



The Positive Impact of Sports

Involvement in sports is an integral part of child development and teaches youth to lead active, healthy lives while developing many of the fundamental skills necessary for a child to succeed. Let Kids Play (LKP) offers parents and children the opportunity to overcome the barriers that may prevent youth involvement in sport. It is recognized that financial and systemic barriers can play an inhibiting role on the involvement of youth in sport. LKP will provide low-income and underprivileged youth with the financial means to help alleviate these barriers and will work to facilitate the personal growth that is realized by youth through participation in sport.

A Canadian Council for Social Development study showed that participating in structured recreation positively influenced young people's physical and social development, as well as their civic behaviour and skills.¹ A 2003 Sport Canada survey of 1005 Canadian youth, aged 12 to 21, found that their involvement in sports:²

- Improved their health (99 per cent);
- Helped them make friends (87 per cent);
- Improved their feelings about themselves (85 per cent);
- Helped them succeed at school (58 per cent);
- Helped them become more active with their family (54 per cent).

Sport significantly enhances the quality of a child's urban life.³ Numerous studies of social cohesion have found that sport and community recreation play a key role in life in a city, and that recreation and sports facilities contribute to a child's integration into his or her community surroundings. Sport provides pleasure for children and gives them the opportunity to meet new people and make new friendships, breaking the isolated mould many low income and underprivileged youth fall under. Children develop a sense of self-belonging and confidence through social cohesion. Participation in sport improves the development of peer relationships, establishes the notion of trust and builds teamwork skills.² Sports challenge children to excel physically and mentally, and teach valuable skills such as leadership, hard work and perseverance which translate beyond the playing field to all aspects of life, whether it be in the classroom, at work, or in the community.

The individual benefits of involving youth in sporting activities transcend into benefits for the community as a whole. Participants experience a high degree of interaction with other individuals within their community, which not only benefits the child, but such interactions also translate into the community's socio and economic development.⁴ Thus, in addition to the personal benefits for the child, youth involvement in sports also has a broader impact on the overall community. Participation in sport has a positive effect on reducing the involvement and exposure youths may have to violence and unethical activity. Sports offer children a positive alternative to idleness, which, if a child is consistently left without constructive activity, can often lead to violence. A lack of activity and idleness can lead to a lack of understanding between different ethnic groups. Sports help to eliminate these racial and cultural barriers by removing the separation between such groups through healthy competition and the realization of shared goals.

¹ Canadian Policy Research Networks Inc. and the Canadian Council on Social Development, *Four Hypotheses about the Policy Significance of Youth Recreation*.

² Sport Canada, *Reconnecting Government with Youth Survey* (2003) [online]. (Ottawa: Sport Canada, 2003)

³ Jean Harvey, "Sports and Recreation: Entertainment or Social Right?" *Horizons* 5,1 (July 2002), pp. 26–28.

⁴ Canadian Policy Research Networks Inc. and the Canadian Council on Social Development, *Four Hypotheses about the Policy Significance of Youth Recreation*.



Along with the social and community benefits, the health benefits of sports on youth are clearly evident and diverse. Sporting based physical activity reduces the risk of premature mortality in general, and some of the tangible benefits of participating in sports include⁵:

- Builds strong bones and strengthens muscles
- Achieves a healthy weight
- Promotes good posture and balance
- Improves fitness
- Strengthens the heart
- Increases relaxation
- Enhances healthy growth and development

Regardless of these clear benefits, just over one-third of youth living in Canada meet the guidelines for optimal growth and healthy development⁶. Youths daily physical activity levels are significantly low and even more concerning is that these levels decline as a child ages and moves through adolescence. A study published in the 2000 Canadian Medical Association Journal found that since 1981, the prevalence of overweight boys increased from 15% in 1981 to 35.4% in 1996, and among girls from 15% to 29.2%. During the same time frame, the prevalence of obesity in children tripled, from 5% to 16.6% for boys and from 5% to 14.6% for girls.⁷ A major concern regarding childhood obesity is that obese children tend to become obese adults, facing an increased risk of diabetes, heart disease, orthopaedic problems and many other chronic diseases. Increasingly, paediatricians are seeing a rise in the incidence of childhood hyperlipidemia, hypertension and diabetes in their young patients.⁸ Hence, the criticality of involving a person in physical activity at a young age is crucial to laying the foundation to a healthy life.

The skills youth gain through sports carry into the larger community and serve children throughout their life, enabling them to become valuable contributing members of society. It is our hope that with the generous support of donors and partner organizations, Let Kids Play will provide families dealing with financial hardship one less thing to worry about and give underprivileged kids a level playing field to access sports, allowing everyone to come out a winner!

⁵ Government of Canada, *Active Kids are Unstoppable*, (2007) [online]. (Ottawa, Government of Canada, 2007)

⁶ Active Healthy Kids, *Reconnecting Tools & Tips Connecting Children with Physical Activity* (2007) [online]. (Toronto: Active Health Kids Canada, 2007)

⁷ Mark S. Tremblay and J. Douglas Willms Secular trends in the body mass index of Canadian children *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 2000 163: 1429-1433.)

⁸ Canada's Physical Activity Guide for Children. *Statistics on Canadian Children & Youth* (2002) [online].