



## Penticton Walking Program is Here for the Long Run

Written in April 2007



### GETACTIVE! PENTICTON

From the start-up of Penticton's Active Community task force in early 2006 until the task force's GetActive! Penticton launch on Move for Health Day (May 10, 2006), a cross-section of committed groups and businesses have pulled together to create a four-year plan and turn it into action. Working under the common goal of creating a healthier community where physical activity is valued and everyone participates daily, they strived for a collaborative community-based approach involving everyone.

*"We had commitment from day one from various stakeholders throughout our community,"* said Lori Mullin, Chair of the GetActive! Penticton task force and the City of Penticton's Recreation Supervisor. *"By having all those stakeholders at the table, the buy-in is already there, so when we go to implement it, people are aware of it and they're assisting us."*

The task force represents the City, School District 67, Interior Health, Public Health, Medical Arts Health Research, the Penticton Indian Band, the Penticton Recreation & Wellness Centre, Edis Computers, Premier Martial Arts, the Canadian Mental Health Association and the Seniors Advisory Committee. In addition, the GetActive! Penticton task force has 25 partner organizations and businesses providing support and resources. To get those organizations' initial attention, the task force compiled a database of potential allies—about 300 contacts—then sent them letters suggesting various partnership opportunities.



*"We gave them options, and that made people think outside the box that they could be involved in other ways,"* Mullin said. For example, the checklist of options included creating an organizational wellness program or providing discounted products or services to GetActive! participants.

To bring citizens on board, the task force developed a personal commitment form to increase individual physical activity levels by 20% by the year 2010. More than 200 people signed the commitment at the GetActive! Penticton launch in May 2006. Mayor Jake Kimberley proclaimed May 10, 2006 as the official launch of GetActive! Penticton. Highlights of the day included a walk with the Mayor to City Hall, free activities at the community centre (including its record-setting 56-person Aquafit class) and School District 67's physical activity challenge. Private businesses also stepped in to offer free healthy food and drinks for participants. The community logged more than 10 million steps that day and Mullin expects that number to increase in the years ahead.

The task force created a plan with the help of a \$2,150 Active Communities grant through BCRPA. It also secured

- The GetActive! Penticton task force has developed an Active Community plan
- GetActive! Penticton secured grants from BCRPA through Active Communities (\$2,150), the UBCM Community Health Promotion Fund (\$35,000) and Interior Health Authority (\$3,500 and \$4,000)
- GetActive! Penticton conducted a community survey that identified time, lack of motivation and work schedules as barriers to participation in physical activities
- The Steps Out online walking program continues to spread to other BC communities, using Penticton's program as a model
- Steps Out is partnering with Interior Health Authority and the Healthy Heart Society to put on hearts@work health fairs for the community, and with School District 61 to offer hearts@school health conferences for youth
- Penticton Steps Out is collaborating with communities in the Okanagan Valley to promote the Unite the Valley walking program
- 13 schools in School District 67 registered with Action! Schools BC
- Launched [www.stepsout.com](http://www.stepsout.com), [www.penticton.ca/gap](http://www.penticton.ca/gap)

## Penticton Info

- **Population:** 33,061 (Census Stats 2005)
- **Region:** Okanagan
- **About Penticton:** Located in the south central interior of BC in the Okanagan Valley and is bordered by two lakes: Okanagan and Skaha. The retail trade, health care and social assistance, and accommodation and food service all top the list of Penticton's key economic sectors. Penticton attracts residents and small business owners to its warm climate and low levels of precipitation. Penticton offers plenty of options for getting active outdoors at its beaches, hiking and biking trails, walkways and parks, in addition to its indoor community recreation facilities.

(Source: [www.penticton.ca](http://www.penticton.ca))

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backing from UBCM's Community Health Promotion Fund (\$35,000) and an Interior Health Authority mini-grant (\$3,500).

*"When we went out into the community to get grants, we were very successful because we were organized and we were coordinated,"* Mullin said. *"By receiving grants, we were able to hire contract staff to actually go out and do some of those things we want to accomplish."*

In 2006, Penticton participated in BCRPA's physical activity survey through Discovery Research to measure baseline activity levels.

To address inactivity levels among the target populations identified in the four-year plan (seniors, people with disabilities, women and girls, children and youth, low-income families and Aboriginals), the task force also produced and conducted its own survey. The Everybody gets to play™ model has been used to identify the barriers to physical activity in those groups, with each of those populations receiving a tailor-made survey. To collect data (both online and hard copy), supporters were on the ground at places where the people they were trying to reach would be, including seniors' centres, the Food Bank, and social service agencies. Six hundred surveys came back, accounting for approximately 1,500 individuals (individual forms were sometimes filled out by families).

The results showed that lack of time was the number one barrier to getting active, followed by a lack of motivation. Mullin was surprised with the results, expecting finances to be the road block. The results also showed that work schedules are a significant obstacle. The task force plans to use this information to get more workplaces on board with wellness programs.



*"It really helps us with the workplace wellness program in that we have to really be educating workplaces that they have a huge impact on the health of people in their community and they can contribute to that to create a healthier Penticton,"* Mullin said. *"We have a lot of work to do but we have the local stats and the local information to go back to the community to tell them this is a real issue."*

The survey results are being released to local media, community partners, city council and any other groups. Next, the task force will look for appropriate partners and create an action plan to break down those barriers.

The City hosted a BCRPA Active Communities Active Workplace Workshop in February 2007 which built initial contacts and got people excited to start something in their organizations.

*"Now we have a growing network of businesses in Penticton that are focusing on workplace wellness,"* Mullin said.

Another workshop was scheduled to reunite this initial group and to provide the opportunity for new businesses to get involved. GetActive! Penticton's community coordinator has been maintaining contact with the network and recruiting new workplaces.

The task force is now also working on a communications plan, a marketing plan and a sponsorship program for the initiative. GetActive! Penticton now has a website ([www.penticton.ca/gap](http://www.penticton.ca/gap)), flyers, a logo, media releases and other promotional materials.

### PENTICTON STEPS OUT

In his 20 years working for the city, Bob Pope has never seen as many people committing to a fitness program for the duration they have in the Penticton Steps Out walking initiative. There are roughly 2,500 adult and student participants who have collectively logged more than 2 billion steps since 2004. Nearly 50 communities around BC are now following Penticton's lead as a model, using pedometers for similar programs.

It all started in 2004, when a Penticton yoga instructor told Pope about a pedometer program in Colorado and suggested trying it out. Within a few months, 500 people had signed up for Penticton's



version of the program—and half of their names had never been in the community centre’s computer before. Steps Out then moved into the schools to get Grade 6 students using pedometers; the Step into Action program now boasts more than 1,500 student participants, while the adult Steps Out program, run out of the community centre, now has about 1,000 participants. Pope says the numbers speak for themselves.

*“In recreation, you’re lucky if you can keep people participating on a 3-month basis,”* said Pope, who is a member of the GetActive! Penticton task force and the City’s Active Living Recreation Coordinator. *“I think [Steps Out] is the easiest tool to get people active.”*

Word of the program got out to other Active Communities through an article Pope wrote for the BCRPA magazine’s fall 2005 issue and through word-of-mouth with other registered communities, especially at the 2006 BCRPA Symposium. Pope credits the program’s success to the ease of fitting the walks into each individual’s schedule. He also recognizes the program’s success is owed to the website Edis Computers created, which shows each walker’s progress along a virtual map and keeps them accountable to themselves to pick up their pace.

*“The sustainability is you’re competing against yourself; you’re moving along the map,”* Pope said.

Pope has witnessed the program’s impact on people’s health and lifestyles. He hears success stories from participants practically every other day, everywhere he goes. One mother reports her son no longer heads for the TV or computer after school and instead finds ways to get active and keep moving along his virtual map. An 83-year-old woman has family across the country who keep track of her progress along the map and check on her if she doesn’t log many steps in a day. She told Pope the program has changed

her life. He has noticed the majority of participants are over the age of 40 and predominantly women—two of the target populations in Penticton’s Active Community plan.

*“Community pride has been really huge,”* Pope said. *“As a community it’s really helped to make people feel great about their achievements, and their achievements as a team.”* Once participants get excited about walking, it’s a gateway to moving into other physical activities, he notes.

To keep people moving, Pope is creating a walking map of Penticton to show the time it takes to walk to key destinations such as the community centre. The maps will be placed at bus stops and the mall to encourage people to walk.

Another key factor in the program’s success is the partnerships and sponsorships that have formed. The city’s partnership with the Interior Health Authority boosted the program’s credibility and resources. For the past year, Steps Out has put on active living health fairs in cooperation with the Healthy Heart Society’s hearts@work program, often filling the 400 plus-capacity theatre in town. Local physicians, dieticians, athletes, kinesiologists, stress counselors and fitness instructors give motivational talks for free at the forums and workshops. This gives the presenters exposure and Steps Outs gets free community resources.

*“Penticton’s getting healthier,”* Pope said. *“[The lectures] are getting people more active, whether they’re involved in Steps Out or not.”*

The Step into Action student pedometer program, coordinated by Interior Health Nurse Educator and Active Community team member Carol Stathers, runs similar health conferences called hearts@school. This partnership between Penticton Recreation, Interior Health and School District 67 teaches youth the benefits of healthy,

active living. Step into Action received a \$4,000 Interior Health mini-grant.

The Penticton Steps Out program won a BC Public Sector Information Technology Award for Citizen Engagement in 2006 for the Edis Computers-created website, a Canadian Parks and Recreation Association Award of Excellence for Innovation in 2005, and a BC Recreation and Parks Association Award for Program Excellence in 2005.



Communities in the Okanagan Valley have now brought their Steps Out programs together to create Unite the Valley. The initiative has prize incentives for walkers who reach milestones on their way to the virtual destination. Unite the Valley communities include Osoyoos, Penticton, Summerland, Peachland, Westbank, Kelowna, Lake Country and Vernon.

The walking program and health fairs can be successful in any community, not just Penticton, Pope notes. The most important thing to keep in mind when competing with the TV and sofa, Pope said, is keeping things fun and new, like contests and promotions with concert ticket prizes.

Pope hopes the next thing in store for Penticton will be to expand the Steps Out program into workplaces.