



Creating Community Connections and Taking Action

Background

One important aspect of the Community Health and the Built Environment project is creating connections with the community. To do this in St. Paul we partnered with a group of key community stakeholders. Our community partners represented the following community organizations:

- Community Futures St. Paul-Smoky Lake,
- County of St. Paul,
- Healthy Alberta Communities, and
- St. Paul Town Council.

This group of representatives helped to guide the research that was conducted in the community. In addition, they have been working with the researchers to develop community projects. The projects help residents be more physically active and eat healthy food. Through conversations, the representatives from St. Paul identified a need to encourage unstructured free play among children, youth and families in the community. The project has been named St. Paul MOVES!

What is St. Paul MOVES?

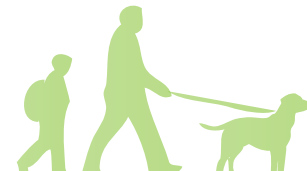
"MOVES" stands for Motivation, Opportunity, Variety, Enjoy, and Success. It is a project that was created by the community for the community! The goal of the project is to introduce children and youth to enjoyable, unstructured free play games and activities, to motivate them to engage in these types of games and activities during their free time. The logo featured here was designed by a local resident to promote the project and to capture the spirit of the initiative.



What is Unstructured Free Play?

Unstructured free play includes activities and games that are not heavily structured, organized or supervised, like:

- biking,
- walking,
- building sand castles,
- skipping,
- tag, and
- playing at the park.



What We Did

To do this project we have partnered with a number of local organizations. The project has been carried out in a number of key phases since 2009 and we are continuing to build the project into 2011.

(1) Partnered with Local School Boards (Winter 2009)

For this phase we partnered with the two local school boards (St. Paul Education Regional Division and East Central Francophone Education Region). Within these school boards, high school students developed, organized and implemented unstructured play activities for elementary school children to play.

(2) Expanded to the Broader Community (Summer 2009)

The second phase of the project expanded to the broader community during the summer of 2009. For this phase of the project youth leaders were present at playgrounds throughout the summer to lead and participate in unstructured free play activities with children.

(3) Expanding the Program (Summer 2010)

To further develop the program in the summer of 2010, a youth leader was hired for four months to plan for the implementation of the program. In addition, this leader worked on developing documentation for future installments of the project (e.g., games manual and project manual). For July and August an additional youth leader was hired to assist in the park spaces. Youth leaders were in parks throughout the community every day from 9 - 11 am and from 1 - 3 pm. A copy of the games manual and project manual can be found on the DVD included with this package.

Program Highlights

- The youth leaders engaged a range of age groups.
- On average 25-30 children and youth participated in the program each week.
- Youth leaders suggested that the program provided children and youth an opportunity to do something other than watch television or play computer games during the summer.
- Children and youth were provided with knowledge of a variety of games and activities to engage in during their spare time.
- Youth leaders observed that towards the end of the summer children and youth were beginning to create their own games to play.

Next Steps

The researchers and the community partners are working with the community to ensure the sustainability of the project in future years. Watch for St. Paul MOVES youth leaders in the community in the coming years!

