Project Background

In 2010, the Peterborough County-City Health Unit (PCCHU) led the development of a healthy community indicators report for Peterborough County and City. This report analyzed six healthy community indicators, which included healthy eating; physical activity, sport and recreation; tobacco; injury prevention; substance misuse; and mental health. Upon release of this report, the PCCHU organized community discussion forums for each topic area with the purpose of examining the report findings and determining opportunities for next steps. A discussion forum on physical activity, sport and recreation was held on January 12, 2011 and included 18 individuals representing a variety of key stakeholder groups. The discussion that day resulted in the development of four recommended next steps for physical activity, sport and recreation and each were ranked according to priority.

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<th>Recommended Actions for Physical Activity, Sport &amp; Recreation</th>
<th>Priority</th>
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<td>Encourage ‘at-risk’ populations to be physically active through a variety of affordable and accessible recreation programs in both the City and County and promote nontraditional (non-team based) recreation activities in various facilities and settings (e.g., schools, churches, town halls, community gardens).</td>
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<td>Advocate for and optimize existing community spaces and future community development to encourage physical activity and active transportation (e.g., expanding existing trails, bike lanes, designing walkable neighbourhoods, increasing density).</td>
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<td>Advocate for and potentially develop comprehensive education programs to promote active lifestyles (e.g., school curriculum based physical literacy programming, road safety awareness for pedestrians, cyclist, and drivers)</td>
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<td>Support evidenced based decision making to reduce barriers and increase active transportation (e.g., sidewalk and road snow removal to improve access to sidewalks, bike lanes and trails, offer a wide range of public transportation options and cost)</td>
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In addition to the next steps determined from the Healthy Communities discussions, Parks and Recreation Ontario and the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association each released position and policy statements regarding affordable access to recreation. Through these statements, both organizations encouraged all levels of government to formally adopt access to recreation policies and to include the issue of access to recreation for low-income families as a priority within their strategic plans. For a definition of access to recreation and its link to public health, see Appendix A.

**PCCHU’s municipal access to recreation strategy**

As a result of the aforementioned discussions, events and policy statements; the PCCHU decided to include activities to explore access to recreation in their 2012 physical activity operational plan. Exploring activities included:

- attending educational events to learn more about access to recreation,
- researching access to recreation policy options,
- learning more about what local municipalities are doing to address access to recreation.

After sufficient background information was collected, the PCCHU determined that there was a need to work with local municipalities to assess their readiness to address access to recreation. Subsequently, a logic model was developed to guide this work (see Appendix B) and the PCCHU committed to leading the following activities within three broad categories:

1. **Building Knowledge and Awareness**
   - Invite all municipalities to attend an exploration meeting to learn more about access to recreation.

2. **Creating a Supportive Environment**
   - Hire a consultant on behalf of the municipal partners who specializes in municipal recreation to facilitate the exploration meeting.
   - Support two municipalities with resident consultation.

3. **Developing Healthy Public Policy**
   - Draft access to recreation policy options for discussion.
Project Activities Completed To Date

The first exploratory meeting with municipal parks and recreation staff was held on April 25, 2013. Since that time the group has expanded to include representation from all municipalities in Peterborough County and City, the City/County Social Services Department, as well as the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport (MTCS). The group has held a total of nine meetings over a one year period. The actions stemming from these meetings have included:

1. Building Knowledge and Awareness
   - Ongoing meetings
     - All municipal representatives agreed to meet regularly to further their discussions about access to recreation and to share knowledge and information. These regular meetings also serve as an opportunity to network with colleagues in similar fields.
   - Promotion of this project
     - The PCCHU and municipal partners are committed to sharing information about this project to encourage other municipalities to develop an access to recreation strategy and/or policy. The first public presentation of this project will be made at the Global Summit on the Physical Activity of Children in Toronto, ON on Wednesday May 21, 2014 (see Appendix C for a copy of the poster presentation).

2. Creating a Supportive Environment
   - Public health support to individual municipalities
     - To foster an environment that provides accessible and affordable recreation, the PCCHU agreed to support municipalities as they consult with their community about this issue. Specifically, two municipalities conducted needs assessment meetings with their recreation and sporting groups. The purpose of these meetings was to provide an opportunity for organizations to discuss ways to increase access to recreation in their community. The results showed that both municipalities were experiencing similar challenges. The top four issues highlighted were: marketing and promotion; volunteer development
and coordination; developing affordable programs/services; and program/service scheduling. In addition to these consultations, the PCCHU supported one municipality with developing a multi-year parks and recreation workplan that included access to recreation activities.

- Activate Peterborough County and City project
  - One Township, on behalf of all nine municipal partners, applied to the 2014 Ontario Sport and Recreation Communities Fund for a two year “Activate Peterborough County and City” project. Year one of this project will focus on providing each municipality with the opportunity to facilitate a needs assessment with all of their recreation and sporting groups regarding access to recreation. Year two will be to implement recommendations from the needs assessment with the purpose of building capacity for access to recreation within the recreation and sporting group sector. Capacity building activities will include (but are not limited to) customized training sessions that address fundamental movement skills, physical literacy, marketing/promotion and social media, volunteer development, leadership and coaching development, and reduced rate and/or subsidy programs.

3. Developing Healthy Public Policy
   - Access to Recreation Policy
     - In June 2013, all municipal representatives agreed to the development of an access to recreation policy. This activity was deemed critical by the group to ensure widespread commitment to access to recreation at a municipal level. The PCCHU hired a consultant to research access to recreation policies across Canada and to draft a policy that could be applied within the local context. By the end of 2013, the policy was finalized and all municipal partners had agreed to modify it to meet the specific needs of their municipality. By the end of 2014, it is expected that each of the nine municipal partners will have passed the policy. An adopted policy of this kind will ensure that there is municipal support to make access to recreation a fundamental component of
any municipal recreation program (See Appendix C for a copy of the draft policy).

Next Steps
After one year of discussions, all municipal representatives have agreed that a collaborative approach to addressing access to recreation in Peterborough County and City is a fundamental component of any access to recreation strategy. In order to advance the work that this group has started, they have agreed to the following next steps:

- Hold a planning meeting with the purpose of formalizing the group through the development of terms of reference, a formal group name, and designated action steps for subsequent years.
- Invite neighboring First Nation communities to join the group and to support access to recreation activities in their communities for their citizens.
- Address other public health topics/emerging issues that fall within an access to recreation framework, such as playground design/safety, healthy community design, etc.
- Continue to promote the work that the group is doing regionally, provincially and nationally so that other municipalities can adopt similar access to recreation strategies.

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\(^1\) Peterborough County-City Health Unit. (2010). Healthy Communities Assessment Report. Peterborough: Peterborough County-City Health Unit.
