VITAL "PULSE"
SPORTS AND FOSTERING A SENSE OF BELONGING
Part 1 of a 4-Part Series
BELONGING – AND THE SPORT CONNECTION

When people have a sense of belonging, they are connected to a community. Those connections bring meaning to their lives, resulting in a community that is healthier – both mentally and physically. Our sense of community ownership and pride increases as we increase our participation, and our communities become safer and more resilient. When people from all backgrounds and cultures have a greater sense of belonging, this creates vitality, wellness and happiness.

In the Grande Prairie area, there are many organizations and individuals working hard to provide opportunities for people to connect with others and to help them on their journey to well-being. Yet, like communities across the country, some are still struggling to feel a sense of belonging and connection.

In our 2015 Vital Signs survey, when asked how connected people feel to their community, 28% of our youth and young adults (ages 15-24) and 20% of adults responded “hardly” or “not at all.” While this is lower than the national average, we still have work to do.

Studies show that sports and recreation activities play an important role in strengthening communities and fostering a sense of belonging. Over the following four weeks, the Community Foundation of Northwestern Alberta will explore the role of sport and recreation in the Grande Prairie area and its impact on our sense of belonging.

Our goal: to encourage thoughtful discussion on how we can engage the community to look at sport as a way to promote inclusiveness, wellness and community vitality and to inspire you with some of the powerful initiatives already underway!
COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP HELPS YOUTH GET ACTIVE

The Community Foundation of Northwestern Alberta has formed a unique partnership with the Grande Prairie Public School District, Peace Wapiti School District, the Grande Prairie Catholic School District, the City of Grande Prairie and Jumpstart.

This initiative, which will make a difference in the lives of 100 grade 4 to 8 students, will help these youth participate in a five-week program where twice a week they get to explore a new sport or recreational activity. These children will have the opportunity to expand their sense of belonging through exciting sporting opportunities at the Eastlink Centre, such as the flow rider, wheelchair basketball, sledge hockey, speed skating, and so much more.

The Community Foundation of Northwestern Alberta’s Vital Signs Report has identified the importance of citizens feeling engaged and the benefits to the overall well-being of a community. This is even more important for our young citizens.

We also know that participating in recreational activities helps people feel more engaged, inspired, and successful. However, not every young person is given the opportunity to participate in sports and recreational activities. Through this dynamic partnership and donations from the community, with initial funds raised at our Nourish the North Wine & Auction (held last week), we’re helping make that happen!

Participating in sports and recreation helps builds stronger communities. Together we can make a real difference in the lives of 100 local youth!
PARTICIPATION REPORT CARD
ON PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Research shows that Canadian children and youth are becoming increasingly inactive and they may be losing sleep over it. Regardless of the reasons, this inactivity impacts their lives in many ways.

What’s the connection between physical activity, sedentary behaviour – and sleep? Research shows kids who are tired out from running around sleep better, and those who have slept well have more energy.

And the reverse is also true and troubling: Canadian children and youth aren’t moving enough to be tired, and they may also be too tired to move. Research on the connection between these behaviours is highlighting the fact that sleep deprivation is a problem in Canadian kids:

- Only 9% of Canadian kids aged 5 to 17 get the 60 minutes of heart-pumping activity they need each day.
- Only 24% of 5- to 17-year-olds meet the Canadian Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines recommendation of no more than 2 hours of recreational screen time per day.
- In recent decades, children’s sleep duration has decreased by about 30 to 60 minutes. Every hour kids spend in sedentary activities delays their bedtime by 3 minutes.
- The average 5-to 17-year-old Canadian spends 8.5 hours being sedentary each day at least some of the time.
- 33% of Canadian children aged 5 to 13, and 45% of youth aged 14 to 17, have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep at least some of the time.
- 36% of 14- to 17-year-olds find it difficult to stay awake during the day at least sometimes.
- 31% of school-aged kids and 26% of adolescents in Canada are sleep-deprived.
What are the effects of sleep deprivation in young people?
Some effects of sleep deprivation in kids are obvious and some are not so obvious:

- Too little sleep can cause hyperactivity, impulsiveness and a short attention span.
- Children with reduced sleep are more likely to struggle with verbal creativity and problem solving, and generally score lower on IQ tests.
- A short sleep duration produces adverse hormonal changes like those associated with increased risks of obesity, diabetes and hypertension.
- Chronic sleep loss is linked to higher rates of depression and suicidal thoughts.

How can physical activity help?
The good news is that regular, heart-pumping physical activity might just be the best sleep aid there is:

- Grade 5 students with higher physical activity levels are less likely to be sleepy during the daytime. Active transportation (e.g., walking or biking) and outdoor play increase exposure to sunlight, which helps regulate sleep patterns.
- Physical activity helps kids fall asleep faster.
- High school students who get at least 60 minutes of physical activity each day are 41% more likely to get sufficient sleep than those who don’t.
- Our tendency may be to cram more into each day to wear kids out, but more activities don’t necessarily equal more physical activity. Plus, overscheduling can impact sleep by getting kids excited and pushing back dinnertime, homework time and bedtime.
Benefits of Sport Participation for Young Children


If your child is 5-8 years old, there are many benefits they can gain from participating in sport.

**Personal Benefits**
- Building confidence and a sense of who they are and what they can do
- Learning personal responsibility
- Learning fair play and sportsmanship

**Social Benefits**
- Developing friendship
- Learning about teamwork and cooperation
- Learning to respect authority
- Engagement in school

**Physical Benefits**
- Developing fundamental movement skills
- Improving health and wellbeing

How does your child gain these benefits?

**Exploration**
Your child gets to try new things and explore their abilities through sport.

**Parental Reinforcement**
Children get the most benefits when parents seize teachable moments and reinforce them at home.

**Focus on Play**
When the coach focuses on learning and play instead of competition, your child has more opportunities to explore.

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With celebrations already underway for Canada’s 150th birthday, last Thursday Calgary’s Mayor Nenshi traveled north as a guest of the Community Foundation of Northwestern Alberta and left students in the Grande Prairie area with a challenge: “Give three birthday gifts to our nation, three things to Canada, give three acts of service.”

Whether you’re a spectator or a player, a coach or a parent, a senior or child, a community leader or community organization, the upcoming issues of Vital Pulse will provide some “food for thought” and deeper insights into ways local sports and recreation can build stronger communities and strengthen our sense of belonging to each other – truly one of the best gifts we can give to one another and to ourselves!

Check out the latest issue of The Sport Parent from the Child and Adolescent Sport and Activity Lab (CASA) at the University of Alberta. It’s an excellent resource highlighting up-to-date research to help parents make the most of their children’s sport experience.

Parental involvement plays a crucial role in motivating children to actively participate in sports. In 2005, the participation rate among Canadian children aged 5 to 14 with neither parent involved in sport was only 35%, compared to 57% when at least one parent was an active sport participant. When at least one parent helped as a sport administrator, children’s participation rate jumped to 80%.*

*It is possible that parents get involved as administrators because their kids are involved.
Watch our upcoming Vital Pulse newsletters over the next three weeks as we talk about what’s happening in the Grande Prairie area to support getting active and getting connected!

Newcomers to Canada reported that they often had more meaningful social interactions playing or watching sports than in the workplace.

*Institute for Canadian Citizenship (2014)*

Watch upcoming issues of Vital Pulse to learn more about how sport can create more inclusive welcoming communities for new Canadians.