

ACTIVATING AURORA: All Kids Can Play

By Ron Weese

At Activate Aurora, one important deliverable we have with our funding partner, the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF), is to increase participation. Our recent Report to the OTF showed that in Year 1 we have had an impact on 8,498 people, or just under 31 per cent of our 27,500 person target. Our role is to not only to increase opportunities for participation, but to reduce barriers, so all people can be involved in healthy physical activity. We are on track.

One of the barriers we constantly hear about is finances. All our sport organizations report that when prices go up, participation declines. It is understandable. When rent, food, clothes and other necessities of life result in 'more month left at the end of the money' then sadly, paid participation in activity often is left off the budget. It is why these not-for profit organizations try very hard to keep fees low. It is also why most of them have subsidy programs in place for those who are in need.

That leads me to the All Kids Can Play (AKCP) Program developed by Sport Aurora. The AKCP Program was created and is managed by Sport Aurora to solicit funds from donors and sponsors who care about getting kids active. All funds donated go directly to the kids and families in need. Our volunteer Committee and our Executive Director administer the fund to ensure it is used according to our policies and to make sure the funding is applied fairly, consistently and reaches the most people.

Recently the fund was given a welcomed 'shot in the arm' through the Mayor's Charity Golf Classic (not the first time). We have also received funds from generous local companies, Service Organizations such as the Rotary Club, philanthropic individuals and even our sport organizations to build up this fund. Healthy Kids Community Challenge donated to help us deliver an outreach Program to encourage more people to apply. You might wonder why an 'affluent' town like Aurora needs such a fund, but you should know that there are many families in our Community who struggle day-to-day and for who sport participation fees are out-of-reach.

Recently, Sport Aurora on the recommendation of Activate Aurora, amended their funding policies for the AKCP Program; expanding them to include Programs that were multi-sport in nature. Introductory Recreational Programs were always included for various sports to encourage participation but now after-school and multi-sport Programs that encourage physical literacy and organized play are now eligible. To further facilitate this, Activate Aurora is working with all Aurora in-school, before and after-school care providers; providing supplementary training to staff so they can provide active, physical literacy programming for all elementary-school aged kids who attend their Programs. We are working closely with our sport organizations and the Town Parks and Recreation Department to offer multi-sport options for kids. Funding for eligible families to off-set costs of all after-school and multi-sport Programs will be available through AKCP.

The message is clear. Healthy physical activity is required for a healthy community. Finances should not be a barrier. If you know a family who could benefit from subsidized funding so their kids can engage in physical activity with their friends, please contact Sport Aurora at www.sportaurora.ca and inquire. Our goal is to make Aurora a Town where 'All Kids Can Play.'