



2010 UBCM Community Excellence Awards Best Practices

Submitted By: District of Kitimat Recreation Department and Northern Health

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Project: District of Kitimat and Northern Health Protocol Agreement

Background

There is no disputing the fact that preventative health care is about promoting and encouraging individuals to live healthy and active lifestyles. It is not surprisingly then that the Kitimat Recreation Department and Northern Health, Kitimat Health Unit have been working together for the past 25 years bringing the message of living well through the pursuit of an active lifestyle that includes healthy eating and routine medical check ups.

This relationship has spun such projects as;

- ⇒ Eat Your Broccoli
- ⇒ Healthy Foods and You
- ⇒ Physio / Rehab Swim Program
- ⇒ Well Spring Women's Conference
- ⇒ Hearts At Work 1 & 2
- ⇒ Skeena Regional Transit
- ⇒ FITT Group Program
- ⇒ Active Communities Projects
- ⇒ Kick It Up Kitimat Initiative
- ⇒ Union of British Columbia Municipalities Grants re: Healthy Community Projects
- ⇒ British Columbia Recreation and Park Association Grants re: Active Community Initiatives
- ⇒ Senior's Programmer Grants and Initiatives
- ⇒ Haisla Nutritional Workshops
- ⇒ Caregiver's Workshops
- ⇒ The Good Food Box
- ⇒ Tobacco Free Zones Signage

and most recently the "Kitimat Valley Run/Walk Festival", the "Women's Wellness Roman Spa" night, "Community Hatha Yoga & Breathing" and "Chocolate Bliss". However, until 2008 this relationship was very informal in that it was the staff at the

grass roots level that was leading the charge, as the projects mentioned above and others like them were within each organizations mandate.

With the successful conclusion of the Women's Wellness project in November 2006, it was recognized that some of the key people in each organization could be moving on to different roles or onto retirement and there was fear the work of the past would be lost as would be the opportunity for future projects. To this end a protocol agreement (see appendix A) was created and officially signed on February 25th, 2008 by Mayor Rick Wozney, Advisory Recreation Commission Chair David Brown and Kathy MacDonald Regional Director, Preventive Public Health and Rowena Holoien, Health Service Administrator from Northern Health cementing the 25 year relationship of the two organizations; giving formal recognition to the importance of the partnership in promoting and providing health and wellness programming for the residents of Kitimat. The signing of the protocol agreement reminds both organizations of the benefits that working together can provide especially in a small community such as Kitimat.

Building Capacity One Step At A Time

Building capacity through partnerships is a survival tool that organizations can not ignore in today's economic climate if they want to not only survive but thrive. Something that District of Kitimat Recreation Department and Northern Health, Kitimat Health Unit have recognized for 25 years operating in a small town where resources are often harder to come by.

It is not surprising then that these two organizations have come together on so many past projects as both have a very similar mandate; which is, in general terms, to promote and improve the quality of people's lives through providing opportunities to live an active healthy lifestyle. It would seem then that the partnership of the two organizations is a natural fit.

The relationship at the top on both sides was difficult at times and there were years when both the agencies due to budget fluctuations could not work as closely as they wished, thus cooperation or interaction was not always possible. However, this did not deter the grass roots staff members who were responsible for the various projects; and overtime a body of work, past projects and continuing projects had been built up.

In 2006 funding became available through the Union of B.C. Municipalities (UBCM), the District of Kitimat and Northern Health and the British Columbia Recreation and Parks Association that allowed for the promotion of health and wellness initiatives on a larger scale. The larger program initiatives allowed both sides, Northern Health Administration and the District of Kitimat Administration, to recognize how much had been accomplished in the past, what the benefits that working together over the years had accomplished and what could be provided to the community of Kitimat in the future.

The change in perspective was really noticed during the Women's Wellness Project in 2006. During and after this project both organizations saw a change in their clientele and what they were asking for. Also how the behaviours and attitudes of the whole community were changing from a place of apathy to wanting to take charge of their health and wellness. The Kitimat Recreation Department saw an increase of almost 30% in its fitness and wellness programs and the Kitimat Health Unit was being asked to do presentations through out the community on various topics. The Northern Health Unit

also noticed that the public was asking questions on health related issues and was seeking answers for solutions to preventing and coping with health related issues.

For the Northern Health Unit one particular group that was very passionate about having information brought to them was Sikh Ladies, who hosted three different events over the course of the year that were open to the general public at the Sikh Temple. Another group that the Women's Wellness Project had impact on was the FITT Group. The FITT group is a group for persons who are at risk of having or do have risk factors of chronic disease, illness or limited mobility. This program started as strictly a hospital bound program with a very minor activity component. However through the growing partnership that was emerging the Health Unit and Recreation Department this program was moved to the Riverlodge Recreation Centre. The program now has a strong activity component and is much more of a community based approach with strong attendance.

After being recognized in 2007 by the British Columbia Recreation and Parks Association by receiving the Programs Excellence Award for the Women's Wellness Project, both the District of Kitimat and the Kitimat Health Unit's senior managers began to take notice of the ongoing projects and more interest in continuing the activities that provided opportunities to bring the two organizations together. At the same time as this awakening was happening in upper levels of the organization the grass roots members of each organization were realizing the benefits of working together and positive impact they were having on their community and wanted to somehow take the relationship to the next level. The key people that had hosted the Women's Wellness Project did this by coming together and forming Kitimat's Active Community Committee, Kick It Up Kitimat (KIUK). By doing so the group created one voice for promoting a healthy active lifestyle to the residents of Kitimat. In fact KIUK has expanded to include partners from the Seniors Association, Kitimat Youth Centre, and Kitimaat Village, with the Kitimat Recreation Department and Kitimat Health Unit continuing to be the leaders of the group. Since 2007 KIUK has gone on to develop and host a variety of health and wellness initiatives with the most recent being the Kitimat Valley Run Walk Festival and a Women's Wellness Spa Night.

As projects were moving ahead and completed KIUK was building recognition within the community; representatives from Kitimat Health Unit and Kitimat Recreation Department were seeing staff changes within both organizations. It was at this point in the fall of 2007 that the idea to officially recognize and cement the relationship between Kitimat Health Unit and Kitimat Recreation Department was developed. The reasons for the protocol agreement (which in general terms is a template for how future engagement of the two organizations will look, based on past successes of the two organizations) were and are;

- 1) Both parties felt that they had worked on a number of past successful projects, as well as current ones, that benefit the health and welfare of the residents of Kitimat.
- 2) Both parties felt it was important for each group to recognize what they bring to the table when working together on projects.
- 3) Both parties felt that, looking ahead to any future projects, it was important to lay a foundation of what had been done in the past and how it was accomplished. It was felt this was extremely important to ensure that working

groups of future opportunities can use the protocol agreement for a reference.

As mentioned earlier the agreement was officially signed on February 25th, 2008 cementing the 25 year relationship of the two organizations; and by doing so giving formal recognition to the importance of the partnership now and for future projects.

Outcomes of Protocol Agreement

The outcomes from the signing of the Protocol Agreement are really three fold. One it has given staff at the grass roots ongoing permission to actively pursue opportunities where the two agencies can work together. Second it gave formal recognition to the work that has been going on for the past 25 years and it serves as a model of efficiency that other communities can emulate.

At the community level, the residents of Kitimat now have a sustainable and consistent approach and messaging in regards to living an active and healthy lifestyle. This can be seen as mentioned earlier with the increase in registration in Kitimat Recreation Department's Fitness and lifestyle programs. The partnership also gave for the Recreation Department new insight into the challenges that people with a high level of medical issues face both mentally and physically, when they try something new. Especially new activities or exercises that can help make huge changes to their lifestyle.

With the formalization of the relationship through the protocol agreement, came instant legitimacy to projects the organizations work on and with KIUK as the tool for delivering programs it provided the opportunity to reach various ethnic groups, all age groups and specialized segments of the community that are traditionally challenging populations to engage with. Groups like the Sikh ladies, Seniors', youth at risk and various workplaces have all taken advantage of KIUK programs and services.

The protocol agreement has also increased the capacity of both organizations abilities to meet the changing needs of the community by the sharing of resources and information. For example when KIUK was looking at providing wellness workshops for Delta King (assisted living residence) the Kitimat Health Unit provided speakers on nutrition, medical issues, while the Kitimat Recreation Department brought information on the importance of adding physical activity to daily life and led the residents through exercises they could do in their apartments. These workshops were at no cost to the residents of Delta King as it was a community service delivered by both organizations, thus following the intent of the protocol agreement.

The partnership between Northern Health: Kitimat Health Unit and District of Kitimat Recreation Department has assisted both parties in reducing duplication of services and messages to the public. It also has assisted both parties better understand what services each can provide while at the same time better understanding the limitations of each organization. By being aware of each others strengths the ability to plan successful events has been assisted greatly. Looking at the core mandates of both organizations; which for the Health Unit is to promote healthy lifestyles and promote prevention of disease and the District of Kitimat Recreation Department mandate is to promote a healthy lifestyle, both physically and mentally through a high level recreation and leisure services have both been advanced with the signing of the protocol agreement.

Best Practices

The keys to success of the protocol agreement between Northern Health and the District of Kitimat can be summarized in the following statements;

1. Commitment to community
2. Shared vision of success
3. Patience
4. Trust

Commitment to community is an important first step, because if you don't have people involved in the project who have a passion for improving their community and the belief in the capacity of their community; any partnership in regards to community planning and programming won't get off the ground. It is this passion for bettering the community that was the jumping off point for both the Northern Health staff and staff from the Recreation Department.

Shared Vision of success naturally came after the realization that both parties were in a very similar business and many of the philosophies and mandates overlapped each other in many cases were the same. Having a shared vision for what success will look like is something that gives a project like this a way to measure itself against. In fact KIUK came up with the following mission statement to help guide its work; *"To educate, encourage, facilitate and support the residents of Kitimat as they move towards a more active lifestyle. To build on the strength of our community and involve a network of health and wellness conscious professionals and community members who work together for the health and wellness of Kitimat."* This statement was created in order for KIUK to stay on track and not get pulled in different directions by various interests. When the mission statement was being developed KIUK members saw a community where likeminded professionals worked together sharing resources to provide assistance to the residents of Kitimat to be well educated about their health and wellness and then to put this new education into action. This will always be a work in progress as community issues change, but if it is kept in mind when engaging with the community wonderful things can happen.

Patience is a big component of the success of the partnership between Northern Health and District of Kitimat Recreation Staff, without patience the partnership would not have lasted as long as it has. It is really important to remember that different organizations move at different speeds and have different policies and operating procedures they must follow. Sometimes as both parties found out the shortest distance between two points is not always a straight line but rather one that meanders in order to meet the requirements of each organization. This is something that has become easier overtime as each organization has learned more about themselves, each other and their community.

In the beginning it was difficult to give up "turf" as it were in order to make things work. To get past this the Kitimat Recreation Department and Kitimat Health Unit had to trust one another in that we were at the table as equals and that no one party was going to use the other to better its own end. In other words once the two organizations learned that when one wins they both win and when one loses they both lose, it was amazing to see the trust level and freedom of discussion that took place.

Conclusion

The success of the partnership between Northern Health and the District of Kitimat's Recreation Department has a 25 year history that was officially recognized by the signing of a protocol agreement by the Mayor of Kitimat and senior management of Northern Health in 2008. The story does not stop with the signing of the protocol

agreement as the two organizations through KIUK have worked to host a number of successful events since then including the 1st Annual Kitimat Valley Run/Walk Festival (June 2009) and most recently a Women's Wellness and Spa evening at the newly renovate Sam Lindsay Aquatic Centre (October 2009).

What makes the protocol agreement special is that it is one of the first if not the first of its type in British Columbia. To have both the District of Kitimat and Northern Health formally recognize the natural pairing and role that preventative health care and recreation services play in enriching citizen's lives is a major milestone for both organizations. One of the markers to how innovative the protocol agreement is is that other jurisdictions are now looking to the Northern Health and District of Kitimat's protocol agreement as a template to further their community's goals of providing healthier more active communities. In fact KIUK which is Kitimat's active community committee which the District of Kitimat's Recreation Department and Northern Health who share co-chair responsibilities was recognized by the BCRPA in 2008 with first ever Active Communities Excellence Award given out at the BCRPA's annual symposium in Victoria, B.C.

The test of how powerful a document like the protocol agreement between Northern Health and the District of Kitimat is its longevity and ability to impact the lives of the residents it is meant to serve. Time will only tell how successful this achievement was however, if the two years since its signing are any indication the protocol agreement will have decisive impact on the health and wellness in the community of Kitimat for years to come.