



Active After School Programs for Girls and Young Women

SUCCESS STORIES FROM FIVE FRIENDSHIP CENTRES

Project Background

In 2010-2012, the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS) partnered with the National Association of Friendship Centres and five member Centres to support the development and delivery of active after school programs for Aboriginal girls and young women. The project was part of CAAWS' involvement in the Canadian Active After School Partnership (CAASP), funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada. This document provides an overview with key learnings from each site to support the creation of similar programs at Friendship Centres and other active after school program providers across Canada.

Why After School?

The Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines recommend that young people accumulate 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity daily, but only 9% of boys and 4% of girls meet this level on most days of the week. The after school time period, from 3:00pm to 6:00pm, has been identified as an important opportunity to improve healthy living amongst children and youth. Many children and youth left alone during the after-school time period tend to watch television, use the computer, or play video games instead of playing outdoors, both by child preference and through parental directive (safety concerns). Researchers also report poor eating habits and increased crime and antisocial behaviour during this time. Quality active after school programs can provide girls and young women with positive environments in which to develop lifelong physical activity habits. Programs that integrate moderate and vigorous physical activity, and support healthy eating choices, will contribute to achieving outcomes relating to girls' and young women's health.

"The obesity rate for Aboriginal people is much higher than non-Aboriginal. We're trying to stop the increasing numbers by educating and supporting participants in establishing healthy habits while they are young so when they are older they will continue to live a healthy lifestyle. The On the Move after school program is allowing for the girls to change, and the best part is the girls want to change."

PROGRAM LEADER, HAMILTON ON



On the Move – Getting more Girls and Young Women Active!

CAAWS partnered with Friendship Centres in Vancouver BC, Riverton MB, Fort Frances ON, Hamilton ON, and St. John's NL to create free active after school programs based on CAAWS' On the Move concept. On the Move is CAAWS' national initiative to increase opportunities for inactive girls and young women to participate in sport and physical activity. The On the Move concept supports participant-driven, community-specific programs based on the On the Move Top 10 Success factors:

- 1 Emphasize Fun!
- 2 Introduce a Variety of Physical Activities
- 3 Allow Input into Program Design
- 4 Provide Female-Only Opportunities
- 5 Create a Positive Environment
- 6 Teach the Basics
- 7 Move More
- 8 Be a Positive Role Model
- 9 Coordinate Transportation
- 10 Provide Healthy Food

For more information about the On the Move Active After School Program Top 10 Success Factors, or to download CAAWS' Active After School Program Policy and Recommendations document, visit www.caaws.ca/onthemove.

“This program differed in that it put emphasis on connecting with those not already engaged in sport. The experience encouraged me to develop better strategies to attract, engage and retain young girls, and now I have a great circle of youth to connect with on future projects and programs. I have also developed a greater sensitivity to some of the issues that affect girls. With a better understanding of these barriers, I can better meet the needs of the community.”

PROGRAM COORDINATOR, VANCOUVER BC

Program Descriptions

■ *Girls On the Move*

Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre Society, BC

Once per week, typically on Thursdays, girls and young women, ages 8-18, gather after school for Girls On the Move at the Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Society. The program is one component of the Centre's Youth Enrichment initiative, designed to offer Aboriginal children and youth a safe place to engage in educational, cultural, and recreational activities. The female-only program provided participants with an opportunity to try a variety of activities and learn about healthy eating. Each week started with 60-90 minutes of moderate and vigorous physical activities, including, basketball, soccer, athletics (Run Jump Throw), swimming, skipping, pow wow dancing, circus activities (pogo stick, Diablo, hula hoops, stilts), yoga, hiking, and walking/jogging along the Vancouver seawall. The second half of the program featured healthy meal preparation with lessons about healthy grains, super greens, living foods, healthy substitutions, balanced eating, and hydration. Popular recipes included pasta and salad, kale chips, green smoothies, quinoa salad, and homemade granola bars. Two female Aboriginal youth were recruited as “ambassadors”, assisting the non-Aboriginal program coordinator and acting as the point for contact for

“Having a girls-only program has enabled us to offer female-specific programming to encourage new participants to join and ensure participants felt comfortable trying new activities. Catering to the girls' unique needs and interests produced greater engagement, more laughter, and bigger smiles all around. Since completing the program, we've seen an increase in female participants accessing both the co-ed and girls only group programs.”

PROGRAM LEADER, VANCOUVER BC

participants. The ambassadors were strong female leaders selected based on their sport experience, demonstrated leadership skills, reputation within the community, and “down to earth natures” which supported the development of positive relationships with the program participants. Most sessions were provided at the Centre. Transportation to off-site activities was provided via the Centre’s van, or bus tickets were provided.

■ *Girls On the Move*

Riverton & District Friendship Centre, MB

Girls On the Move is a bi-weekly active after school program delivered by the Riverton and District Friendship Centre. The program was designed to help girls and young women, ages 12-20, become more physically active while having fun, socializing, increasing self-esteem, and learning about fitness, health and wellness. The program originally focused on Aquasize Zumba, providing girls and young women with an opportunity to travel to the neighbouring town of Gimli (Riverton doesn’t have a pool). However, program leaders were surprised that body image issues that prevented many participants from fully participating, and costs relating to transportation were high (a bus was used to transport participants). Reflecting the On the Move Success Factors, the second program was delivered in Riverton at the Friendship Centre and the local Middle School. Activities included soccer, volleyball, basketball, paddleball, and Zumba, as well as healthy eating games and workshops. After school snacks were provided. The program leader noted that the girls became more outgoing and less shy as the program progressed.

“Delivering the program I realized how shy most of the girls are and the need for them to increase their self-esteem.

This program helped them feel more comfortable participating in a healthy living program.”

PROGRAM LEADER, RIVERTON MB

■ *On the Move*

Hamilton Regional Indian Centre, ON

The On the Move program at the Hamilton Regional Indian Centre was about “learning to live an active life.” It was developed to teach participants that healthy living is more than playing a sport or exercising — that it’s about moving your body, pursuing whatever activity you like. Each week, girls and young women, ages 8-13, gathered for the program — program registration was limited because the Centre’s van, used for transportation, could only accommodate six passengers. The Centre’s more holistic approach included a variety of activities selected by participants, including tag games, relay races, walking, stair climbing, Zumba, traditional dance, floor hockey and basketball. The program also featured traditional teachings including crafts, singing, and smudging; and education about healthy eating through a “mock shop” grocery store tour, tasting and cooking activities, and healthy recipe research. Providing an after school snack provide participants with something to look forward to. Investing time in developing relationships with participants, and building their trust, enabled the program leader to integrate a number of new experiences that participants may not have participated in before. The close nature of the group also made participants feel like they were part of something special, and supported open sharing of experiences and issues the girls are confronting.

“Girls wanted to come back. They enjoyed our time together and were upset when program was over. They would all argue who would be the last one dropped off at home.”

PROGRAM LEADER, HAMILTON ON

■ *SHOW P.R.I.D.E (Powerful, Respectful, Intelligence, Dependable, Epic)*
Aboriginal On the Move — Girls Group
United Native Friendship Centre, Fort Frances ON

The United Native Friendship Centre provided two active after school programs — one for girls, ages 9-12, the other for young women, ages 13-15. The goal of both programs was to expose participants to a variety of physical activities in hopes that they would leave the program with an interest in continuing with at least one new activity. During the first sessions, participants created a name for the program, and brainstormed and voted on their activity preferences. As a result, the programs included cardio boxing, the Insanity Fitness Test workout video, Zumba, hiking, walking, snowshoeing, bowling, volleyball, dodge ball, and laser tag. Since participants selected these activities, program leaders expected all girls to participate, and participant retention was high throughout the program. Participants also contributed to the preparation of healthy snacks. An end of program downhill ski day for the older age group was planned to celebrate participants' successes in the program.

"We received a lot of feedback from parents about how happy they were with the program. Comments were made that the mood of their daughter was so much better after programming, and that they were interested in different activities, such as running, or Zumba, which they never thought they would hear from their child."

PROGRAM LEADER, FORT FRANCES ON

■ *You Go Girls*
St. John's Native Friendship Centre, NL

You Go Girls was designed to provide girls and young women from the diverse Aboriginal communities in St. John's (including Innu, Inuit, Métis and Mi'Kmaq) with an opportunity to participate in a variety of fun, recreational activities while building their skills and healthy living knowledge. Program activities included boxfit, glow golfing, bowling, wall climbing, healthy food preparation and tasting activities, label reading, diabetes education, and talking circles. Many participants had little or no access to sport and physical activity facilities or equipment outside of this program. Initially the program was called AWARE — Aboriginal Women Accessing Recreational Environments (AWARE), but the title, created by the Program Coordinator, did not engage the target group (girls and young women, ages 9-18). After consulting with the participants, the program name was changed to You Go Girls, increasing their ownership and connection to the program.

"Providing a safe, warm and comfortable environment in which only women can partake in recreational activities dramatically eases stress and stimulates the drive to continue the transition from rural lifestyles to urban lifestyles."

PROGRAM LEADER, ST. JOHN'S NL

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

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National Association of Friendship Centres

