization is more likely to support a social responsibility plan for a consistent cause. Support from senior management is especially important, since they control resources and have the most influence.

Determine organizational objectives for a social responsibility plan. Objectives should be SMART: specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound (like marketing and advertising objectives).

Specify the type and amount of resources needed to achieve set social responsibility objectives. For example, if your company wants to implement a volunteerism plan, support employees by offering time off for volunteering.

Evaluate how social responsibility efforts perform relative to their objectives. You should also decide whether to change your efforts and assess the appropriateness of future involvement.

Social Responsibility and Health and Wellness

According to *Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living* (Health Canada, 1998), physical activity reduces the risk of premature death, coronary heart disease, obesity, high blood pressure, adult-onset diabetes, osteoporosis, stroke, depression, and cancer. Other benefits of physical activity include better health, improved fitness, better posture and balance, weight control, stronger muscles and bones, and relaxation and reduced stress. Yet, despite these benefits, 64% of Canadians are still not active enough to benefit their health through physical activity (Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, 2001).

Health and wellness centres can educate the public about fitness and promote a more active culture (and at the same time improve their own bottom line).

Some health club representatives speak at workplaces and in schools to promote proper nutrition and the benefits of regular physical activity (while also educating the audience about their own clubs). Health clubs can also hold group classes at local community recreation halls. To induce parents to work out regularly, health and wellness centres like the YMCA offer high-quality child care for parents and after-school programs that incorporate values of caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility.

Socioeconomic disparity marginalizes many of our fellow citizens, limiting their access to essential goods and depriving them of any meaningful role in social life (Lessard, 1997). In response, the YMCA offers membership assistance and outreach programs to people in need, giving them an opportunity to benefit from physical activity, regardless of income level. The YMCA also provides many social programs through its Enterprise Centre, offering an alternative education program, employment services, and an entrepreneurial program, as well as its Family Ties program that helps families get off social assistance.

Health and wellness organizations' corporate policies can encourage employees to volunteer. CIBC (and its 7,000 employees) helped to raise more than \$10 million for breast cancer research, education, diagnosis, and treatment (CIBC, 2001). Employees could also mentor youth, increasing young people's enthusiasm about physical activity.

Summing Up

A properly implemented social responsibility initiative can lead to many benefits for both the organization and community. Health and wellness centres are uniquely positioned to positively affect the well-being and health of their communities, while also improving their own bottom lines. Volunteering, donations, and sponsorship are some of the ways that health and wellness centres can positively affect their communities.

Social responsibility no longer involves only the company, as Friedman suggested in 1970. Rather, social responsibility is mutual—organizations affect society and society's well-being can influence organizations' success.

References available on request or from the Alberta Centre for Active Living web site at www.centre4activeliving.ca.

Ideas for Action in the Community

- Establish safe, well lighted walking, jogging, and bicycle paths.
- Provide areas to secure bicycles near workplaces, shopping areas, and other public or private buildings.
- Convert downtown centres into pedestrian malls. Arrange for shopping malls or school gymnasiums to open early for walkers.
- Secure access to and adequate lighting for outdoor playing fields, university or school track fields, parks, tennis courts, and other community resource areas to allow evening use by community residents.
- Make public stairwells accessible, ventilated, well lighted, safe, and clean.
- Establish police precincts at inner-city community recreation facilities, and security escort services from program locations to parking lots or garages.
- Develop parks or playgrounds in vacant lots or accessible rooftops, or convert surplus public lands into park and recreation facilities.
- Establish playgrounds for children and adults. Develop walking paths around children's playgrounds to foster activity among the adults who accompany the children.
- Provide transportation, child-care services, or other services that overcome barriers to participation. Advocate for inclusion of major community exercise or athletic facilities on public transportation routes.
- Map out neighbourhood walking paths and install distance markers to help people judge distances.
- Combine physical activity and environmental projects, such as cleaning up beaches, along park trails, or along roads.
- Build fitness and walking paths that are convenient to all community residents.

Adapted and reprinted from the US Department of Health and Human Services (1999).

References available on request or from the Alberta Centre for Active Living web site at www.centre4activeliving.ca.

Beyond the Physical Activity Experience: Tales from the Dragon Boat Women

Kerry McGannon, PhD (Research Coordinator, Alberta Centre for Active Living), and Dot Laing, MA

Breast cancer is the most frequently diagnosed cancer in Canadian women. In 2001, an estimated 19,500 women were diagnosed with cancer, and 5,500 died from it (Canadian Cancer Society, 2001a). A woman has a one in 9.4 chance of developing breast cancer and a one in 25.8 chance of dying from it (Canadian Cancer Society, 2001b). On the other hand, the good news is that approximately 75% of women with the disease will survive (National Cancer Institute of Canada, 2000), due to early detection, advanced technology, and adjuvant therapies (i.e., therapies applied after the initial treatment to suppress the formation of secondary tumours).

Treatment for women living with breast cancer is an arduous and formidable experience. Additionally, depression and low self-esteem are common outcomes of the disease. Thus, a longer life may not equal a high quality of life. The current challenge for health professionals and communities is to search for interventions that enhance the quality of life of women living with breast cancer.

"Quality of life" refers to a person's

- physical capacity (e.g., ability to perform daily tasks);
- symptoms from the disease or its treatment (e.g., fatigue or nausea);
- social interactions (i.e., personal relationships); and
- psychological well-being (Smart & Yates, 1987).

How Does Physical Activity Fit in?

Physical activity has been linked to enhanced quality of life in breast cancer survivors (Courneya & Friedenreich, 1997). Physical activity interventions might then contribute to the healing

process for breast cancer survivors on multiple levels. Unfortunately, because two-thirds of Canadian adults are not physically active enough to receive the health benefits associated with being physically active (Craig, Russell, Cameron, & Beaulieu, 1999), helping breast cancer survivors to achieve these benefits is challenging. We need to better understand how and why physical activity improves the quality of life for breast cancer survivors.

The Role of Narrative Research

What tools can we use to increase our understanding? Besides the traditional methodological tools of quantitative research (e.g., surveys, observation), we can also use qualitative methods such as narrative research (i.e., stories) to investigate the relationship between physical activity and quality of life.

People are storytellers by nature. Telling stories to ourselves and others allows us to make sense of our experiences. It is this quality that allows us to use narrative inquiry as a methodological tool (Bruner, 1987). Despite being criticized as "art" or merely "anecdotal evidence," narrative/storytelling has become increasingly visible in the social sciences in the past fifteen years.

Stories allow us to gain several understandings. By studying the specific (i.e., the stories themselves), we understand more about our own society and culture. The social world circulates particular stories, and, in addition, story telling is itself culturally situated. In narrative, people draw on a repertoire of stories in their culture that they then turn into personal stories (Atkinson, 1997).

Stories do not just come from individuals, but by receiving them from individuals, we can learn more about the broader social world (as it is the social world that circulates particular stories). We may then influence human behaviour by targeting both the individual and society for change. In fact, stories do not originate with the individual or society, but result from an ongoing interaction between the two.

To gain a more in-depth understanding (and one that includes the women's own words) of what breast cancer survivors gain from regular participation in physical activity, we used a narrative approach to study four members of the

Breast Friends Society of Edmonton Dragon Boat Racing Team.

Studying these women was a unique opportunity to learn more about the value, role, and implications of physical activity in breast cancer survivors' lives.

What Did the Stories Tell Us?

The stories revealed three important elements—all related to enhancing breast cancer survivors' quality of life through physical activity participation. These elements also fit well with the mission and vision of the Breast Friends' Dragon Boat Racing Team:

- to encourage other breast cancer survivors to lead full and active lives;
- to demonstrate the benefits of an active lifestyle;
- to raise awareness and to support finding a cure; and
- to provide support to team members.



1. Affiliation and Social Support:

- being with other breast cancer survivors provided comfort and a shared understanding that helped women both to cope with the disease and adhere to the program;
- the times that the women met for physical activity also gave them the opportunity to discuss treatment-related issues (e.g., side-effects) and to disclose fears and anxieties that outsiders might not understand.

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2. Empowerment:

- the enhanced perception of control over health status and improved body image that resulted from physical activity made survivors feel more in control of their health;
- women experienced a sense of accomplishment and normalcy (i.e., they felt themselves again), reinforcing that the disease had not stopped them enjoying life.

3. Opportunity for Role Modelling:

- Dragon Boat racing was a chance to raise community awareness about breast cancer and survivorship;
- Dragon Boat racing also provided a tangible way to educate people that life can be normal after breast cancer.

Implications for Community Support

The role of community support in improving the quality of life of women with breast cancer cannot be emphasized enough. The experience of the Edmonton Dragon Boat Racing Team illustrates that it is community support that enables these breast cancer survivors both to participate in this kind of physical activity and to receive its benefits.

Community support for the Dragon Boat Team has included:

- Strathcona County Community Lottery Board, Scotiabank, and Adams Financial Group (funding for supportive physical environments for training, e.g., pool rentals or the Dragon Boat);
- Alberta Traffic Supply Ltd. (track suits for the team, which also enhance the women's identity, affiliation, and group support);
- Cliff's Towing and Double L Towing (transporting the Dragon Boat to various launch sites);
- Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation, Alberta Chapter (sponsoring the Breast Cancer Challenge Race at the Edmonton Dragon Boat Festival during 2001). This race is dedicated to all women currently battling breast cancer and to the memory of those lost to the disease.

What we learned from this research about the physical activity participation of this group of women has implications for other breast cancer survivors and their levels of physical activity and improvements in their quality of life. These women's stories of physical activity revealed the critical role of the community in enabling supportive physical and social environments. Without this community support, much of the physical activity (and its benefits) would not be possible.

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Do You Live in a Fit Community?

Circle the letter that best answers the questions below.

1. Does your local recreation department have fitness facilities that children can take advantage of?
a. yes b. no c. I don't know
2. Do local schools open up their fitness facilities for community use after school?
a. yes b. no c. I don't know
3. Does the after-school child-care program offered by your community include active play time in supervised sports programs?
a. yes b. no c. I don't know
4. Does your community recreation department regularly review its parks and update and improve facilities as users and needs change?
a. yes b. no c. I don't know
5. Does your local school coordinate its efforts with community fitness organizations to be sure that all children get a chance to enjoy a fit lifestyle?
a. yes b. no c. I don't know
6. Do you see access for people with disabilities at your local fitness clubs?
a. yes b. no c. I don't know
7. Does your community offer financial aid to low-income families for recreational classes and facilities?
a. yes b. no c. I don't know
8. Do you regularly see announcements in your local paper and posted on community billboards alerting you to registration times for youth sports leagues?
a. yes b. no c. I don't know
9. Do local churches offer sports programs for children?
a. yes b. no c. I don't know
10. Are coaches in local sports leagues required to take classes on coaching techniques for young children?
a. yes b. no c. I don't know

Total the number of a's, b's, and c's.

Results:

More than six a's—You live in a fit community. Work with your community to be sure that your child can take advantage of all it has to offer.

More than five b's—Your community isn't making your job any easier. Contact your local parks and recreation department, city council, and the mayor's office to see if you can assist them in offering better programs.

More than four c's—Contact key people in your community for help in getting your community fit!

Adapted and reprinted from Kalish, 1996.

References available on request or from the Alberta Centre for Active Living web site at www.centre4activeliving.ca. 

The Dragon Boat Women Speak

Please note: To protect privacy, the names below are pseudonyms.

On Affiliation and Social Support:

I think it's [the physical activity] that totally got me through the diagnosis of breast cancer. But probably most important, the friendships and the feeling that there's a whole group of people that I can talk to who really, really understand what I go through— not physically but emotionally. And whatever it is, you can talk about it to someone and they will say, "I know what you mean," or "I remember going through that." And that's the importance of Dragon Boat racing for me—the support and physical activity and again participating, making sure I take the time. If you search, rearrange other things in your life, and if it is important to you, then you will probably do it. I don't know, it's the best thing that's happened since this cancer.

Sarah, 45-year-old survivor

What's the experience been like? Wonderful! It's been really good. I love the women that I've met. I enjoy the exercise, I really like the closeness of everybody and the fact that we've all been where we've been and know everyone's circumstances—not really in-depth but we've all been diagnosed with breast cancer...it's easy to be with them. I really enjoy it.

Gladys, 42-year-old survivor

On Empowerment:

I was just hooked after just being in the boat and paddling, that was it. And in the breast cancer survivor race where there were ten breast cancer teams paddling in that Vancouver festival, it was just so empowering. All we had in common was that we had been diagnosed with breast cancer. But I just found it very, very empowering, and for myself it helped bring forth, you know that there is a life after breast cancer. You don't have to curl up and die or even wait to die, so I just found it so thrilling!

Miranda, 53-year-old survivor

It's not only that it's a weight control thing for me...I feel good about myself and I think all that contributes to it. So not only do I enjoy doing it and feel good about doing it, but the results are that I maintain my weight within an acceptable range and as a result my self-image benefits from that. So there's lots of things

that I get out of the exercise. But even if my breast cancer comes back, it's not going to keep my breast cancer away. I don't believe that it will, although I think it might help in some way and I'm going to be healthier and happier while I'm living. And if I die of breast cancer a year from now, at least my year will be a lot more pleasant because of the exercise I do.

Jessica, 50-year-old survivor

On the Opportunity for Role Modelling:

I want women who are diagnosed with breast cancer—I want them to see us out there on the river or out there training and I want them to know that here's a group of women that were diagnosed with breast cancer and they didn't die. You know, that they're still leading active and full lives after a diagnosis because when you're diagnosed with breast cancer you really do think – and rightfully so—that you might die. And it's nice to know that you might not die, that not all women who are diagnosed with breast cancer actually die. Some survive and some lead really active and full lives. So I very much wanted to get that message out there. I'm not out there raising breast cancer awareness in a knitting group, you know, I'm raising breast cancer awareness through physical activity.

Jessica, 50-year-old survivor

Just seeing all those women out there and knowing what they have gone through or have experienced, I think we all deserve medals for that, you know. Or the fact that we are out there and bringing awareness for this horrible, horrible, disease. And what I remember so much about that is that after that race how we came back on the dock and the people that were waiting for us and how quiet and emotional it was for them. I'll never forget that. I'll never forget how they were so caught up in it. I didn't really know how to say it, but it was just an amazing moment...

Gladys, 42-year-old survivor

References available on request or from the Alberta Centre for Active Living web site at www.centre4activeliving.ca. 2



News about the Alberta Centre for Active Living's Web Site

Visit the Centre's new and redesigned web site at www.centre4activeliving.ca.

You can download the latest copies of *WellSpring* and *Research Update* (as well as many of our other publications) and get information on our current research and educational projects.

The catalogue of our extensive resource library collection is also now available on our web site. The Centre's resources include material on active living, physical activity, recreation, workplace health, health determinants, and other related topics. Contact our Resource Coordinator, Tracy Chalmers Kitagawa (tracy.kitagawa@ualberta.ca), for more information about our collection. ☺

If you have suggestions or questions, we'd like to hear from you.

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St. Albert's Active Living Initiative

Margo Brenneis, Community Recreation Coordinator, City of St. Albert Recreation Services Department, and Brenda Cavangh, Fredericton YMCA

Background to the Project

In February 1998, the Alberta Active Living Task Force released *Towards an Active Living and Prosperous Alberta* (1998), a document aimed at producing a healthier and more active Alberta. To help make St. Albert an "active living" community, the city's Recreation Department applied for funding from the St. Albert Community Lottery Board. In addition, the city of St. Albert supported the project with matching funds to cover salary and office expenses. In September 1998, the Community Services Department also embraced the concept of active living and decided to implement a variety of special initiatives.

Communicating the Concept

We used various communication methods to create awareness in our community:

- a partnership with one of the local papers resulted in monthly active living articles;
- school, church, and community newsletters published active living tips;
- we developed and distributed a brochure called "The Active Living Family";
- St. Albert's Tourist Information Centre displayed a two-storey seasonal sign promoting active living;
- the 1999 Northern Alberta Children's Festival included a Healthy Lifestyle tent.

We formed a Healthy Lifestyles network that included the hospital, Regional Health Centre, community organizations involved in healthy lifestyles, and the city of St. Albert. This group collaborated to produce many active living opportunities for St. Albert residents. For example, the network co-sponsored two workshops for coaches and parents to ensure that children have positive and safe experiences in sport. Residents also learned about cross-country skiing and snowshoeing and received health and safety information.

Our Priorities

Children and youth were our highest priority. Introducing good activity habits at an early age develops healthy attitudes and values for the future. The Canadian Heart and Stroke Foundation developed the Heart Healthy Kids™ program to help elementary school teachers incorporate physical activity into their classrooms. Classroom-training sessions took place in approximately 70% of city schools, playschools, and daycares. We also produced extra resources to help teachers implement the program. This program proved our most valuable tool. Three months after the training, we found that most schools continued to integrate physical activity into their classrooms.

Tips for Successful Community Projects

- Before you start, research community health, lifestyle, and demographic patterns and the existing organizations that promote active living.
- Set goals, determine objectives, and evaluate your project.
- Partner with organizations that already promote active living.
- Tap into the existing information distribution systems in your community.
- Integrate healthy lifestyle education components into wellness or recreation programs.
- Ensure that your instructors are trained and knowledgeable.

References available on request or from the Alberta Centre for Active Living web site at www.centre4activeliving.ca. ☺

Mission statement of the Alberta Centre for Active Living

Supporting practitioners and organizations to improve the health and quality of life of Albertans through physical activity.