

Literature review on citizen engagement and promising practices for those citizens on low income and their access to municipal recreation programs and facilities (2009)

for

British Columbia Recreation and Parks Association

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Recreation Policy = Health Policy

The recreation sector has shifted from being a provider of sport and leisure opportunities to playing a vital role in the health continuum. Because recreation opportunities have been known to affect both the physical health and social well-being of communities, recreation providers are well-placed to be significant contributors to community health.

Recreation services are often the main providers of active living opportunities. The health benefits of physical activity are well known, including prevention of chronic disease and obesity, as well as protection from stress and anxiety. Public pools, arenas, fitness centres, parks and trails, and recreation programs all contribute to active lifestyles.

Recreation opportunities also provide places for community members to come together, build friendships and develop social networks. People often smile and say “hello” to each other as they walk or jog on trails. Regular patrons at a recreation facility often develop a sense of community as they see each other at the same time and same place week after week. Given these health and social benefits, one may wonder why more people do not take advantage of these opportunities.

There are many documented reasons why people do not participate in recreation opportunities. For people living on low income, there are a number of recognized barriers that are numerous and varied.. Cost is certainly a barrier, even for some people who do not fall under the poverty line. And cost is a common thread that weaves through the many layers of barriers that prevent most people from participating. But even when programs and services are offered for free, there are other reasons why community members may not participate.

Promoting physical activity for physical and social health requires more than just individual behaviour changes. In order to support recreation staff to be responsive to the diverse range of community needs, they need to be empowered and guided through policy.

The purpose of this document is to support the adoption or revision of access to recreation policies, to provide examples of promising practices and to make recommendations on policy priorities. The long term outcome is to ensure that those living on the margins of our communities are able to equitably access the health and social benefits of recreation.

The Role of Policy or What is Public Policy?

Public policy is a planned course of action that an organization will undertake, but it is typically anchored in both a set of values regarding appropriate public goals and a set of beliefs about the best way to achieve those goals. This approach provides consistency in actions and decisions made by staff. Typically a “policy directs but does not consist of, operational programs and details” (Milne, G, 2007). With regard to recreation policies and access to recreation programs and services, having such a policy in place may:

- Demonstrate a local government’s commitment to community health and well-being.
- Substantiate a belief in service equity.
- Express an understanding of the benefits of recreation.
- Guide how the local government will ensure equitable opportunities to all in the community.

It is important to recognize that policies can either support the status quo or facilitate change.

In this resource, a distinction is made between access to recreation policies and fee assistance programs. Policies relate to overall strategic commitments to ensuring that recreation opportunities are truly accessible to socio-economically disadvantaged community members. Fee assistance programs are just one part of such policies as such programs are important but the reach is often limited.

Fee assistance programs, although an important element of recreation policies, have a limited reach due to a number of recognized barriers.

Debates and trends in recreation access policy

Policy development in Canada, whether at a national, provincial, or municipal level in many situations follows an established hierarchical process or it is at least intended to follow a process. Generally speaking the larger the government the more complex the process. Typically at a municipal level it will involve the elected officials, committees, staff research and preparation, and public input that vary depending on what is required (Wolf, R, 2009,).

Municipal recreation staff whether working in one neighbourhood or for the whole municipality or region, the work they do, the people they work with and the issues that they deal with are often impacted by senior levels of government whether at a provincial or municipal level.

Financial versus social focus

The Canadian municipal recreation profession has viewed its role as providing community recreation programming and facilities for the enjoyment of all citizens in a community. Recreation departments contend that their role is to be inclusive of all members of the community and that no citizen is to be denied access.

During the past several years recreation departments have been faced with financial constraints that have created pressures to adopt a more businesslike approach, known as new public management (Harvey, 2001; Thibault, Kikulis, & Frisby, 2004). This approach is closely tied to the rise of neo-liberalism, the development of public-private partnerships, and the privatization of public services (Harvey, 2001; Arai & Reid, 2003; Thibault et al., 2004).

The emphasis on revenue generation has become common place for municipal recreation departments and the bottom line is now the business of recreation, rather than the delivery of recreation services to all citizens in the community (Thibault, Frisby & Kikulis, 1999; Harvey, 2001; Thibault et al., 2004). The pressure to provide more, but with reduced budgets, has come from a combination of factors such as downloading from other levels of government, increased demand for services, and resistance to increased taxes. Furthermore the current global economy is unstable and this puts more pressure on municipal services, and in particular, recreation.

Sustainability has become a popular term in both the public and private sector. Environmental sustainability is a concept now widely recognized. We are aware of our limited natural resources, of air and water pollution, of rainforest destruction, and of the thinning ozone. Most of us understand that the health of our planet depends upon us making significant changes in the ways we live, practice business, and think. However, many definitions of sustainability include a third pillar: social sustainability. The idea of social sustainability is, like environmental sustainability, about taking future generations into consideration, and living with the awareness that our actions make an impact on others and the world at large. The City of Vancouver has the following approach to social sustainability:

For a community to function and be sustainable, the basic needs of its residents must be met. A socially sustainable community must have the ability to maintain and build on its own resources and have the resiliency to prevent and/or address problems in the future.

There are two types or levels of resources in the community that are available to build social sustainability (and, indeed, economic and environmental sustainability) – individual or human capacity, and social or community capacity.

Individual or human capacity refers to the attributes and resources that individuals can contribute to their own well-being and to the well-being of the community as a whole. Such resources include education, skills, health, values and leadership.

Social or community capacity is defined as the relationships, networks and norms that facilitate collective action taken to improve upon quality of life and to ensure that such improvements are sustainable.

To be effective and sustainable, both these individual and community resources need to be developed and used within the context of four guiding principles: equity, social inclusion and interaction, security, and adaptability.

City of Vancouver web site

It is important that recreation departments recognize their potential to create positive outcomes that support individual and community social sustainability. Recreation departments provide opportunities for individuals to improve their well-being. Recreation also facilitates learning, skill development, socialization, and opportunities to promote physical health. In addition, recreation provides opportunities for individuals to develop social networks and connect with the wider community, reducing social isolation and encouraging civic engagement.

Top down versus bottom up policy development

Often when local government has developed a policy, the first step will be to inform the public about the policy, which is an information-giving process rather than an information-gathering process. There is no real opportunity for the stakeholders to be involved because the decision has already been made. In this process the government is trying to educate the public about an initiative to which it is committed. Often this is the case in the development of fee waiver policies or fee policies. Sometimes a municipal recreation department may get informal input from stakeholders through surveys and staff input. However it is not a formal process, whereby they would go back to the stakeholder for further input.

There has been a growing movement among citizens who demand to be consulted about policy development and to be included in how governments proceed on issues affecting their lives (Arai, 1996, Patten, 2001, Phillips & Orsini, 2002). The literature indicates that governments are increasingly aware of the need to involve citizens in policy debates and social issues.

Much has been written in academic journals about citizens who are marginalized and live below the poverty line; and that they often are forgotten during the development of public policy. While this may not be intentional in parks and recreation departments, policies that address issues of access to recreation programs have not been developed with meaningful input from those very citizens who are affected by such policies. Studies suggest that those citizens who are marginalized and live below the poverty line be involved in the development of policies and programs that affect them.

Things you can do

Recreation programmers or supervisors can meet informally with low income community members and ask them what they think of the local leisure policy. Here is an opportunity to receive input on what works well in the policy and what is not working. This type of meeting can be done on a yearly basis, and will provide important information for the department. It is important to ensure that these stakeholders are kept informed as to whether their concerns were heard. This kind of action assists in building relationships with community members who may not generally have a voice.

Policy development: Who gets involved and who does NOT get involved.

Despite the increasing grassroots activity, many local governments lament the low numbers they see at consultation events.

In a study by Lowndes, Prachett and Stoker (2001) a number of reasons were cited as to why citizens did not involve themselves in citizen engagement; issues such as not having trust in their local government authorities, believing that the officials would not take an interest in their issues, and finally that their input would not be acted upon. Other reasons cited included that citizens were not aware that they could participate in discussions or did not know how they could become involved, and this ignorance--combined with a lack of response by local government to citizens concerns--created apathy. Citizens need to see that their involvement in policy development is recognized by the bureaucrats as important and useful in deliberations for change. We also should not take for granted that those on low income will just automatically participate in policy

development; due to their own demands on their lives and also the fact that there will be many differing opinions as to what will or will not work (Berner & Phillips, 2005).

Things you can do

- Invite those living on low income into the development process of a policy for access to recreation programs.
 - Notices can be posted in locations where those living on low income frequent.
 - Invitations may be extended by mail, by phone or in person to existing leisure access participants.
 - Work in conjunction with other service providers to assist in soliciting people to attend the meeting.
 - Meeting should take place where residents feel comfortable, such as a meeting room in a subsidized housing complex.
 - Make people feel comfortable, bring food and name tags.
- Talk to your supervisor about the importance of hearing from those who are on low income and how they need to have a voice into policy development.

In one study, it was identified that those citizens living below the poverty line were keenly aware of the health and social benefits of being involved in recreation programs and would have welcomed the opportunity to be consulted and have input into the development of leisure access policies. (Frisby, W., Alexander, T., Taylor, J., Tirone, S., Watson, C., Harvey, J., & Laplante, D. (2005)

The literature suggests the importance of citizen engagement in the development of public policy and in particular for those citizens that are marginalized, whether they are living on low income, have a disability, or are recent immigrants. It is also suggested that citizen engagement in policy development builds stronger communities and is therefore important to citizenship.

Things you can do

- Do some research on low income participation and barriers to participation by those who are living on low income. Become knowledgeable in the area so that you can inform others in your own community about issues regarding low income. To find some of this information, contact your local health authority.
- Consider taking on a pilot project involving low income community members in the development of a leisure access policy that would be presented to senior management.

How can it happen?

While there is little research on government documents and literature on citizen engagement for municipal parks and recreation departments, some information is available on citizen engagement in the delivery of health services and in the public library system. The standard method of public consultation for municipal parks and recreation departments has been and continues to be an approach where government controls the agenda and the list of invitees. Information flows in one direction and the process of getting input from the public is done on a sporadic basis with no real plan in place (Phillips & Orsini, 2002; Sam, 2003).

The concept of a community development model as a strategy for citizen engagement has been suggested as a method which will result in more effective policies programs and practices (Donnelly & Coakley, 2002; Frisby & Millar, 2002; Arai & Reid, 2003). While many recreation departments are involved in community development and claim to work with community groups and citizens the research suggests that staff make certain assumptions about the needs of those living below the poverty line and actually do not involve them in the development of leisure access policies.

In a document authored by Phillips and Orsini (2002) they suggest that engaging the public in policy development is essential to citizenship and that in today's communities this needs to be done. They outline a number of steps that are necessary for this to occur. These steps include:

- 1) mobilizing interest by creating a public space for debate;
- 2) claims making – allowing individuals and organizations to express claims, positions, and values on public policy issues;
- 3) knowledge acquisition – sharing expert and experiential knowledge;
- 4) spanning and bridging – across networks and communities;
- 5) convening and deliberating – exercising citizenship skills and forming horizontal bonds of affiliation;
- 6) community capacity building – creating social capital through the emergence of leaders and through collective action that helps communities attract financial, human and technical resources;
- 7) analysis and synthesis – reporting results of citizen involvement for policy making; and
- 8) transparency and feedback – demonstrating how public input was used and whether it made a difference. (Phillips and Orsini, 2002, p.8).

This suggested process for the development of such policies as leisure access would require parks and recreation departments to modify how they currently operate in

the development of leisure access; however, this is not to suggest that they do not develop other policies using a more inclusive method of citizen involvement. However this involvement with the community is generally not undertaken with leisure access policies, fee reduction policies, subsidies etc. Often, consultation or involvement with stakeholders occurs at the organizational level (i.e. organizations that work with or represent socio-economically disadvantaged community members) rather than at the individual level.

“Involving citizens in policy development around financial barriers to accessing recreation programs gives them a sense of belonging to a community, thereby decreasing isolation and giving individuals a sense of empowerment;

Not surprisingly then, citizen participation is directly linked to empowerment as a means of promoting healthier individuals and healthier communities (Arai & Pedlar, 1997, p. 170).”

Bryant (2002) suggests that when you involve citizens in policy development with policy makers, four things could take place:

- i) no policy change (e.g., when conflicting ideologies cannot be successfully negotiated or satisfactory alternatives are not identified)
- ii) normal policy change (e.g., when only minor adjustments to existing policies are made)
- iii) gradual or incremental paradigmatic change that result in major shifts in policy over time (e.g., when an alternative policy is implemented in stages)
- iv) radical policy change (e.g., when there is a relatively swift and complete shift to a new policy model).

Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN) is a not-for-profit organization. Its mission is to make Canada a more just, prosperous and caring society. With this in mind this organization does research in a number of areas including the area of Citizen Engagement. The research is free to download. The Network provides the research in an “impartial space” which provides for open dialogue for anyone who wishes to get involved. Much of the research is based on the national government and citizen engagement in policy development at a national level.

An article from CPRN titled Handbook on Citizen Engagement: Beyond Consultation by Amanda Sheedy, 2008 has a number of tools that would benefit the development of leisure access policies. This document describes what it means to have meaningful citizen engagement, and not just surveying the opinions of the public.

True citizen engagement is where the community member helps set the agenda, what needs to be discussed, etc. Having citizens engaged in policy development “requires governments to share in agenda-setting and to ensure that policy proposals generated jointly will be taken into account in reaching a final decision” (p.4)

The following table outlines a number of initiatives that constitute true citizen engagement in policy development. Citizen engagement initiatives may involve some of these characteristics and not necessarily all of them.

Citizen engagement	Not citizen engagement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involves citizens (individuals, not representatives) in policy of program development, from agenda setting and planning to decision-making, implementation and review. • Requires two way communication regarding policy or program change (interactive and iterative) between government and citizens; among citizens; and among citizens and civil society groups. • Aims to share decision-making power and responsibility for those decisions; includes forums and processes through which citizens come to an opinion that is informed and responsible. • Generates innovative ideas and active participation. • Contributes to collective problem solving and prioritization (deliberation). • Requires that information and process be transparent • Depends on mutual respect between all participants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engages exclusively the leaders of stakeholder groups or representatives. • Constitutes participation in a program where no decision-making power is granted regarding the shape or course of the policy or program. • Involves participants only in last phase of policy development. • Seeks approval for a pre-determined choice of alternatives. • Intends to fulfill “public consultation obligations” without a genuine interest in infusing the decision with the opinions sought. • Includes public opinion polls and many focus group exercises.

Table 2: Clarifying the Definition of Citizen Engagement. (p.5)

Things you can do

Here’s an opportunity for a recreation department or community centre to become involved: bring together women on low income, in a structured manner, and work with them to develop recreation programs that met their needs. Such a community development project may be accomplished in conjunction with the local health authority, or another social service agency. Funding for a pilot program could be accomplished through BCRPA grants, 2010 Legacies Now, or other grant agencies.

WOAW: An example of how it can happen.

A research project known as WOAW (Women Organizing Activities for Women) brought together a diverse group of women living on low income. Many of these women were single mothers, older women and immigrant women who lived in a tri-city area of British Columbia. The women came together with a number of community partners and UBC academic researchers to collectively address their social isolation through increased access to recreation.

The researchers operated from a “feminist participatory action” approach, and endeavoured to always involve the members of WOAW in all phases of the project. In addition, a significant amount of time was spent developing structures and principles of working together in the community-based organization that was formed to combat the hierarchy and power imbalances that had permeated the women’s lives. The research project aimed at including the women’s voices and also ensured that there was equitable participation in decision-making.

The research documented the processes and actions undertaken by participants over a five-year period (2000-2005). WOAW was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

There were three major points of discovery that arose from this research: social isolation was seen as a barrier to good health; all of the women would have liked to participate in community recreation but had limited or no access to community recreation; and their increased involvement in community recreation through WOAW was seen as a way of reducing social isolation, (Reid, C., Ponic, P., Frisby, W., 2002).

The positive impact that participation in community recreation programs had for women on low income gave them a sense of belonging. The research showed that the women enjoyed being part of a community of women, participating in physical activities and other recreation program opportunities, and being included in decision making. While some think that recreation is not a priority in poor women’s lives, women involved in WOAW identified positive results from their participation:

They viewed recreation as a means toward improving their health, managing chronic pain, reducing stress, setting a positive example for their children, meeting other women, and connecting with community partners who had access to resources (Reid et al., 2002, p. 2).

How has it happened?

Promising practices in Recreation Access

Every local government faces the challenge of providing affordable recreation programs and services, particularly in difficult economic times. Undoubtedly, there are many examples across Canada of good practices in recreation policy and programs for those citizens on low income. Innovative approaches have been taken in many communities to ensure that everyone--regardless of financial circumstances--can experience recreation without barriers; that everyone can engage in positive and quality leisure pursuits and enjoy physical, social and emotional health through participation in recreation.

The following section provides a sampling of the different approaches used by local governments to remove barriers to participation. Some communities have a strong guiding policy, while others have developed innovative programs. Inter-sectoral partnerships also feature prominently. There are also some examples of how public engagement can work in the recreation context.

In most cases, the communities that go above and beyond the traditional fee subsidy program leverage a combination of these promising practices:

- Policy
- Programs and Services
- Partnerships
- Public Engagement

Effort was taken to survey communities regarding opportunities that support participation and remove barriers for all age groups. While many access initiatives are aimed at children, youth and increasingly, seniors, surveys indicated that adults living in poverty often appear to be overlooked. When considering access initiatives, it is important to move beyond assumptions that adults are living in poverty because it is “their own fault.” Poverty is a manifestation of the many layers of social, economic, political and environmental factors that affect one’s status and health. (Reid, 2004)

In establishing recreation policy, we have a choice. We can reinforce these limiting factors by maintaining the status quo. Or we can play a role in minimizing their affect by ensuring that people affected by poverty have opportunities to improve their physical health and social well being through recreation.

It is important to note that this jurisdictional review was not an exhaustive survey. Participants included communities in British Columbia as well as other Canadian provinces and the North West United States. There are undoubtedly other promising practices that are happening throughout Canada in the area of access to recreation that we are not aware of, and therefore not able to comment on in this document.

BCRPA would like to thank the participating organizations for sharing the innovative initiatives that are increasing access to recreation for low income families. If you do have a promising practice that you would like to share with the rest of the province, please contact BCRPA.

Promising practices

Engagement

City of Edmonton: 2005

Development of recreation access strategy

A report titled "Recreation Access Strategy for Low-Income Edmontonians, 2005", was developed by the Community Services Department. One part of the development of the report was the consultation with stakeholders, citizens and groups with an interest in the outcomes of the strategy. There were six focus groups which included two groups of citizens living on low income, two groups of not-for-profit organizations and various other government agencies, and two groups of Community Service staff. These focus groups were asked for their views on the strategy that was under development for low income Edmontonians.

Their responses indicated that the top five barriers for persons on low income to access recreation programs were: affordability, transportation, awareness of information about opportunities, social barriers and child care.

City of Seattle: 2008

Development of fee subsidy policy

A committee of 30 people, comprising 1/3 parks professionals and 2/3 citizens (including low income) and volunteer members, developed the recommendations for the new policy. The committee met once a week for three hours and met over a period of ten weeks. In addition to the committee, staff interviewed people who were recipients of the resulting fee subsidy. One of the principles that came out of the recommendations is that participants did not want a subsidy that was completely free; rather, they felt better about paying a portion of the program fee.

Programs and Services

Winnipeg Community Development and Recreation Services Department

A division of the Winnipeg Community Development and Recreation Services known as Community Development and Recreation Initiatives is responsible for a number of free programs which are available to the children and youth of Winnipeg. While most of

the programming is geared to children and youth there are programs available to adults such as “Moms and Tots” programs.

A unique program known as Sport Programs in Inner City neighbourhoods (SPIN); targets children 6-14 years of age, and enables them to participate in sport programs where they learn basic skill development, team work, leadership and fair play in a non-competitive environment. This program tackles some of the barriers facing inner city youth by providing transportation, financial help, equipment, leadership and volunteer support. It is offered through the sponsorship of numerous government agencies and community groups.

In addition to the above recreation programs and services the Division operates three community centres in the downtown area which are geared to inner city families. These centres have a number of recreation services and programs available to families -- free of charge.

As well, there are a number of loonie/toonie public swimming and skating sessions offered throughout the week. And in some of the indoor swimming pools there is a free Friday night public swim session.

Currently there is a recreation review underway and the Division will be launching a new initiative during 2009 with plans for greater inclusion. Citizen engagement is also expected to be part of an integrated planning process between service providers and program participants. This will be implemented on a geographic basis.

City of Prince George Leisure Access Program

In 1999 a financial assistance task force which included a number of key stake holders resulted in the Leisure Access Card program, currently administered by parks and recreation.

This program is designed for residents of Prince George who are economically disadvantaged. Each participant receives a swipe card which entitles them to 40 passes for public swim and public skating admissions.

Additionally, participants are entitled to a 75% discount on recreation department registered programs. The discount can also be applied towards a ten visits of a monthly pass at either of the pools.

Partnerships

Some municipal recreation departments have developed partnerships with other social service agencies to provide services for citizens living on very low incomes.

City of Kelowna Sport and Recreation Department.

The department has developed a unique approach in the administration of their leisure access program. Rather than the department having to assess whether a resident meets the requirements of low income and who should receive the leisure access, the department has given the function of administration to a large variety of social service agencies who are in a better position to understand their clients' needs.

The list of 54 organizations includes: the school district, food bank, Friendship Centre, women's centre, subsidized housing agencies, Ministry of Children and Family Development social workers and the health authority. The department works with these community partners on a regular basis, and provides coupons to each agency, for more effective distribution to clients.

The coupons give access to public swimming and skating, babysitting, child minding, fitness drop in, weight room, drop in youth programs, open sessions in the gym such as drop in basketball in any city run facility.

In Kelowna, this approach helps to lessen the impact of having to prove poverty, which has been identified as a major barrier for citizens living on low income.

City of Surrey Parks and Recreation Department

The department has a leisure access card, which is a swipe card with photo ID and may be used by any member of a family. It's virtually the same card that is utilized by other patrons, so that there is no visible distinction between cards. These cards give unlimited access to all drop in programs at all city-owned recreation facilities including: swimming, skating (includes helmet and skate rentals) weight rooms, fitness classes and sports drop ins. In addition, a 75% discount is offered on most Parks, Recreation and Culture registered programs.

The department also has a good relationship with local schools and the community school coordinators. These coordinators are constantly keeping an eye out for those families in need, and also assist in filling out the forms that are required to receive a leisure access card.

Vancouver Island

Inter-municipal leisure access program known as L.I.F.E. (Leisure involvement for everyone)

The municipalities of Victoria, Saanich, Oak Bay, and Esquimalt, together with the West Shore Recreation Society and Panorama Recreation Commission, have joined together in the L.I.F.E. program that offers 52 drop-in admissions for swimming, skating and fitness on an annual basis, for each family member that meets the eligibility requirements. While each municipality may offer slightly programs for its citizens, the common element is the 52 drop-in admissions. This program came into effect January 1, 2000.

City of Prince George

The recreation department in Prince George does very little direct services; rather, they follow a community development model whereby the YMCA runs all the skating programs including public sessions. The YMCA honours the leisure access cards distributed by the City of Prince George, and then invoices the leisure services department.

Ongoing communication with the various social services agencies is good, and includes ensuring that administrative needs, such as application forms, are being met

Promising practices in social inclusion/ social sustainability

York Region, Ontario

Community and Health Services Department

Family strengthening programs, empowering people, engaging communities

The programs that are delivered by the York Region Community and Health Services department are at no cost to families and are designed to support and strengthen families and child development. These Family Strengthening Programs are for low income families and are designed to provide families with access to: parenting supports and community resources, community based programs and services and school readiness programs.

A range of programs are available for eligible families at no cost. Families choose the programs according to their needs and interests. The Family Strengthening programs are funded by York Region Community and Health Services Department and delivered by local municipal recreation departments and community agencies.

Summer Day Camp: Established in 1999, this program provides children with access to summer recreational programs offered by local municipal recreation departments. Children of Ontario Works participants and children of Social Housing residents are eligible for these programs.

After School Programs in Social Housing Communities: Established in 2003, this program provides a safe and positive after school environment which promotes positive social, emotional and physical development to children residing in five Social Housing sites in York Region. Children aged 6 to 12 years of age who reside in Social Housing sites are eligible for these programs.

Youth Leadership Camp: This program started in 2000, and provides youth with an opportunity to attend residential camps, for one week during the summer months. Youth aged 13 to 16 who reside in a Social Housing community are eligible for this program. They must have parental consent.

Swim to Survive Initiative: Starting in 2005, this program is still delivered in partnership with the nine local municipal recreation departments, local school boards and the Lifesaving Society. The program is offered at schools in the York Region, that have been identified by School Boards as having a higher percentage of students with families who are new to Canada and/or families with limited financial resources. This program teaches children in Grade 3 about the inherent risks associated with water, providing them with the skills necessary to survive an unexpected fall into water and their parents with important water education information.

PLAY (Positive Leisure Activities for Youth) Program: This program started in the spring of 2004. Subsidies are available for children aged 4 to 18 to attend recreation and sport programs, such as swimming lessons, dance lessons or sport programs (one program per session) in spring, fall and winter. Program fees cannot exceed \$93 per child or \$100 per youth for one session. Eligibility criteria: children of Ontario Works participants, children of parents in receipt of Child Care Fee Assistance or children of parents residing in Social Housing.

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