



Affordable Access to Recreation: Policies, Procedures and Programs in Wellington, Dufferin and Guelph

A GUELPH *in motion* REPORT

SEPTEMBER 2011

ABOUT GUELPH *in motion*

Guelph *in motion* is a regional collaborative developed out of a partnership between Wellington County, Dufferin County and the City of Guelph (WDG) that aims to address physical inactivity among its communities. *In motion's* vision is that WDG be comprised of physically active and healthy communities. Its goals are to increase access to recreation; design communities that allow citizens to safely commute to and from work, school or play by walking or cycling; increase residents physical activity rates thereby decreasing heart disease, obesity and cancer risk; and create policies to support residents being active. These goals are achieved through supporting opportunities for residents and communities to become physically active, building strong partnerships, carefully managing growth, resources and capacities, as well as measuring progress and celebrating successes.

Phone: 1-800-265-7293 x. 2655 **Fax:** 519-846-0323 **Mail:** Karen Armstrong, Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health, 474 Wellington Rd. 18, Suite 100, R.R. #1 Fergus, ON N1M 2W3

ABOUT THE RESEARCH SHOP

This research was supported by The Research Shop. The Institute for Community Engaged Scholarship (ICES) fosters collaborative and mutually beneficial community-university research partnerships. ICES draws on strong traditions of community engagement and socially responsive research within the College of Social and Applied Human Sciences (CSAHS) at the University of Guelph. The Research Shop serves as a portal between community and university research needs. Faculty and students work with community organizations and individuals to identify and address social problems, and develop policies for positive change. Currently, the Research Shop focuses on working with collaborations in Guelph and Wellington by developing community-based research, placing students for service learning, and knowledge mobilization.

Phone: 519-824-4120 ext. 53109 **E-mail:** ICES@uoguelph.ca **Mail:** Institute for Community-Engaged Scholarship/Research Shop, College of Social & Applied Human Sciences, University of Guelph

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Primary Author: Amanda Peters, The Research Shop.

Secondary Author: Randalin Ellery, Guelph & Wellington Task Force for Poverty Elimination

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BACKGROUND

A national survey conducted in 1998-1999 showed that 62% of individuals living with yearly incomes at or below \$20,000 were considered inactive (Act Now BC, 2011). There are many systemic barriers to taking part in physical activity:

- Socio-economic barriers - individuals cannot afford to take part in activities
- Organizational barriers - policies, facilities and resources are not geared towards supporting those living on a low income)
- Communications barriers - low income families do not hear about available resources and services
- Cultural barriers - resources and services are not offered in a way that make visible minorities or new comers feel welcome
- Gender barriers - sport activities often are geared towards and involve men

In addition to these barriers, those living on low incomes tend to cite unsafe pathways, busy streets, transportation and a lack of skills as prohibitive for their participation in physical activities (Act Now BC, 2011).

Research conducted in the City of Guelph in 2010 showed that those facing economic hardship are experiencing barriers to accessing recreation as a result of limited opportunities and resources for individuals and families (Altass et al. 2010). Guelph *in motion* has committed significant efforts towards removing barriers to accessing recreation. Financial barriers are just one part of the groups' broader initiative to provide appropriate and accessible recreation opportunities to improve the health of all communities in Wellington and Dufferin counties and the City of Guelph (WDG).

In 2010, Parks and Recreation Ontario (PRO) released a toolkit for creating policy frameworks designed to support the implementation of affordable and accessible programming. Based on this provincial initiative, Guelph *in motion* is beginning the first steps towards developing an affordable access to recreation policy for use by service providers across WDG. The goal is to bring together government, for-profit and not-for-profit organizations in a shared vision of affordable recreation for all (Report to the Community, 2011). In October 2011, Guelph *in motion* is hosting a regional workshop, facilitated by PRO, to determine the best way forward for increasing recreational opportunities and resources to benefit those affected by barriers to access.

METHODS

In order to bring together organizations around a shared vision of affordable recreation for all, there is a need to establish a baseline of existing policies, procedures and programs in the Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph (WDG) area.

An email survey was sent out to 18 service providers (including government, not-for-profit, and private organizations) from across WDG. The survey asked the following questions:

1. What formal policies and procedures do you currently have that support access to affordable recreation?
2. Are there other ways your municipality/organization address affordable access to recreation (e.g., free programs, corporate sponsorship, child care, transportation)?
3. Are there other ways your municipality/organization wants to change your affordable access to recreation policy or practice (or have you made changes in the last 2 years)?

Over a period of 3 months, data were collected from 7 respondents (4 governments, 2 not-for-profits, 1 for-profit). The key findings of the survey are outlined in this report and will be shared among that sample and at a workshop in order to arrive at a consensus on future goals and directions.

FINDINGS

- There is a lack of formal policy across organizations, including government
 - Four of the seven respondents commented that formal policies or procedures to support affordable access to recreation do not exist in their organization.
- Many programs support child and youth involvement in recreation, fewer support adults
 - The majority of programming and fee adjustments are geared towards school age children and youth (e.g. pre-school programs, school programs, after school programs, camps, children's swim programs, etc.) For example, the Township of Centre Wellington Youth Subsidy Policy is the only formal policy in place and provides those under 18 years of age and involved in youth groups 30% discount on rental fees.
 - Adult geared programming includes community facility rentals, Centre Wellington *in motion* Equipment Bags, Parent & Tot swim and skate programs, and Personal Assistant for Leisure Program (for persons with disabilities).
- Limited, targeted programming and procedures exist outside of government supported initiatives (i.e. fee assistance only)
 - For example, the Children's Foundation of Guelph & Wellington is focused on child development and, therefore, gears programming and subsidies towards access for children. Parents must demonstrate financial need in order to be considered for fee subsidies.
 - Similarly, the YMCA-YWCA provides fee subsidies to families who can demonstrate financial need.

- Non-government organizations may or may not have formal or informal procedures and programs for dealing with special financial cases
 - Removing barriers to accessing recreation for low income families is not typically part of non-government organizations' stated goals, yet many provide fee assistance where possible. In addition, they may or may not have informal procedures, such as waving fees for certain children or youth in special circumstances.

- Local governments are leaders in supporting initiatives that remove barriers for low income individuals and families
 - At least 10 different formal recreation programs (not including Inclusion Support Services initiatives) were mentioned among the 4 government respondents, while none were mentioned among the other 3 respondents.

CONCLUSION

The findings suggest that organizations not involved in government supported initiatives have relatively fewer policies, procedures and programs designed to reduce or remove barriers to accessing recreation for low income individuals and families. In addition, the procedures and programs in place tend to be limited and targeted toward particular special financial cases, such that there is tendency towards viewing barriers as financial only. It appears that there is a need to bridge gaps between non-government organizations and government to more collaborative programs that are part of a vision of recreation for all. These organizations are currently operating within their own systems by their own metrics of success which means programs may or may not be reaching all of those individuals and families that might access opportunities.

Overall, there is an opportunity to engage the for-profit and not-for-profit organizations in considering the broader implications of having health communities through government sponsored and supported initiatives.

TOWNSHIP
OF CENTRE
WELLINGTON

PARKS &
RECREATION

POLICIES

Youth subsidy policy: All Centre-Wellington youth groups (defined as groups with members less than 18 years of age and with at least 80% of residing in Centre Wellington) receive a 30% discount on normal rental fees. This equates to approximately \$300,000/year of deferred revenue.

PROCEDURES

Parks & Recreation in the Township of Centre Wellington connect families who require assistance with local support groups. i.e. Jump Start program, Community Resource Centre or sports groups that provide some assistance. Staff allows people to register and Community Resources pays part of the program fees.

PROGRAMS

Free community facility rentals: Parks & Recreation provide free facility space at the Sportsplex, Elora Arena, and Belwood Hall to Wellington Community Resource Centre of Centre Wellington & Wellington North for parent and tots program mornings (this includes storage at our facilities) – 5 days a week. Parks & Recreation also provides meeting space for our youth group executives to meet and organize their groups – 1 per month pending availability.

Swim to Survive Program: Parks & Recreation staff fundraises to pay for all the operating costs to offer a Swim to Survive Program to ALL grade 3 students in Centre Wellington schools.

Children's splash pad: Parks & Recreation offers free splash pad in O'Brien Park, Elora.

CONTINUED...

Centre Wellington *in motion* equipment bags: Parks &

Recreation offers free bags which include free equipment and instructions on how to increase physical activity for kids in sports and culture.

WDG *in motion* Certified! Schools and Child Care Centres:

Parks & Recreation provides program support, in partnership with the child and youth *in motion* committee, for 8 level active recognition programs.

Personal Assistant for Leisure Program (PAL): In conjunction with Wellington County, all personal assistants for people with disabilities access our programs for free.

Free programs at facilities:

- Tim Horton's Free Public Swim and Skating
- Township provides Free Parent & Tot skating
- Township provides Free Parent & Tot Shinny
- Various free swims and skate through partnerships with other local businesses

CITY OF GUELPH
NEIGHBOURHOOD
GROUP
PROGRAMS

PROGRAMS

Neighbourhood Group Programs:

After school programs are free or offered at a low cost -recovery rate depending upon the neighbourhood group.

Neighbourhood Group camps spots are all partially subsidized. Further subsidy is offered based upon need up to full subsidy by request.

Preschool programs in neighbourhood groups are free.

Neighbourhood Group events are free. Often there is a charge for food items. Sometimes this is also free depending on the economic demographics of the Neighbourhood.

Drop in youth programs are free.

Coffee hours and family gym drop in programs are free.

THE CHILDREN'S FOUNDATION OF GUELPH & WELLINGTON

POLICIES

With the support of The Children's Foundations' program partners, their goal is to help as many children as possible through a centralized system that is easily accessible for families.

PROGRAMS

The Children's Foundation Grants Program supports children in Guelph and Wellington County in recreational, social or cultural activities that benefit their development. Details:

- Help as many children as possible through centralized, easily accessible system. Funding criteria: a) Maximum grant per child per calendar year will be \$400, b) Children from birth through 18 years of age, c) Children who live in the City of Guelph or County of Wellington, d) Financial need must be demonstrated BY 1) Families with incomes below the Low Income Cut Off (currently at \$22,000) are eligible for full funding (up to \$400) or 2) Families with incomes above LICO and below \$40,000 will be expected to make a partial contribution (generally estimated at 20%)
- Ineligible costs include: transportation, equipment, individual requests for school based trips, (e.g. Camping, Ottawa, outdoor education, etc.), membership fees, and insurance fees.
- Applications are not assessed on a) the merit of the program or activity, b) the cost of the activity or c) the level of the activity (house vs. Rep.). The Board of Directors of the Children's Foundation of Guelph & Wellington will review the granting maximum and LICO figures on an annual basis and make adjustments to the criteria is necessary. Applications may be declined if funds are not available.

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Act Now BC (2011). Why Don't People Participate? Physical Activity Strategy (online). Retrieved from http://www.physicalactivitystrategy.ca/pdfs/Why_Dont_People_Participate.pdf

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Poverty Task Force (2011). The Guelph and Wellington Task Force for Poverty Elimination: Report to the Community. Retrieved from <http://gwpoverty.ca/research/task-force-community-plans-reports/>

APPENDIX: SURVEY

Organization type:

Community contact:

General comments:

1. What formal policies and procedures do you currently have that support access to affordable recreation?
2. Are there other ways your municipality/organization address affordable access to recreation (e.g., free programs, corporate sponsorship, child care, transportation)?
3. Are there other ways your municipality/organization wants to change your affordable access to recreation policy or practice (or have you made changes in the last 2 years)?

