

Looking to Form a Successful Partnership? Just Ask a Library!

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Introduction

The scene is one you might not expect to see in a public library. Amongst the bookshelves, a group of women and girls are led through a calming practice by a certified yoga instructor. The creation of the Yoga in the Library pilot project was led by Chinook Arch Regional Library System and through co-operation with Lethbridge College's Be Fit for Life Centre, and funding from the Government of Alberta's Recreation and Physical Activity Division (RPAD), the program was offered to the public through 10 of its member libraries.

Libraries have long been a haven for those seeking to learn; in an effort to provide their patrons expanded opportunity many libraries are branching out to explore the realm of whole-person literacy. However, without community collaboration, instances such as Chinook Arch's Yoga in the Library would not be possible.

"As community hubs for activity and information, libraries strive to serve their communities to the best of their ability," says Lisa Weekes, Public Services Manager for Chinook Arch. "It is through unique collaborations that libraries are able to offer a wider variety of programming than they could on their own."

Supporting Rural Member Libraries Through a Grant

In an effort to support its member libraries and the changing role that they play within their respective communities, Chinook Arch is undertaking the development of a new Regional Plan of Service. Through consultations and research, the need for leisure and active living supports in rural communities was identified. Luckily, physical literacy is a passion for Weekes, who immediately began looking for funding options to assist rural libraries in being able to offer this type of programming.

Funding came in the form of the Government of Alberta's Recreation and Physical Activity Project Micro Grant Program. The RPAD program promotes an 'active Alberta': where all Albertans, no matter their abilities, age, or circumstances, have the opportunity to participate in a wide range of activities in many different settings. The focus for 2017/2018 was on supporting activities that contribute to access to physical activity programming for women and girls (Government of Alberta, 2017).

"Rural populations often do not have the same recreational opportunities as urban centres and this is particularly true for women and girls," Weekes explains. "Our rural libraries are in an ideal position to offer physical literacy programming to their communities, however, access to qualified instructors and funds to hire them are not available to the libraries."

The Partnership That Keeps on Giving

Thankfully, Weekes had already formed a positive relationship with Tiffany Wideen, Program Administrator at Lethbridge College's Be Fit for Life Centre (BFFL). Chinook Arch successfully partnered with BFFL in 2017 to curate a physical literacy programming collection, with BFFL also providing physical literacy training and programming ideas for regional library staff. It made sense to both parties to partner together once again and further build the relationship.

"I think it is always a wonderful thing when you can partner with another group and make a positive impact on the community," says Wideen. "Because we offer a lot of yoga programming at the college, we know the wide range of benefits it offers. We loved the idea of sharing this opportunity with members in the rural communities."

"The power of partnerships never fails to amaze me," adds Weekes. "Together we are able to offer what neither organization could on their own – free yoga programming with a certified instructor at a safe, welcoming location in our rural communities."

As an added bonus, the benefits to participating rural libraries and their patrons go beyond the 6 week course time-frame. Each participating library will have yoga-related materials added to their collection, allowing participants to continue with and build their practice from home.

The Impact of Physical Activity on Overall Health and Physical Literacy

RPAD's focus of providing physical activity programming for women and girls stems from the Framework for Recreation in Canada. The framework comprises five goals, one of which is to increase inclusion and access to recreation for populations that face constraints to participation. While only one third of kids are meeting the recommended 60 minutes of physical activity per day, research shows that physical activity decreases with age, and that boys tend to be more physically active than girls (Statistics Canada, 2017).

The benefits of daily physical activity for children are wide-ranging, and include:

- Increased self-esteem and happiness
- 40% higher test scores
- Reduced risk of heart disease, stroke, cancer, and diabetes
- 7-8% higher annual earnings
- Ability to maintain a healthy body weight

(Active for Life, 2015; CSEP/Participation, 2017)

Of the three major factors that increase physical activity in kids, the Yoga in the Library program responds to two: parents' activity level and participation in active lessons. For every 60 minutes of a parent's physical activity, 15 minutes is added to a child's average daily total. For every 60 minutes of participation in organized activities, 10 minutes is added.

Physical literacy is developed in children through a variety of structured and unstructured activities and gives kids the confidence to be active throughout their lives. The Yoga in the Library program offers a perfect way for mothers and daughters to enjoy an activity together, while instilling the im-

portance of creating time for daily physical activity in our lives.

The program is offered for anyone aged 8 and over. Studies have shown that children aged 8-12 are ready to be introduced to more complex skills, as they show signs of readiness (Active for Life, 2015). The fact that the Yoga in the Library program is free, and is offered within a supportive and welcoming environment, makes it the perfect opportunity for kids to try something new.

Today's Library Offers *MORE*, Thanks to Exceptional Partnerships

Literacy in the library realm no longer applies to just books and reading. Today's library offers a broad range of programming and services, oftentimes thanks to a partnership with an outside organization.

Much can be learned from watching how libraries find innovative ways to bring new and exciting programs to their community. They are seasoned professionals at building mutually beneficial partnerships, and at delving into areas that at first glance don't appear to be a regular library offering.

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