



## Dawson Creek Mobilizes to give Everybody a Chance to Play

January 2009

Dawson Creek has a new group of community partners who have come together to find creative ways to get low-income families involved in sport and recreation opportunities.

The City of Dawson Creek's Recreation Department leads the local Active Communities initiative and Everybody Active initiative: two provincial programs that the BC Recreation and Parks Association (BCRPA) is delivering in B.C. With support from BCRPA, the Recreation Department is working with key community partners to develop strategies to get people active at low or no cost. The committee of partners represent School District 59,

the Nawican Friendship Centre, Northern Health, the BC Ministry of Children and Family Development, the mental health sector, human resources professionals, Success by Six, and City Council.

In Dawson Creek there exists an income level disparity between transient oil and gas workers and some of the city's more permanent lower-income residents. The steering committee is aiming to reach out to these lower-income residents. The committee is also working towards engaging Aboriginal families in recreation, as the region has a high proportion of Aboriginal residents.

Dawson Creek's Active Community plan highlights people on low incomes as one of its key target populations, as well as Aboriginals and families. The plan aims to increase physical activity levels of people living in Dawson Creek and contribute to their personal well-being and quality of life.

To find out what recreational activities these groups are interested in accessing, the committee is sending out a questionnaire through community gathering places and organizations. The City of Dawson Creek was inspired to use this method of trusting community partners to distribute drop-in tickets to those who need the assistance and eliminating the requirement to "*prove poverty*" by the City of Kelowna's Recreation Opportunities program.

The coupon book will be created once the committee receives the questionnaires and understands what activities are the most popular or desirable for these target populations. The committee would then approach sport and recreation organizations in the City to participate in the coupon book program.

The questionnaire will also contain a brochure developed by the Recreation staff. This brochure will contain a city map marking free or low-cost places to go and things to do, such as parks, to further build awareness of opportunities for physical activity.

The committee will address the barrier of transportation to encourage new users to access recreation facilities. The City is fortunate to have a new Multiplex



## Peace River/Liard – Dawson Creek

recreation facility, which includes the Kenn Borek Aquatic pool and the Encana Events Centre's free indoor walking track. But not everyone has dropped in to try it out yet, in part because it can be a challenge to get to the facility which isn't located close to residential neighbourhoods. To overcome this barrier, the committee will approach transportation providers as potential partners to provide bus transportation that would take groups to and from the Multiplex from community partner organizations/locations such as the Nawican Friendship Centre.

*"They would be going with people that they already know and that they feel comfortable with,"* said Recreation Programmer Erin Oliver, who leads Dawson Creek's Active Community initiative.

In addition, the committee plans to partner with School District 59 to offer programs in school gyms through their joint use agreement. Families could then walk to the school and participate together. Parents, then, would not have to pay for childcare while they take part in a sport or recreation program.

*"We're hoping programs will be available in each area of town, not just in one school,"* Oliver said. Once the participants get comfortable with different activities, such as yoga, they could practice independently or with their family.

*"People could come to one of these programs to learn activities that they could take home, and continue on with it,"* Oliver said. In addition, they could move on to try activities at the Multiplex.

These ideas and strategies that the committee is now implementing to engage inactive residents came about after the Recreation Department started working with Everybody Active in the fall of 2008. The Recreation Department's support from Everybody Active prompted the dialogue between community groups.

Everybody Active is a joint initiative of the BCRPA and the Heart and Stroke Foundation of BC and Yukon, funded by the BC Healthy Living Alliance with support from ActNow BC. The underlying philosophy of Everybody Active is that by working together to remove barriers to physical activity, communities can play an important role in promoting health and social well-being among individuals and families from underprivileged situations.

Everybody Active sponsored an Everybody gets to play™ workshop in October to create an understanding of the barriers preventing low-income families from accessing recreation opportunities and to explore ways to remove those obstacles. Everybody gets to play™ is a national program, delivered in this province by BCRPA, which encourages a community development approach to ensuring economically disadvantaged children and families have access to quality leisure experiences. The local community representatives that were at the workshop then formed the committee that is rolling out these low-income access strategies.

*"From that group we were able to engage people who could help steer our Everybody Active program along,"* Oliver said.

The day after the workshop, Recreation staff developed the City's Active Community plan with the help of BCRPA's Community Developers. The Everybody Active initiative in Dawson Creek supports the City's Active Community plan, as well as the City's overarching commitment to serve its residents and increase usage of new facilities in Dawson Creek.

By working together with local groups and leveraging provincial initiatives, Dawson Creek's team of partners are making it easier for people on low incomes to get out the door and get moving with their community.

## Dawson Creek Highlights

- Hosted an Everybody Gets to Play™ workshop
- Formed partnerships with key community groups
- Working with BCRPA's Everybody Active initiative to pilot projects that remove barriers to participation for people affected by poverty
- Developed an Active Community plan with BCRPA's Community Developers
- Conducting a needs assessment questionnaire of people on low incomes to increase accessibility to recreation
- Planning to develop a coupon book of sport and recreation activities
- Working with School District 59 to maximize use of school gyms in neighbourhoods
- Developing a wellness initiative for city hall employees
- Offered a Girls Get Fit pilot program to introduce girls to activities such as kickboxing, cycling training and yoga
- Awarded a Province of BC grant to purchase and install outdoor fitness stations for seniors
- Attended BCRPA's Active Communities Regional Roundtable in 2007

## Dawson Creek Info

- Population:** 11,811 (BC Stats 2007)
- Located at Mile Zero of the Alaska Highway
  - South Peace Community Multiplex opened in 2007 containing the Kenn Borek Aquatic Centre, indoor walking track, Encana Events Centre ice arena and Lakota Agri-Centre
  - Outdoor recreation facilities include trails for downhill and cross-country skiing, horseback riding, mountain biking, and walking; a skateboard park; tennis and basketball courts; baseball diamonds; soccer fields; a man-made lake for swimming; an outdoor speed skating oval; and a natural green belt through the city

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