

Why access to recreation matters

What we have learned

- Research shows that recreation is an effective and economical way to improve the lives of low-income families.
- Ensuring that children living in low-income families have access to recreation is a matter of equity and inclusion.
- Many recreation practitioners do not see poverty in their community, or the need to address this issue.
- To address the needs of children, we must address low-income families, especially single-mother families.
- The face of poverty is different for everyone, and solutions need to respect these differences.
- Recreation practitioners must use the talents and energy of low-income families. Ask them about their skills and talents. Give them opportunities to contribute.

It just makes sense:

Healthy communities mean...

healthy families mean...

healthy children and youth.

Access to recreation

1. It's a matter of equity.

- Access to recreation is a human right. “The child has the right to rest and leisure... play and recreational activities,” according to article 31 of The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989. Almost every country in the UN, including Canada, has agreed to these rights.
- Canada’s National Children’s Agenda, 2000, states clearly, “As a nation, we aspire to have children who are as physically and emotionally healthy as they can be, with strong self-esteem, life skills and enthusiasm.”
- Many parks and recreation departments have stated goals that include providing recreation opportunities for all.

2. It's a matter of inclusion and exclusion.

- Low-income families and their children are excluded from participating fully in their community and often feel isolated.

3. It's a family matter.

- Families shape the lives of children. The number of parents, their education, jobs and income all have a profound effect on children.
- We need to hear the voices of low-income parents and children, and engage whole families to increase their opportunities for recreation.

4. It's a community matter.

- Family life is shaped by the community—by jobs, housing, schools, institutions, services and residents.
- Too often communities take the attitude that “we have no poverty.”
- To increase recreation opportunities for children in low-income families it's fundamentally important to build commitment and capacity among families, neighbourhoods, schools, congregations, businesses, government agencies (including recreation departments) and organizations that serve youth.

5. It's a health matter.

Health Canada describes the link between health and socio-economic status this way:

▶ “Better social and economic conditions mean better health. The more comfortable and better off you are, the healthier you're likely to be and the longer you're likely to live.”¹

Researchers suggest two main interpretations of the link between income and health:

- People with low incomes are deprived. They may have trouble paying for necessities such as food and housing.
- They have little control over their own lives and few chances to participate in society.

**Experience shows that one significant adult
in a kid's life can have a huge effect.**

¹ *Improving the Health of Canadians*, Health Canada, 2004.