



Kitimat Kicks It Up a Notch

Written in June 2007



On the North Coast, Kitimat's Active Community Initiative—called Kick It Up Kitimat—aimed to reach the inactive in the community, while recognizing that many people were already quite active. On top of Health Canada's target populations (children, youth, adults and seniors), the city planned to focus in on persons living with chronic disease or illness, economically challenged persons, First Nations and multicultural communities which were identified as having historically low physical activity levels.

Survey results in its Active Community plan for 2006-2010 reported half of Kitimat's population was overweight or obese.

"We have a large multicultural base in our community, a large senior population, and a significant youth population as well," said Active Communities Programmer Monique Miller. *"Because of the industry here, its mills, there are a lot of young families and a lot of people who*

have retired from the mill. So we are trying to take that 20% challenge and really create programs that are going to be reaching a wider range, the wider base of people."

The Active Community plan's mission is *"to educate, encourage, facilitate and support the residents of Kitimat as they move towards a more active lifestyle. To build on the strength of our community and involve a network of health and wellness conscious professionals and community members who work together for the health and wellness of Kitimat."*

THE KICK OFF

The Kick It Up Kitimat campaign kicked-off with a community walk in May 2007 that brought out more than a hundred people carrying a sea of balloons to show their spirit.

"Kitimat had a very long winter, so we really wanted to get people out to kick

- Launched the Kick It Up Kitimat Active Community campaign with a community walk event
- Forming community partnerships
- Secured grants from BCRPA (\$5,000) and UBCM Community Health Promotion Fund (\$35,000 and \$20,392)
- Started a walking challenge for the community, workplaces and schools
- Created a Kick It Up Kitimat website (www.kickitupkitimat.ca)
- Hosting health and wellness workshops
- Started a personal training program at the Youth Centre
- 9 schools in School District 82 registered with Action! Schools BC

Kitimat Info

- **Population:** 10,587 (BC Stats 2005)
- **Region:** North Coast/Nechako
- **About Kitimat:** Kitimat is BC's largest port and an emerging energy hub. It is a modern, planned community with a hospital, a school system and recreational facilities including two ice rinks, a fully equipped recreation centre with a gymnasium, basketball courts, squash and racquetball courts, and a modern swimming pool, and numerous outdoor facilities such as soccer and baseball fields, tennis courts, cross country skiing, a challenging, professionally designed 18-hole golf course, hiking and biking trails and more.

(Source: www.city.kitimat.bc.ca, www.visitkitimat.com)



Kitimat Kicks It Up a Notch, cont...

start an active lifestyle and to educate them at the event itself,” Miller said. “Our goal was to have a hundred people show up. In order to take attendance we had a hundred helium balloons and they were all numbered. We ran out of balloons before we even started our walk.”

The people who arrived walked for half an hour from downtown through a neighbourhood, while passing drivers honked and waved to show their support.

“We had three or four blocks back of people,” Miller said. “People in wheelchairs showed up, scooters, strollers, kids on bikes, but predominantly we had people walking. It was almost like a parade.”



The District council and local MLA and MP's offices had representatives out in support. Local service groups such as the Cadets led the parade. The walk, held at noon on a Sunday in late May, also got the attention of church congregations.

“Some churches actually brought their services to the walk because they felt that it was such an important thing—not only the active lifestyle but also the community spirit part of it,” Miller said. A month after the kick-off walk, one of the churches followed Kick It Up's lead and held its Sunday service at a park.



“So it's branching out to other areas that weren't so much even in our Active Communities plan, but people are just getting involved,” Miller said.

Community partners Envision Financial and the Heart and Stroke Foundation helped make the walk possible. Support was also provided by Kitimat's Active Community Team Members representing the District of Kitimat Recreation department, Northern Health, the Snowflake Seniors Centre, the Kitimat Community Services Society and the Haisla [First Nation] Recreation Centre. Miller got involved to lead the initiative and organize programs and events for six months with \$35,000 funding from UBCM's Community Health Promotion Fund and a \$5,000 BCRPA Active Communities grant. After receiving public feedback, Miller is confident the community will maintain the Kick It Up Kitimat momentum long after her term is up.

“People are really onboard and they're



coming to me with ideas of things that they want to see happen in the community in the coming years, so that's a really good sign,” Miller said.

WALKING CHALLENGE

Kick It Up Kitimat has been hosting a walking challenge (July 1 to October 31) involving workplaces and elementary schools as well as the wider community.

“We're really excited about the fact that the local school district has come onboard to partner with the bike or walk to school [week] challenge, which will be in September, and the walking challenge which will be the month of October,” Miller said.

Participants (individuals or groups) will log their steps on the Kick It Up Kitimat website (www.kickitupkitimat.ca) to track their distance across a virtual map of Canada. The site also features health tips, resources, information and local event listings. It's funded through portions of a \$35,000 UBCM Community Health Promotion Fund grant and a \$5,000 BCRPA Active Communities grant.

“We're really focusing in on creating it as a group challenge,” she added. Kick It Up has been recruiting team walk leaders, who receive a free pedometer to log steps for the group. Envision and other banks have stepped forward with teams to challenge each other. Neighbourhoods are also competing.

“[The walk leaders] are really excited because it's the first time we've ever done anything like this in town,” Miller said. Kick It Up is also approaching local industry to join the challenge.

The District of Kitimat's infrastructure is well set up for walking, with its intercon-

nected sidewalks and back promenades. Maps guide the walk leaders around town.

The first day of the challenge kicked off at the Canada Day parade where people walked and biked. One group meets at the arena, where people walk indoors.

“The hockey parents are getting on-board, so while their kids are practicing, rather than just sitting there, they walk around and watch their child play,” Miller said. *“So [the arena] has been a really excellent resource for them to have.”*

WOMEN'S WELLNESS PROJECT

The District of Kitimat received a UBCM Community Health Promotion Grant of \$20,392 for a women's wellness workshop. The Women's Wellness Conference and Fair earned awards from both the BCRPA for Program Excellence and from Learning Resources Network (LERN) for excellence in recreation programming.

The joint committee aimed to educate women on the benefits of positive healthy lifestyles and on the available community resources to improve the health of women and their families. The February 2006 conference at the Riverlodge Recreation Centre included a fair of educational booths with information including cancer prevention services, heart and stroke health and prevention, smoking cessation, family support services, screening activities, pampering services, wellness practitioners and yoga and Pilates instructors. An obstetrician/gynecologist gave a keynote speech on Contraception for Every Age and the Women's Health Initiative Study. Sessions at the conference also included breast health; how to use a pedometer; a nutrition talk on Changing Minds, Not Bodies; ovarian health; relaxation; activity breaks and there was an opening welcome from the Haisla Dancers. Northwest Community College's Culinary Arts Program provided a nutritious lunch.

The conference brought out 260 women, including women of lower economic status and women from multicultural backgrounds. Women's wellness sessions carried forward to sessions at the local Sikh Temple and within the Haisla First Nation. Use of the discounted Leisure Access Program for people with lower incomes increased after the event.

The joint District and Health Unit committee also put on a Women's Fall Gala in 2006 with physical activity classes, a presentation on women's health in Northern BC, and a local fashion show.

REACHING OUT TO THE COMMUNITY

To reach unemployed people, Kick It Up Kitimat put on a three-part series of health and wellness workshops in spring 2007. The first focused on optimal health for the body and mind, led by Northern Health. The second workshop educated participants about nutrition and Northern Health's Good Food Box program, which provides affordable or subsidized fresh produce for people on low incomes. The third workshop, which Miller led, centred on fitness and active lifestyles. Participants went out for a walk during the workshop. The workshops were well attended and participants could fill out evaluations, which were incorporated into Kick It Up Kitimat's monthly report to the Active Community committee and the District council.

Kick It Up Kitimat is also planning workshops for the wider community, such as caregivers' workshops in partnership with Northern Health and grocery shop smart workshops.

“It's a program to reach out to people who are taking care of the aged population—people who are taking care of their parents or who have a child with special needs,” Miller said of the caregivers workshops, which cover areas such as fall-prevention.

Kick It Up Kitimat has also partnered with the Youth Centre to get at-risk youth between the ages of 13 and 18 physically active.

“We've started a personal training program with them so they get to have one-on-one and group training together to build their team skills as well as their confidence individually throughout the summer,” Miller explained. Then in the fall, the youth who complete the training program are put through a six-week boot camp-style class.

Nutritionists also get involved by coming in to teach the youth about meal planning and portion sizes. Northern Health's Good Food Box program will provide food for a celebration dinner in the summer for the youth program. Any youth who attend the youth centre or who express an interest in the training program can join. Kick It Up Kitimat funds the free training program through its grants funding.



To raise awareness, Kitimat Recreation created a Kick It Up logo, with a figure in motion holding a torch, representing the goal of being more active by 2010 and tying into the Olympic Spirit of Vancouver 2010. Miller has been regularly sending out news releases on the initiative to local newspaper and radio outlets, in addition to advertising in a local flyer. The Fall Recreation Guide will include a section on Kick It Up Kitimat, with healthy active living tips. Kick It Up is also putting together a Passport to Healthy Living pamphlet. Active events are regularly posted at www.kickitupkitimat.ca and in a Kick It Up email newsletter. Next year, adults and youth in Kitimat can look forward to a triathlon that Kick It Up Kitimat and Envision Financial are now planning together.