

MEDIA RELEASE



CITY OF SURREY WINS BCRPA PROGRAM EXCELLENCE AWARD *City of Surrey honoured with 2020 Program Excellence Award*

Vancouver (June 22, 2020) - The BC Recreation and Parks Association (BCRPA) presented its Program Excellence Award for members with a population of over 15,000 to the City of Surrey for its Sensory Friendly Spaces program. The award recognizes a creative, successful, and innovative program which may serve as a model for other recreation and parks agencies to enhance their services.

The City of Surrey has one of the highest rates of Autism in British Columbia. To address this, and guided by the City's principle of inclusion, Surrey partnered with the Canucks Autism Network (CAN) to create and promote several sensory-friendly options for people living with autism spectrum disorder or who have sensory processing needs.

The Sensory Friendly Spaces program aims to ensure people living with Autism feel welcome at City events and facilities. A sensory friendly space is a calm and quiet area designed to create a supportive environment for individuals who have autism spectrum disorder, anxiety or other sensory-processing needs. The sensory friendly space allows individuals to feel safe and calm, allowing them to not only attend events but also feel supported throughout the event.

In an effort to make the City the most accessible city in Canada, recreation centres across Surrey also have adopted sensory friendly kits to support patrons. The kits contain noise-cancelling headphones, sensory toys, and fidget toys and can be borrowed from the reception desk in each centre. These low-cost kits are incorporated into recreation centre budgets to make this project sustainable in the long term. The program also integrates training for front line staff on how to use these kits with patrons. The City has also developed kits in partnership with the Surrey Fire Department to support Fire Fighters in emergency situations to help people with autism and other sensory processing needs.

"The City of Surrey's Sensory Friendly Spaces program is a highly deserving recipient of the BCRPA Program Excellence Award. This innovative program now allows both children and adults who live on the autism spectrum to have safe, supported access to city facilities and events, serving as a powerful model for other recreation and parks agencies to learn from. Not being able to hold our annual awards ceremony in person this year, we have chosen instead to present them today as another way to celebrate June being recreation and parks month. Recreation and parks have never been more important to our lives than they are right now and our awards help further highlight the impactful work being done in communities across BC," said Rebecca Tunnacliffe, CEO of the BC Recreation and Parks Association.

The Program Excellence Award is one of four provincial awards presented virtually by BCRPA on behalf of over 3,300 recreation and parks sector members from across BC, each working to enhance the physical and mental health, wellness, connectedness and quality of life of their communities.

Images Available
Background included

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BACKGROUND

The British Columbia Recreation and Parks Association (BCRPA) is the voice of public recreation and parks, and champions the sector's development of healthy people and connected communities. Representing over 95% of the provinces' local governments, we play a central role in supporting the enrichment and improvement of the quality of life of British Columbians. Our work as a not-for-profit organization focuses on creating community connectedness and well-being based on the knowledge and recognition that recreation and active living, as well as access to parks and the natural environment, have significant impacts on our physical and mental health. Since 1958, the BCRPA has provided leadership, training and support, fostering the principles of accessibility and inclusiveness, to help its members meet provincial and local mental health and physical activity priorities.

www.bcrpa.bc.ca/about-us/