

## **The Working Together Initiative: The Contribution of Sport and Physical Activity to multiple policy objectives**

Overview of the Initiative (June 23, 2008)

The impetus for Working Together Initiative (WTI) comes from the belief and evidence that sport and physical activity have an impact on health, the economy, a sense of community, national identity, and quality of life. At the same time, no single government or department is responsible for horizontal leadership and connecting to the “bigger picture” of how sport and physical activity does and can positively impact Canadian society. In addition, achieving policy objectives increasingly demands innovations that governments cannot develop on their own.

The WTI addresses this situation by bringing together government departments that have sport and physical activity mandates, and those that don't, with sport and physical activity sector leaders to learn how sport and physical activity can help meet diverse policy objectives. By working collaboratively, the initiative will provide valuable lessons on how to work together to meet these demands.

The WTI has four objectives. The first objective is project-oriented; the other three objectives are knowledge-focused. The WTI aims to:

- Develop, implement and assess a number of initiatives that address multiple policy outcomes through sport and physical activity;
- Assess the knowledge gaps of each initiative and determine how best to fill them;
- Increase our knowledge about sport and physical activity as a means to meet policy objectives; and
- Learn how to more effectively work together across departmental and sectoral boundaries and capture this knowledge so that others might benefit from what was learned.

Two primary principles underpin the WTI: shared leadership and contribution. No single organization has the overall lead; rather, leadership is provided through collaboration. The principle of “contribution” builds on the assets, including experience and expertise, that everyone brings to the table. The organizations and communities – the “sites” – that become involved through specific initiatives (e.g. Wabano Centre, Seine River) will be an integral part of the learning process in a way that supports their needs. This is a unique and innovative process of collaboration that differs from the way in which governments, NGOs, public institutions, and communities traditionally collaborate. It builds on the good work of other collaborative cross boundary initiatives and will contribute to the knowledge of what it takes to do this effectively to meet complex policy challenges.

### **Meeting policy objectives through sport and physical activity: “Pilot” Projects**

Early on a group decision was made that we would learn best by doing -- working to meet policy objectives with communities. We decided our target population would be children and youth and specifically aboriginals and newcomers to Canada. Criteria for selecting pilot initiatives were determined at a full-group meeting on October 23, 2007. An initiative should:

- Generate interest and commitment from several departments (in addition to Public Health Agency of Canada, Sport Canada, Citizenship and Immigration Canada), and sport and physical activity leaders;

- Have the potential to test the contribution of sport and physical activity to several policy objectives (e.g. obesity, self esteem, youth leadership, social integration of newcomers, mental health promotion etc.); and
- Able to make use of available resources and/or align with existing projects and resources.

Based on these criteria, a number of potential initiatives were proposed. As of June 2008, three are moving forward, each with a different combination of involvement and levels of contribution from the departments and NGOs involved.

### **Seine River/Gen 7 – Rural Aboriginal youth**

This northern Ontario reserve was the site of a successful Gen7 aboriginal youth program. The program engaged both youth and elders, creating an intergenerational bridge. The current initiative aims to follow up on this success by working with the community to enable more sport and physical activity of youth. Due to demonstrated readiness and community support, this initiative represents an ideal opportunity for immediate progress.

### **Newcomers Project – Urban immigrant youth**

The Newcomers project aims to aid in the integration of immigrant youth through sport and physical activity. Initial discussions with Brampton Neighbourhood Recreation Centre have confirmed strong interest in working together.

### **Wabano – Urban Aboriginal youth**

Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health is located in Vanier (Ottawa) runs a number of successful programs for youth, including aboriginal youth. It has been approached about engaging in a pilot initiative and is interested in exploring opportunities.

### **Capturing knowledge through Knowledge Framework Projects (KFP)**

The Knowledge Framework Projects are being developed to meet the knowledge-focused objectives of the WTI. There are four separate but interconnected projects:

1. A broad project, led by PRI, aimed at adding to the existing knowledge about the effects of sport and physical activity on youth in an evolving Canada
2. A project which addresses “knowledge gaps” through the three pilot initiatives (Seine River, Newcomers, Wabano) including determining how to service their onsite knowledge needs (evaluation etc.)
3. A “learning how to work effectively together” project that enables the WTI group to capture learnings about working together across departmental and sectoral boundaries, with the intention to share these learnings with others..
4. A potential project that captures other community knowledge about using sport and physical activity to achieve community goals in order to make connections and share knowledge.

### **WTI Architecture**

The WTI is led by a group of senior policy leaders from various government departments and NGOs with an interest in achieving policy outcomes through sport and physical activity. As the initiative moves forward, others are invited to join, including community members from the pilot initiatives. Each pilot initiative and the KFP projects are led by smaller working groups, drawn from interested members who can make a contribution.

The Public Policy Forum (PPF) acts as a convener that holds the space for effective collaboration as we learn together and co-ordinates outreach to others. The PPF works with the WTI to ensure we all learn from the process of working together, and that these learnings are captured and shared.