

Feedback from the 2010 Mothers in Motion Community Grants

In 2010, the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS) collaborated with 8 communities across Canada to develop and deliver combined physical activity and healthy eating programs for mothers of low socioeconomic status (LSES). To reach LSES mothers and their families, known barriers to sport and physical activity were addressed. The community based programs responded to LSES mothers' needs by ensuring activities were culturally appropriate, held in mother friendly facilities and outdoor spaces, free or low cost, and most offered subsidized childcare and travel.

To improve the delivery of physical activity and healthy eating programs targeting LSES mothers and families, it is important to share the challenges and strengths of each program and offer recommendations for future planning. Descriptions and evaluations of the following eight programs and the lessons learned through their implementation are therefore detailed below.

1. GOLS Soccer School – Soccer London Moms in Motion (SLMIM), London, Ontario
2. City of Swift Current – “Groovin’ at the Park”, Swift Current, Saskatchewan
3. Supportive Housing for Young Mothers – SELFF (Skills, Education, Learning, Fitness and Fun) - Moms Making the Move, Mulgrave, Nova Scotia
4. Société de la Petite Enfance et de la Famille du Sud de l’Alberta – JEEP (Jouer Ensemble Enfant et Parent) en Route, Calgary, Alberta
5. Kids First Association - Moms Making the Move, Sherbrooke, Nova Scotia
6. Terrace Nisga’a Society – TNS Moms on the Run “Sun Run in Training”, Terrace, British Columbia
7. Centre de Ressources Familiales de la Péninsule Acadienne – Maman en Mouvement, New Brunswick - **Information Not Available**
8. Tupper St. Family Resource Centre – Moms in Motion, Portage, Manitoba

1. GOLS Soccer School – Soccer London Moms in Motion (SLMIM), London, Ontario

To get moms off the sidelines and into the game, the Soccer London Moms in Motion program (SLMIM) created physical activity opportunities for moms during their children's scheduled soccer practices. With younger children supervised at the park, and youth playing soccer, moms were able to take to the field and participate in a variety of physical activities such as, circuit training, yoga, and fitness boot camp. Throughout the program, 32 sessions were held with 10 to 25 mothers and 5-13 young children participating each week.

Program Challenges:

At first, many mothers were intimidated to join the program. Once a core group of diverse women was established and seen enjoying the activities however, others were eager to participate. As the program was hosted outdoors, the weather, and heat in particular, was also an obstacle. Through the support of program leaders and fellow participants however, the women were able to work through the uncomfortable weather and make the most of each session.

Program Strengths:

Hosting the program at the same time as children's scheduled soccer practices helped address barriers such as, time constraints and child care, therefore allowing a greater number of mothers to participate. Having professional trainers lead the workout sessions and support the mothers in reaching their personal fitness and health goals was also considered a success factor.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations:

- 1) Participants should be allowed to join a program at any point. With SLMIM, many women were initially reluctant to join, but once they saw the program in action they wanted to be involved.
- 2) Programmers need to realize that most mothers understand the importance of physical activity and want to participate in programs but have difficulty fitting them into

their hectic family schedules. Hosting programs for mothers at the same time as children and youth programs is therefore an easy way to address this barrier and promote participation.

3) It is important to remind participants about the program every week and keep them motivated.

2. City of Swift Current- “Groovin’ at the Park”, Swift Current, Saskatchewan

The city of Swift Current realized there was a lack of free or affordable recreation and sport opportunities for LSES and newcomer mothers in the area. Also, even when these activities were offered, they were not adequately advertised and communicated across the community. Groovin’ at the Park was therefore created to address these problems and improve access to, and availability of, recreational activities and healthy living information for LSES and newcomer mothers, as well as their families. This program also served to promote integration of newcomer mothers and their families into the Swift Current community. Groovin’ at the Park provided newcomers, LSES mothers, and all interested women the opportunity to meet, socialize and be active. In total, 14 sessions were held with 26 women participating in the introductory workshop and 64 women taking part in the workout sessions.

Program Challenges:

Recruiting trainers and creating a schedule to reach the widest audience possible was challenging. Ultimately, a small pool of trainers, known to the recreation department, was established and separate morning and evening schedules were created. Since the sessions were held in a park, it was important to prepare for unpredictable weather. A standard Plan B, with sessions relocated to the Recreation Centre, was therefore created and communicated to all participants.

Program Strengths:

The diversity of activities offered, such as aerobics, zumba, yoga and belly dancing and the novelty of hosting the programs in the park attracted a lot of participants. Providing childcare during the workout sessions also enabled more LSES and newcomer mothers to take part.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations:

- 1) To attract participants, activities must be interesting and appropriate so as to accommodate a wide range of fitness and experience levels.
- 2) To target LSES mothers and newcomers, cultural and religious holidays and community sporting and family events must be considered when creating program schedules.

3. Supportive Housing for Young Mothers – SELFF (Skills, Education, Learning, Fitness and Fun)- Moms Making the Move, Mulgrave, Nova Scotia

SELFF- Moms Making the Move provided young LSES mothers the opportunity to try a variety of physical activity programs including aqua aerobics, yoga and zumba. In addition to providing affordable fitness activities, this program also provided subsidized travel and childcare. A total of 3 sessions were held, through which 20 women participated.

Program Challenges:

Mothers are busy, so coordinating with their hectic schedules was challenging. A survey was therefore conducted to identify the most convenient day and time for the program. Finding local instructors and suitable facilities was also difficult, but eventually instructors known to the recreation department were recruited and a nearby community facility was used for one of the activities.

Program Strengths:

Participants were involved from the onset of this program assisting in the planning, scheduling, delivery, and evaluation. In addition to having the support of participants, SELFF-Moms Making the Move also partnered with local agencies such as Mulgrave Recreation and the Mulgrave Education Centre to make this program a success.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations:

- 1) Camaraderie among participants and with the group leader is important for program participation and retention. With SELFF-Moms Making the Move, camaraderie was fostered within the group since all participants could relate to one another as mothers and would support each other throughout programs sessions.
- 2) Providing childcare and travel subsidies is key to encouraging and supporting LSES mothers to take time for themselves and exercise.

4. Société de la Petite Enfance et de la Famille du Sud de l'Alberta – JEEP (Jouer Ensemble Enfant et Parent) en Route, Calgary, Alberta

Jouer ensemble enfant et parent (JEEP) en Route brought together French-speaking mothers and their children from different areas of Calgary. The women and children participated in a variety of sport and physical activity sessions such as “strollercize”, stroller yoga, and a field trip to the zoo. With the Mothers in Motion Grant assisting with travel expenses, this program was able to broaden their outings and activities. JEEP also expanded their advertising efforts to reach mothers and families that previously did not know about the organization and program. Calgary is a vast city with a small French-speaking community composed of French-speaking Albertans, French Canadians from Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec and New Brunswick, and newcomers from South America, Europe, and Africa. This program therefore sought to bring together Calgary's French-speaking community in a safe and supportive environment, and facilitate the integration of French-speaking newcomers into this community.

Program Challenges:

Calgary is a large city, so finding facilities that were accessible to everyone was challenging. To overcome this barrier, events were hosted at different venues across the city and public transportation directions and travel subsidies were provided. Calgary also experiences unpredictable weather. JEEP therefore created a standard Plan B so mothers always knew where to go in case of bad weather.

Program Strengths:

This program provided a safe and supportive environment for French-speaking families to exercise, learn about healthy living, socialize, and have fun. An important feature of this program was that it was respectful and welcoming of diversity. All participants, regardless of race, culture, and socioeconomic status, were valued for the knowledge and experience they contributed to the group.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations:

- 1) It is important to encourage communication and provide a safe space for questions. To promote discussion and interaction, everyone must first feel comfortable expressing their ideas and opinions with the group.
- 2) When facilitating programs intended for a diverse group it is important to respect cultural beliefs and practices and understand how they influence attitudes and behaviours around physical activity and health.

5. Kids First Association – Moms Making the Move, Sherbrooke, Nova Scotia

Moms Making the Move sessions involved 60 minutes of physical activity followed by a 30 minute discussions on healthy living. The physical activity sessions featured aerobics, yoga, aqua aerobics, and a visit to the fitness centre while discussions on healthy living focused on nutrition and wellbeing. To encourage the participation of

LSES mothers, qualified childcare providers supervised children during each session. A total of 4 sessions were held with 13 women and 19 children participating.

Program Challenges:

To balance hectic schedules and ensure maximum participation a survey was conducted to gather mothers' input on the most suitable day and time for this program.

Program Strengths:

Including participants in designing the program created a sense of ownership and ensured the activities reflected the true interests and needs of LSES mothers. Providing childcare and transportation was also important for reaching out to LSES mothers and supporting their participation. Partnering with other community agencies was also key in effectively delivering this program.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations:

- 1) It is important to expect the unexpected, to be flexible and to adapt throughout the program.
- 2) Communication with participants and partners is essential for developing and implementing a successful program.

**6. Terrace Nisga'a Society – TNS Moms on the Run-“Sun Run in Training”,
Terrace, British Columbia**

To prepare for the 2010 - 10km Vancouver Sun Run, the Terrace Nisga'a Society (TNS) Moms on the Run created a Sun Run in Training program. This program was a comprehensive health and fitness plan based on a 13 week training schedule. The program included long distance running (10km), rigorous mixed martial arts-style strength and conditioning, screenings of documentaries about smoking cessation and healthy eating, workshops on injury prevention and fitness recovery, and community fundraising events. A total of 43 sessions were held with 22 participants, the majority

(95%) of which were Nisga'a mothers and youth. As a result of this program, 2010 was the first year the Terrace Nisga'a Society was represented in the Vancouver Sun Run.

Program Challenges:

Finding adequate community space to host the training sessions was challenging.

Session often required a lot of patience, creativity, and flexibility. Learning to improvise when technology failed or when group attendance was low was also important.

Program Strengths:

The kickboxing/mixed martial arts-style strength and condition workouts were extremely popular with the group. These sessions were fun and provided a varied approach to physical activity. Group bonding and camaraderie was fostered through these sessions as participants naturally supported each other during the challenging workouts. Another successful component of the program was the power and persuasion of mothers in the community. Mothers are true community leaders in Terrace and they acted as the primary contact persons and support systems throughout the 13 weeks of training.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations:

1) Volunteers are essential for programs of this scale. To move forward with this program next year, more volunteers will be recruited to assist with all aspects of the program.

2) Providing childcare to ensure all participants have the resources and opportunity to participate is important. In future Sun Run in Training session, organized childcare will be offered.

7. Centre de Ressources Familiales de la Péninsule Acadienne – Maman en Mouvement (New Brunswick) – Information Not Available

8. Tupper St. Family Resource Center – Moms in Motion, Portage, Manitoba

Moms in Motion created a physical activity program that also featured healthy snacks and healthy living discussions. Participants were involved from the onset, determining the name of the program and suggesting potential activities. With each session, healthy eating tips, handouts, and information about available resources were provided so participants had practical knowledge they could take home and apply in their daily lives. In total, 8 sessions were held with 45 women and 77 children participating.

Program Challenges:

Finding qualified instructors to lead some sessions was difficult but suggested activities were accommodated as best they could.

Program Strengths:

Having participant input from the onset was key to this program's success. Ensuring the activities were fun and that childcare and transportation were available was also important.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations:

1) It is important that activities are fun, novel, and personally challenging. The women who participated in Moms in Motion had a great time. This program offered in a private and safe environment where participants could comfortably try new activities and push their limits.

2) Take home materials are a great way to extend the reach of physical activity and healthy eating programs. With Moms in Motion, tips and resources were provided so women could incorporate lessons into their daily lives and maintain a healthy lifestyle once the program was over.

Feedback from the Participants:

Providing LSES mothers, and their families, the opportunity to participate in and enjoy healthy living programming was the aim of these 8 community initiatives. It is therefore important to get program feedback from the mothers regarding what they enjoyed, what they would change, and what lessons they have learned. This feedback is vital for program success and sustainability and for ensuring that the unique interests, needs and experiences of LSES mothers are met.

Participation Barriers:

Internal motivation and the realities of motherhood are often barriers to participation for LSES mothers, especially at the start of a new program. Many mothers acknowledged that they are their own "worst enemy", and that after a full day of work, they often don't have the energy to exercise and cook nutritious meals. As one mother put it, "Finding the time to exercise can be a challenge with children". Program costs, childcare, and transportation are also barriers, "Programs aren't close enough so gas and childcare make it hard".

Program Strengths:

Given the barriers mentioned above, it is not surprising that LSES mothers considered program costs, the scheduling of sessions, and subsidized transportation and childcare the most important program considerations. Having the opportunity to exercise, laugh and have fun, and meet new people was what mothers enjoyed most about these programs. Trying new activities, such as zumba and water aerobics, was also exciting and motivating. Even mothers who were already active benefited from these programs, with one participant stating, "I learned a variety of new exercises to keep my own routine interesting".

Feedback and Recommendations:

Most of the feedback received from the participants was positive. The constructive feedback that was offered focused on program length. A few participants thought the program was too short, wishing there were more sessions at that each session was longer. Other feedback focused on children's participation in the program. For some activities, having children participate was enjoyable, "I loved the fact that I could bring my kids!" while for others it was not, "Sometimes having the baby made it harder and frustrating". A survey should therefore be conducted in advance to find out whether or not participants want their children to be involved in the actual activities. Overall, the majority of participants "really enjoyed" the programs and they unanimously agreed that they would take part if the programs were offered again

Before and After Comparison:

Before the program, most mothers "liked" participating in sport and physical activity and did so "once and a while" or "once a week". After the program, the majority of mothers said they enjoyed sport and physical activity "more so than before" and were now participating in physical activity "2-3 times a week". Also, at the start of the program the majority of mothers said they knew "some" information about living a healthy and active life and this improved to "a lot" after the program.

Motivating Factors:

When asked, "Who or what encourages you to lead an active and healthy life", many mothers spoke about body image/weight loss, i.e. "Fitting into pre-pregnancy clothes" as well as family and friends, "My son is the person who makes me want to be more fit". Support from group members was also highlighted, "Going as a group [was motivating].

We encouraged each other to come”. Finally, witnessing how being active and healthy can improve overall quality of life was discussed, “Being healthy makes everyday tasks easier and more enjoyable – this is motivating”. One mother also stated that, “Being in better shape helps me enjoy my family more”.

Many mothers expressed gratitude for the opportunity to participate in these physical activity and healthy eating programs. As one participant stated “It feels good to be healthy and know that there is a program that recognizes how many moms can use the break”. Another participant discussed how she learned “That it is possible with the help of outside resources to get involved in fitness and fun without the kids”. These “outside resources” must continue to be offered to ensure the accessibility, availability and affordability of physical activity and sport programs and to support LSES mothers, and their families, lead active and healthy lives.