



Girls score physical activity goals with new programs in Smithers

February 2009



More girls are playing hockey, basketball and other sports in Smithers, thanks to the efforts of the town's Recreation, Parks and Culture department and its community partners.

When Andrew Hillaby arrived as the department's new director in the fall of 2007, the town was already registered as an Active Community through the BC Recreation and Parks Association (BCRPA). He set out to build relationships with local school boards and sport and recreation groups to reach out to those who typically weren't accessing sport and recreation programs. One of those groups was youth, particularly girls. Hillaby recognized they weren't being served as well as they could have been.

"There is girls' soccer, basketball, and volleyball, but there are still a lot of girls not in sport," Hillaby said. *"I've talked to some church youth groups; I've talked to a couple of the association groups; I've spoken with women's hockey and a women's volleyball group in town asking them for their input and if they see this as an issue, and they do. So that's why we're heading that way."*

In 2008, Smithers hosted an On the Move workshop through the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS), in partnership with ProMOTION Plus. On the Move is an initiative designed to increase opportunities for inactive girls and young women to participate and lead in sport and physical activity. The workshop brought together about half a dozen interested community members to discuss increasing recreation opportunities for girls.

That workshop got the ball rolling and in the spring Hillaby organized Girls Sport Nights at one of the elementary school gyms. He brought some female secondary school students onboard to help run the 10-week program, geared towards girls aged 6 to 12. For the high school students, it was an opportunity to have some leadership training. A \$2,500 Girls Only grant from BCRPA and ProMOTION Plus went towards the staffing and equipment costs for the evenings.

Each Friday night during the 10 weeks, the girls learned skills in different sports: basketball, indoor soccer, volleyball, badminton, ball hockey, Ultimate Frisbee, and track and field. Although they had touched on these activities in PE classes, the sport nights gave them an opportunity to develop their skills and find something that interested them.

"What the female instructors found was that the girls were able to get a higher dose of the activity," Hillaby said. *"For example, with badminton, because we had a small group of about eight to 10 girls, they were able to get more court time. There's always a benefit when you*

put the piece of equipment in a person's hand and they're actually doing it more and more. We were hoping that something would pop out of that that we could develop into a program in the fall that was targeting girls."

And it did carry over into the summer and fall. That summer saw a first for Smithers: children and youth could join a sport camp at two of the town's schools.

"Some of the women who went to the CAAWS workshop were moms of some of the girls that came to our sport camps," Hillaby noted.

In the fall, Smithers Recreation launched a drop-in basketball program for girls aged 11 to 13 once a week for just \$2 each.

"We had 10 girls on our first night and 15 on our second night, and we should get more soon," Hillaby noted. *"One of the high school girls who helped us in the spring is now employed running this program, so that was a nice spinoff."*

In November, Basketball BC came to Smithers to offer a coaching workshop at a school gym, which brought out teachers and interested adults from the community. The following day, a kids and teenagers practice and game session was held, which was predominantly attended by girls aged 10 to 14. The free clinics were a part of Smithers' plan to launch the Steve Nash Basketball League in March.

Another spinoff from the sports nights was to set aside ice time for girls to play hockey over the winter holidays when the arena wasn't as busy. Four time slots were

opened for girls of all ages to play shinny. *"I had made contact with our local women's hockey groups well in advance saying, 'Would you promote it? Could you come out and hop on the ice with the girls?' Some of the women said yes, and they did. They promoted it by word of mouth."*

At the first girls shinny game, 10 girls showed up along with a couple of the participants from the women's rec hockey group. The next three times, the numbers increased to 15 to 20 girls.

"The girls were totally excited. They were so pumped up about it," Hillaby observed. *"And what was neat was that more of them started to show up at our co-ed shinny hockey for ages 9-12. Now they're feeling a bit more comfortable. And I think it's a total spinoff from what we did over Christmas."*

It also demonstrated the need and demand for more ice time for girls and young women.

Since then, Smithers Minor Hockey has designated one time slot per weekend for girls. Two parents have volunteered to supervise the girls' ice time.

"That's never happened before," Hillaby noted. *"By doing the girls-only shinny, it created a little bit of a demand and it was an eye-opener. Now they're trying to find time for the girls."*

And the parents are recognizing what's been accomplished.

"One mother was weeping in the stands because she thought it was just beautiful that we had done this—she was so happy," Hillaby said. *"I had a dad stop me in the parking lot, and I honestly thought he was going to hug me. His daughter had never played hockey other than the odd time in their backyard ice rink. He went and bought her hockey gear and*

she has come out for all of the games." Hillaby continues to work with groups in the community to come up with ideas to increase access to recreation for everyone in Smithers. One of those avenues is to tap into the resources offered through BCRPA.

He organized an Everybody gets to play™ workshop in the fall, which BCRPA's Everybody Active initiative sponsored. Everybody gets to play™ is designed to help recreation practitioners and volunteers mobilize the resources already available in their community. The workshop brought together 15 people from the community that were interested in getting involved, from school representatives to the health sector to the local Aboriginal community. People from neighbouring communities in the region also came in for the workshop. The attendees shared their input on what their groups want to see offered through recreation services.

Hillaby is continuing to partner with this network to come up with strategies to increase access to sport and recreation. He's also planning to host HIGH FIVE® workshops (the standard in BC for sport and recreation instructors working with children ages six to 12, delivered by BCRPA).

"Being a member of BCRPA has allowed me, as a recreation professional from outside the province, to get quickly connected to the provincial stuff and get Smithers on the map, and to go in a direction that I think the community's been waiting for for a long time," Hillaby said.

With all the relationship-building Hillaby has been doing with community partners, one of his goals for 2009 is to resurrect a local Active Communities team and keep the momentum going.

- Received a \$2,500 Girls Only grant from ProMOTION Plus and BCRPA for a Girls Sport Night
- Created more ice time for girls to play hockey at the Civic Centre arena
- Started a drop-in basketball night for girls
- Received \$300 grants from BCRPA through Active Communities for Spirit of BC Week and Healthy Workplace Month
- Hosted an Everybody gets to play™ workshop
- Planning to host HIGH FIVE® workshops
- Working with BCRPA's Everybody Active initiative
- Received a Measuring Up grant (\$15,000) in 2008 from 2010 Legacies Now

Smithers Info

Population 5,426 (BC Stats 2007)

- Located in the Bulkley Valley along the Trans Canada Yellowhead Highway (Route 16)
- Indoor recreation facilities: ice arena, curling rink, regional pool facility, private gyms
- Outdoor recreation: golf courses, tennis courts, soccer fields, ball diamonds, hiking, cross-country skiing, downhill skiing, snowshoeing, snowboarding, mountain biking
- Home to the Wet'suwet'en First Nation

www.smithers.ca
www.tourismsmithers.com

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