

## **The British Columbia Recreation and Parks Association Statement on Child Care Regulatory Review**

The British Columbia Recreation and Parks Association wants to ensure that the Child Care Licensing Regulation not jeopardize the availability of recreation opportunities for children in BC. We believe that defining standards to provide the highest level of care for children is important. However, equally important is the need for those standards to be flexible enough to allow the recreation sector to provide activities based on the needs of children and their families and communities.

### **Role of recreation in BC**

Apart from the school system, the recreation and sport sector probably deals with more children than any other sector in BC; children participate in recreation and sport activities of all kinds everyday, from camps to sport leagues, aquatics to arts. Community recreation plays a crucial role in the healthy development of children in our communities. While children participate in these programs or activities, they are learning about everything from self-expression to cooperation to a healthy view of competition.

These activities and programs help shape children's self-esteem, sense of self-worth and belonging, and form part of the foundation for them to develop into strong, contributing members of society. Dr. Clyde Hertzman of the Human Early Learning Partnership Interdisciplinary Research at UBC, has shown that access to quality developmental activities for young children in BC is a key determinant to creating healthy and happy children. Positive experiences in sports and recreation help children stay longer in school, become better students, and develop good coping skills to adapt to new situations.

Affordable recreational activities also have a positive impact on the integration of new immigrants to Canadian society, allowing them to make connections to their community and learn to speak English in a relaxed playful environment. The recreation sector has an important role in the village that raises the child and has made a commitment to develop capable, caring individuals who will contribute effectively to the community in the future.

Community recreation providers strive to find ways to help children learn how to use their leisure time positively and want to foster a life-long commitment to physical activity and healthy living. Recreation programs are key players in British Columbia's strategy to increase by 20% the overall level of activity of the population by 2010, and curtail the impact that risk factors to chronic disease, such as obesity and physical inactivity, have on the B.C. population. Any licensing requirements that would jeopardize and diminish the opportunities for children to experience recreation and sport activities would be counter productive to the goal of the Ministry of Health to reduce risk factors for chronic diseases.

### **Recreation programs are activity and skill-based, not care-based**

Recreation programs provide a variety of activities which are safe, affordable, age-appropriate, activity-based, flexible and short-term or seasonal. Children of all ages are encouraged to learn a variety of new skills and build their social confidence.

The recreation sector offers an option of services to parents who do not require regular full-time child care and to parents who want sporadic and flexible out-of-school care for their children. Recreation programs respond to the leisure needs expressed by children and parent/guardians in their communities. When a scheduled activity does not get enough registrants, the program is cancelled; this situation would never occur in a licensed day care program where parents and guardians rely on the long term stability of the care to be able to work or study.

When parents and guardians enrol their children in recreation programs, their expectations are different from parents and guardians who enrol their children in licensed child care facilities. With community recreation programs, parents want their children to have access to affordable and varied activities which take into consideration age-specific developmental factors and interests of children i.e. Photography for 10 to 13 years old, Creating Imaginary Worlds for 5 to 8 years old, and Ballet-Pre for 2.5 to 5 years old.

Parents and guardians also want access to:

- Affordable activities i.e. some programs offer financial support or a sliding scale for families which require financial assistance
- Programs which take care of the needs of parents as well as children i.e. Playtime Workout Combo, where parents use the fitness centres or attend aerobics while their young children (3 to 5 yrs old) play in a fun and safe atmosphere
- Activities catering to the interest of children and youth while giving short breaks to parents during their non-working hours i.e. Friday Night Live Out – Trips for grades 6 to 10 (Ice Skating, Snow Tubing, Disco Bowling, Stardust Roller Rink)

Municipalities and organizations are also accountable to their residents and members; if quality recreational activities for children are not provided, parents and guardians have no difficulty making their dissatisfaction known to the recreation staff, politicians or board members. Some municipalities have an extra layer of accountability by having to report to a Recreation Commission or a Community Association on a regular basis.

### **Internal regulations and procedures**

Recreation programs offered by municipalities in multigenerational complexes, like those presented by organizations such as the YMCA and YWCA, address most of the safety issues raised in childcare legislation. The welfare of children and families is of utmost importance and program providers are accountable to municipal bylaws, procedures and guidelines which provide safety assurance. They are also governed by the Local Government Act, the Health Act (swimming pools), the Safety Standards Act (ice rinks, community facilities) and the Privacy Act. Where registered non-profits are involved in program delivery, the Society Act holds Directors similarly accountable. Risk management practices recommend safe instructor-child ratios and similar guidelines under the Municipal Insurance Association, or its equivalent.

The recreation sector also follows strict hiring policies. Staff and volunteers are screened, criminal record checks are conducted, certification is required (coaching, CPR, First Aid) and additional professional training is provided when necessary. Recreation programs are regularly enhanced by new developments in instructional theory and practice, to advancements in quality assurance in many disciplines, to tools such as the HIGH FIVE Program which reinforces healthy child development and evaluation standards across the recreation sector.

Many of the recreation programs for children aged 5 and under have limits of 8 to 10 children per staff, exceeding current licensing requirements. They also have:

- First aid equipment on site;
- Emergency procedures in place;
- Protocols for attendance;
- Emergency contacts and medical requirements on file;
- Pick-up procedures; and
- Procedures for a lost child.

### **Definition of care and licensing requirements**

The definition of “child care” needs to be more clearly stated in the Regulation. Programs that do not function as care such as short-term, socially-based recreation or skill-based programs are inappropriately labelled “child care” because of the generality of the definition. Recreation is significantly different in purpose from licensed child care, and that purpose should be the determining factor in defining whether or not a program requires licensing.

The Child Care Regulation is intended to ensure the health and safety of children. Undue licensing requirements of the recreation sector would compromise the accessibility and affordability of recreation programs for children in BC which already have at heart the well-being and safety of children.

BC Recreation and Parks Association  
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