



Vancouver's Inner-City Program is Waking up the Neighbourhood

November 2007

A cartoon red fox is inspiring Aboriginal children and parents in Vancouver's inner-city neighbourhoods to get moving and have fun while doing it.

Active Outreach: Red Fox Waking is an Active Communities Vancouver pilot program, developed in 2007 by the City of Vancouver through the Vancouver Park Board and community partners. Red Fox reaches out to inner-city First Nations families to show them easy, fun ways to get active together. It also provides leadership training to parents and youth in the community. The Waking program has extended to Red Fox Walking and Red Fox Running programs, with Red Fox Fun events held throughout the programs. And already, Red Fox is working.



Participants record activities and collect Fox Points in their Red Fox Trail Tracker passports to win sport and recreation prizes. The booklets lead them through a variety of free or low-cost activity ideas, such as swimming and skating at Park Board community centres, planting seeds in a garden, dancing with friends, or going to a Red Fox Fun family event in East Vancouver neighbourhoods. Cartoon graphics throughout the passport, including the red fox character, capture the children's attention.

"In many First Nation traditions red is the colour that represents the body," explained Red Fox Waking Project Developer Emma Sutherland. "And in many First Nation traditions, the fox is an animal that represents transformation and strength and resourcefulness. The symbolism behind it is that taking care of your body is transformative and that there are ways to do it even when you have barriers to being active and eating healthy."

The Red Fox Waking pilot program ran from February to April 2007. Ten parents and youth received leadership training during that time. Eleven Red Fox Waking recreation events at schools and Park Board facilities and parks brought out more than 300 children, youth and parents.

"I go out to a large number of events and it's not so much what you hear but what you see — the families coming out together, the mothers and the children in particular and they're just having a great time," said Jim McKenzie, the City's East District Recreation Coordinator, who leads the city-wide Active Communities Vancouver initiative. "Particularly as some of the parents then stepped in to leadership roles to organize and support the games. The kids at the school look up and there they see role models from their community leading the Active Communities days."

Activities at the events ranged from swimming and skating to stilt walking, skipping, juggling and break-dancing. At the start of the program, the parents would watch their children play but as the program progressed, gradually they would join them.



"It's really great when we have an activity and moms walk in and they start playing with their kids," Sutherland said.

One of those events brought families to the University of BC Farm (site of the Urban Aboriginal Community Kitchen Garden Project), where children could see how fruits and vegetables are grown, along with going hiking, gardening and listening to stories from Elders.

Red Fox Walking is operating from October 2007 to January 2008, leading into Red Fox Running from February to June 2008. The 2008 Active Adventures Passport will be led by community volunteers from the Red Fox program, and will reach 40 elementary schools in East Vancouver. In 2009, the passport program will extend to all Vancouver schools to appeal to students across the city.

The new partnerships formed between the City through the Park Board and Helping Spirit Lodge Society, Vancouver Native Health Society, Vancouver School Board First Nations workers and many other community groups ensured the program got off the ground.

"If the program were to end tomorrow there would be a sustainable benefit," Sutherland said. "There is enough momentum in the community that they would find a way to come together and continue the spirit that was developed. It's succeeding because a lot of people are putting effort into it. The Park Board has been incredibly supportive; the Aboriginal agencies I've worked with have been wonderful also. Really it comes down to the kids and the parents—they are making this happen."



The program stemmed from Active Communities Vancouver and Action Schools! BC's MoreSports Passport to Fitness and Adventure pilot program, which ran in 2006 at Tillicum Elementary School.

"A big part of the overall adventure concept is to encourage people to exercise locally and to get them excited about what adventures are in the community," McKenzie said. Active Communities Vancouver then took the passport program a step further to reach out to inner-city Aboriginal families who were identified as being inactive.

"For a variety of reasons many of the families in Vancouver who are Aboriginal also are living in poverty," observed Sutherland, who had been working in Vancouver's inner-city for 15 years before linking with Active Communities through the MoreSport advisory board. As a result of this poverty, transportation costs and childcare were barriers to families participating in recreation.

"You have a stroller, you have two bus rides, it's pouring rain, you have a toddler—it's not fun," Sutherland said. Through the program, families could get picked up in a shuttle bus to get to community centres or active events. Also, the Red Fox events were in the neighbourhood so families could walk to them. Families were also shown ways to get active indoors or in small spaces at home, such as skipping rope on the porch.

"When families have fun together and when communities have fun together, something magical happens," Sutherland said. *"Fun really is the best medicine."*

The program supports the goal of ActNow BC and Active Communities to increase physical activity by 20% by 2010. To supplement the in-kind contributions from the Vancouver Park Board and funding from City Council, Active Communities Vancouver applied for grants for the various phases of the Red Fox program. Grants from the Union of BC Municipalities Community Health Promotion Fund (\$35,000 in 2007 and 2008), BC Recreation and Parks Association through Active Communities (\$5,000) and TELUS (\$10,000 through Vancouver Native Health) have helped to cover the costs of running the Red Fox programs.

"The Active Communities Initiative that BCRPA is heading triggered [the Red Fox program] initially because it's right out of that initiative itself that the sedentary groups that we should be reaching out to were identified," McKenzie said.

"Active Communities and ActNow BC is a great opportunity for communities to take advantage of these grants and resources that are there," Sutherland noted. *"The amounts for the grants may not be huge but they do help in terms of getting a conversation started and getting communication happening between different groups."*

- First municipality to join the 2010 Legacies Now 20% by 2010 challenge
- Developed Active Communities Vancouver website: www.vancouver.ca/parks/activecommunity
- Created Vancouver Active Communities Network (VACNet) advisory body
- Whitecaps GM Bob Lenarduzzi is Honorary Chair of VACNet
- Developed Vancouver Active Communities Strategic Plan 2006-2010
- City Council approved annual funding of \$100,000 for Active Communities initiative
- One Day, One School Pilot Program (onedayvancouver.ca): active and safe trips to school
- Fitness and Adventure Passports: provides fitness opportunities to children
- Step Out walks: highlights city trails and walks
- Athletes in Vancouver: grants creating partnerships with elite athletes
- Annual special events calendar: highlights local fitness opportunities
- Active Outreach: reaches out to sedentary populations
- Enhancing current programs: Go Play (promotes recreation), Get Out (supports active youth), Fit City (City employees workplace wellness)
- Active Communities Vancouver programs received grants from UBCM (\$35,000 in 2007 and 2008), BCRPA Active Communities (\$2,150 and \$5,000), TELUS (\$10,000)

Lower Mainland – Vancouver

Vancouver Info

Population: 583,267 (BC Stats 2005)

- Host City of the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games
- 2006 Ipsos-Reid survey found 70% of Vancouver's population is active for more than 30 minutes, 3 or more times a week
- Ranked third in livability in Mercer Human Resource Consulting's 2007 Worldwide Quality of Living Survey
- City-wide network of bikeways and greenways
- Home to Coast Salish First Nations (Squamish, Musqueam and Tsleil-Waututh)
- 76 schools registered with Action Schools! BC in SD#39

(Sources: www.vancouver.ca, *Active Communities Vancouver Strategic Plan*)



To form partnerships and develop and promote the program, Sutherland and Silva Tenenbein (of Peripheral Visionaries consulting organization) went into the community and built a rapport with Aboriginal agencies, schools, children and parents.

"There is a great overlap between the Active Communities Initiative goals and what other organizations are trying to do," he added. "So Helping Spirit Lodge Society was more than happy to work with us and help develop the program. Working closely with recognized and respected organizations in that community to enable us to engage the people of that community was really important. Between Helping Spirit Lodge, which had the entrée into the community, and the Aboriginal workers through the school, we were able to really reach out to the children, and then through the children to the parents."

The Red Fox program has a website resource for families (www.ActiveOutreachActiveLiving.com). Next, to reach out to multicultural communities, the passport booklet (which Sutherland and Tenenbein designed) will be translated into two different languages, likely Chinese and Hindi.



"What we've done as Active Communities Vancouver is we've really put forward our goal as a city to be 20% more active by 2010," McKenzie said. "We put the word out and invited all interested organizations to join with us if that goal works within their mandate."

