



Castlegar Tries it...and Likes It

Written in April 2007

When the Castlegar Social Planning Council contracted Susan Olheiser to start a program last fall (2006) to improve Castlegar residents' health, the Active Communities Initiative turned out to be the answer they were looking for. Within a matter of months, the city had accepted the 20% by the year 2010 challenge and registered as an Active Community. A cross-sectoral team had also formed and created an Active Community plan and organized Try it, you'll like it—a week of free drop-in services for fitness and recreation programs. And the team launched its Ready, Set, Go! Castlegar in Action Active Community initiative at a community event in June.

GETTING STARTED

The Social Planning Council's 2006 Castlegar Wellness Assessment Project—based on focus group feedback and statistical data—pointed to a need to increase the physical activity levels of a significant number of residents to improve their health. An Interior Health Authority mini-grant of \$5,000 funded the project. At a follow-up forum in May 2006, citizens voted in favour of making physical fitness a community priority. The Social Planning Council then contracted Olheiser to do just that, as the Community Coordinator for the Social Planning Council and the Active Community Team Leader.



"When I came across Active Communities, it was a perfect fit," Olheiser said. And the Active Community team was formed.

TEAM BUILDING

The Regional District of Central Kootenay's Parks and Recreation department leads the Active Community team, with representatives from the Castlegar and District Social Planning Council, Communities in Bloom, School District 20, Selkirk College, Kinnaird Park Community Church and Interior Health. The group soon built relationships with the local Spirit of BC Committee, the Castlegar and District Chamber of Commerce and local media outlets, businesses, programs and clubs to get the program off the ground.



At its first meeting, the team came up with three main objectives for its Active Community initiative: education and awareness; compilation of all activity-related programs, events and services serving Castlegar & area; and enhancement of existing programs, initiatives and events.

The team created an Active Community Plan, which laid out its strategy: *"By creating a Team consisting of key community stakeholders with a vested interest in improving physical activity levels in local residents and building on existing plans, initiatives and programs we hope to find ways of integrating physical activity into the daily routines of the people of Castlegar and area."*

TRY IT, YOU'LL LIKE IT WEEK

The team launched Try it, you'll like it week during the local 2007 Spirit of BC event to maximize public awareness of the new initiative. Funding from a BCRPA Active Communities WinterActive grant made this possible. Fourteen public and private businesses and organizations, such as a karate club, agreed to offer free services to area residents from February 9 to 17. About 200 people of all ages took part, some using the services for the first time. Some joined programs after trying them out. Thirteen of the businesses said in a follow-up phone survey they would do the same thing next year. Olheiser expects it to become an annual event now that the program is established and the contacts have been made.



"All the work is setting up, so once it's set up it shouldn't be that hard to keep going," Olheiser said.

IN THE COMMUNITY

Try it, you'll like it was the first step toward raising awareness of Ready, Set, Go! Castlegar in Action. The team copied and distributed posters throughout the community and at elementary schools. The local newspaper, radio and TV stations helped with publicity. Olheiser had a letter to the editor published, thanking the community and reinforcing the 20% by the year 2010 challenge.



Ready, Set, Go! was visible at the popular Sunfest weekend event in June. The cross-section on the Active Community team has strengthened communication between various clubs and organizations to ensure they work together and link with any initiatives taking place. The Ready, Set, Go! booth at Sunfest displayed an Active Communities banner and featured a climbing wall and an organized walk to the Waldie Island trails. Castlegar's Friends of Parks and Trails (a not-for-profit organization developing and maintaining trails and maps) has become a great asset to Ready, Set, Go! by sharing information and resources.

The team has put together an Active Community directory of services in Castlegar, split into categories of recreation facilities, sports, dance and gymnastics, martial arts, exercise classes, parks, and walking/hiking/biking. The directory is being distributed in hard copy and has been posted on the initiative's website (www.castlegarinaction.ca). A \$5,000 BCRPA Active Communities grant funded the information-gathering for the directory and for setting up the website. The City is covering site hosting and domain name costs through to the year 2010.

The Ready, Set, Go! Active Community team is working with the city to incorporate the development and improvement of bicycle and walking paths and neighbourhood lighting into its Official Community Plan.

Ready, Set, Go! is organizing a six-week workplace challenge in Fall 2007 to get businesses and groups in Castlegar active. Selkirk College's wellness program serves as a model with ideas for activities—everything from walking to playing the trumpet. Participants set goals and win prizes when they reach those goals.

Selkirk College practicum students have been helping to develop the initiative, and Olheiser recommends other communities make use of similar opportunities.

To gather a baseline measurement of physical activity levels, Castlegar's Active Community team plans to conduct a one-day survey with the help of volunteers. They will use The Healthy Physical Activity Participation Questionnaire from the Active Communities website. The survey will be done door-to-door, by phone and at booths around the community. It will be promoted in advance through media partners.

Along the way, the team is tracking advertising costs, volunteer and paid hours (to track the initiative's costs), participant feedback, the number of people aware of and involved in the initiative, as well as attendance numbers at sport and recreation programs.

With its successful launch of Try it, you'll like it and the Ready, Set, Go! Castlegar in Action initiative's official launch event, the Active Communities Initiative should soon become a household name in Castlegar.



Castlegar Highlights

- Forming partnerships between the Regional District of Central Kootenay Parks and Recreation, the Castlegar and District Social Planning Council, Communities in Bloom, School District 20, Selkirk College, Kinnaird Park Community Church, the Interior Health Authority, the Spirit of BC Committee, the Castlegar and District Chamber of Commerce and local media outlets, businesses, programs and clubs to plan and implement the Active Communities initiative
- Offering a week of free recreation programs and services called Try it, you'll like it week in February 2007
- Launching the Ready, Set, Go! Castlegar in Action initiative in June 2007
- Securing grants from Interior Health Authority (\$5,000) and BCRPA Active Communities (\$5,000) to implement its active initiatives
- Launching a website with a directory of sport and recreation programs and services in the community
- Organizing a 6-week workplace wellness challenge in September for businesses and groups
- 10 schools registered with Action! Schools BC
- Launched www.castlegarinaction.ca

Castlegar Info

- **Population:** 7,259 (BC Stats 2006)
- **Region:** Kootenays
- **About Castlegar:** Castlegar is situated where the Columbia and Kootenay Rivers meet and between the Selkirk and Monashee Mountain Ranges. It is halfway between Vancouver and Calgary. Outdoor features include hiking and biking trails, parks, lakes, rivers and mountains. Indoor amenities include a Community Recreation Complex with an aquatic centre, ice arena, fitness facilities, sports fields, tennis courts and a seniors' centre.

(Source: www.castlegar.com)