



## Libraries Lend Out Free Pedometers on Sunshine Coast

September 2008



Sunshine Coast residents can step into their local libraries to increase their daily steps, thanks to the Active Communities committee's pedometer lending program.

The pilot program in Gibsons and Sechelt was inspired by a similar program in Ottawa libraries. Due to the pilot's success, the pedometers are now permanently available from the two libraries for three-week loans. A \$4,100 grant from the BC Recreation and Parks Association (BCRPA) assisted the Active Communities committee with purchasing the pedometers and setting up the pilot project.

The pedometers encourage the inactive to get walking to reach their recommended 10,000 steps a day. People with chronic health conditions such as diabetes, cardiac disease and hypertension have been accessing the free pedometers after their physicians told them about the library lending program. Both libraries have about 25 pedometer kits — a plastic prescription bottle labelled "**Rx Physical Activity. The most powerful medicine. For best results use daily**" which are available to be checked out. Each kit contains a pedometer, a welcome letter, health information (the Canada Food Guide and the Heart and Stroke Foundation's booklet *Take Control: Actions to Lower Your Risk*),

the BCRPA's Pedometer Handbook, a log sheet and an evaluation form.

*"I wanted to have not just the pedometers, but to have some health information in there as well,"* said Anneliese Ravensbergen, Vancouver Coastal Health's (VCH) Chronic Disease Prevention Coordinator on the Sunshine Coast, who spearheaded the project for the Active Communities committee. *"The back of the welcome letter had personal goals on it so that people could increase their steps from week to week. Part of the research that I had read is if you just give a pedometer nothing happens, but if you have a pedometer and you set goals along with it, then people will increase their steps."*

Ravensbergen boosted awareness of the program through the local health care network. Letters were sent to local doctors' offices promoting the pilot project and the opportunity to "prescribe" activity. The program was also promoted through e-mails to other health care providers and through VCH's Diabetes Education Program.

*"I was involved with the Diabetic Education Centre and I thought it would be great to be able to hand out pedometers to this group,"* Ravensbergen said. She had originally joined the Active Communities committee because they shared the same goals.

*"I thought it would be a wonderful link in preventing chronic disease to be part of the Active Communities committee,"* Ravensbergen said. The committee (led by Pat Hunt, who brought her experience from being involved in Ontario's active

living initiatives) has representatives from the Sunshine Coast Regional District (SCRD) Parks and Recreation Division, fitness professionals, the SCRD and Pender Harbour Community School, local businesses, and community volunteers, in addition to VCH.

The committee's new partnership with the libraries was pivotal to the program's success. The librarians joined the team after being approached with the idea and a request to help work out the logistics. They loaned the kits at the check-out counter, collected the evaluation forms, and promoted the free pedometers through displays and posters the Active Communities group created.

*"The staff at the library were quite excited about it, so that enthusiasm, I think, is what made it happen,"* said Phil Sera, a registered BCRPA Fitness Leader who worked with Ravensbergen to implement the program.

Ten days after the pilot began, all the pedometers had been signed out. By the end of the two-month pilot, the Sechelt Library reported 52 check-outs and the Gibsons Library 55 check-outs. A few people had walked off with the pedometers, but most were returned, and many with completed evaluation forms.

Of the 17 evaluation forms that were returned (16%), nine respondents (52%) reported having a chronic health condition and 14 (89%) reported increasing their daily steps. Sixteen (94%) reported that they found the package helpful.

The committee had purchased 90 pedometers, so the remaining 30 were loaned to the Sechelt Library's summer

## Lower Mainland – Sunshine Coast

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reading program for children ages 5-9. The children used the pedometers to read and walk their way across B.C.

*"The librarian has used them the whole summer," Ravensbergen said. "Every morning she's gone out as part of the reading program with the kids and they put the pedometer on and they count how many steps they've done when they come back. They relate it as kilometres that they're walking across B.C. because they were reading their way across B.C. So that was brilliant. She really got kids interested in moving and counting their steps, and of course kids love gadgets."*

This fall, the 30 pedometers were loaned to inactive adults with low cognitive function through the local community living association. In addition, the pedometer displays from the libraries have gone mobile and are displayed in gathering places such as seniors' centres and community centres to promote the library lending program.

Ravensbergen has also been helping to spread the word about the provincial Walk BC initiative throughout the Coast's medical community. Through Walk BC's Physician Engagement initiative, individuals who have tried the pedometer lending program can now receive their own pedometers from their doctors. Physicians prescribe activity to clients by giving out walking kits containing pedometers and other resources. Walk BC is an initiative of the BC Healthy Living Alliance's Physical Activity Strategy and is co-led by BCRPA and the Heart and Stroke Foundation of BC and Yukon.

To further raise awareness of the benefits of walking and the library lending program, the Active Communities committee held community walks on Move for Health Day in May this year. The walks started from the SCRCD's new recreation facilities: the Gibsons & Area Community Centre and the Sechelt Aquatic Centre. The event brought out approximately 50 walkers.

Sera led the Gibsons walk, while Ravensbergen led the Sechelt walk. As a personal trainer, Sera works with people with chronic diseases to increase their physical fitness levels. He noted the library program removed common barriers to activity he sees among his clients: time, fitness levels, and money.

*"With this being a free program, that took away the barrier of money," he noted. "Because it was a gentle program, it took the barrier away of fitness level. Because it's walking and you can do it in increments of 15 minutes, that seemed to address the time barrier."*

The success of the Sunshine Coast's library pedometer lending program has since spread to Greater Victoria, where the local Active Communities committee has started a similar initiative.

*"It's a fairly simple thing to do and I think it can have a huge impact," Ravensbergen said. "It's a brilliant thing to have in every community."*

## Sunshine Coast Highlights

- Created a pedometer lending program at 2 libraries
- Targeting people with chronic diseases through health care professionals
- Hosted an active transportation forum with expert and Coast resident Larry Frank
- Received grants from BCRPA through Active Communities: \$4,100 for library pedometer program; \$5,000 for active transportation workshop & planning; \$5,000 subsidy for physical activity survey
- Committee developed and updated its Active Community plan with the help of BCRPA's Active Communities Community Developer
- Commissioned a survey of physical activity levels in 2008 with a BCRPA subsidy
- Held community walk events on Move for Health Day at the SCRCD's 2 new recreation facilities
- Info booth with blood pressure testing at the Flu clinics in Sechelt & Gibsons
- 8 schools registered with Action Schools! BC in School District 46

## Sunshine Coast Info

- Population:** 29,781 (BC Stats 2007)
- Sunshine Coast Regional District includes Town of Gibsons, District of Sechelt, Sechelt Indian Government District, and electoral areas of West Howe Sound, Elphinstone, Roberts Creek, Halfmoon Bay, Pender Harbour/Egmont
  - Home to Coast Salish First Nations: Sechelt (shishalh), Squamish (skwxwumish) & Sliammon
  - Recently built new community recreation facilities: the Sechelt Aquatic Centre and the Gibsons & Area Community Centre with ice arena
  - Hiking and mountain biking trails, beaches, parks, sports fields
  - Dakota Ridge winter recreation area for cross-country skiing and snowshoeing