

Becoming a CS4L Community: Stage One

Hamilton's First Steps toward becoming a Champion

The old adage “one step at a time” could have been crafted specifically for the Canadian Sport for Life (CS4L) movement. After all, linking the sport, recreation, health and education sectors – and then aligning community, provincial and national programming across those sectors – is a time-consuming process that requires attention to detail. Quality is rarely synonymous with quick.

The “Becoming a CS4L Community” initiative, now underway, is about just that: infusing the spirit of the CS4L movement into a community to improve the quality of sport and physical activity in that area. And if “one step at a time” suits the CS4L movement, then “Rome wasn’t built in a day” sums up this goal of community connections. Just ask Brad Walker, Supervisor of Sport Policy and Development for the City of Hamilton.

“We’ve been immersed in CS4L and [Long-Term Athlete Development] LTAD for some time in our work, but our Recreation Department as a whole – they’ve heard the terms, they understand that we’re working on it – we still haven’t given them the broad perspective as to what does our community look like when we start to implement this,” he says. “Our plan now is to start looking at how we can educate our internal staff.”

Just as LTAD is a stage-based model, the journey to becoming a CS4L Community consists of stages as well. Hamilton is currently working through First Steps – the first of the five-stage pathway. Exploring, Mobilizing, Transforming and Championing make up the remaining four stages, in that order. Walker explains that to progress through the model and be able to align the many sport, recreation, health and education groups necessary to make Hamilton a Champion, they need to begin their work at home first, so to speak.

“Our plan is to identify a plan, and I know that sounds kind of strange, but at this point we’re still educating ourselves on everything,” he says.

Kristen MacDonald, Sport Development Specialist for the City of Hamilton, elaborates on the importance of establishing a plan. “It’s getting everyone together on what we want to accomplish – what do we want to be, what’s our end goal? I don’t know if there’s an end goal, necessarily, but what does it look like in five years?” There are many aspects to becoming a Champion community, but MacDonald acknowledges the necessity of starting small and mapping out the path to success.

Some early steps a community needs to take include creating a CS4L Community Leadership Team, bringing together passionate, knowledgeable and sector-specific representatives from active living, recreation, sport organizations, education, health, local government and other key community partners who can help facilitate communication across sectors and foster alignment. Asset mapping is another key step – creating a meaningful record of all the physical, organizational and human assets within the community as they relate to CS4L. By understanding CS4L, LTAD and physical literacy, these steps are made easier.

Hamilton’s process began about two years ago when a departmental restructuring led to an expansion of the city’s Sport Development Unit. After this restructuring, an emphasis was placed on CS4L and LTAD by the new management team within the Sport Development section under City Wide Services. Walker

credits their efforts and knowledge, as well as the continuous education he and his team have received from outlets such as the past two CS4L National Summits, for igniting change within their organization.

After the 2012 Summit, Hamilton examined ways in which its recreation and sport programs could be better delivered. Walker recalls how the city went through its whole program recreation catalogue, and using the LTAD framework, began aligning age categories and program duration. He refers to this change as an “easy win,” as it didn’t require curriculum restructuring, but it was a way for Hamilton to make an early transition toward CS4L, LTAD and physical literacy implementation.

Jason Ryan is the Program Lead of Children and Youth Programming for the City of Hamilton. While he agrees that curriculum restructuring could pose more of a challenge, he knows that CS4L-LTAD principles are a positive change for the community. “I’m confident that our participants – and more importantly our parents – are going to understand where this is headed and they’re going to be quite happy with how it affects their children . . . how it can benefit them down the road and the rest of life, whether it’s simply through gaining physical literacy skills or confidence.”

Another area that MacDonald sees existing potential for Hamilton to move through the CS4L stages is through the prospect of a leadership team, and the city’s approach here is twofold. First, Hamilton has arranged for Paul Jurbala, member of the CS4L Leadership Team and Project Lead for the Activating CS4L in Ontario project, to activate the community champion plan in a broader context by connecting with many of Hamilton’s affiliated and non-affiliated groups to see how the city can support them, while possibly discovering some existing CS4L Champions with whom Hamilton could associate.

Secondly, when MacDonald began in her position three months ago, the Healthy and Active Living Steering Committee had just started up, consisting of representatives from the public school board, the Catholic school board, Sport Hamilton, the public health sector, Boys & Girls Clubs, Early Years Centres, as well as the recreation, sport, and programming divisions of the City of Hamilton. It has since changed its name to the Physical Literacy for All Steering Committee, and is planning its first summit for the fall of 2013 (www.physicalliteracyhamilton.ca).

“In the bigger picture it’s going to lead to identify what the gaps and what the assets are in sport and recreation right now,” says MacDonald.

In a sense, Hamilton has been the recipient of what sport people might refer to as “lucky bounces”; the restructuring that led to a bigger sport development unit, and the emergence of a steering committee poised to become a leadership team. But in the same breath, those sports people might say “you have to be good to be lucky,” which is definitely the case with Hamilton.

The city began by taking small, internal steps toward understanding CS4L, LTAD and physical literacy. It then charted out and executed the most achievable alignment options in terms of recreation and sport programming; instead of reaching too wide too early, it built some momentum through success. It mapped out such resources as Jurbala and the steering committee, and recognized the value of collaboration.

As MacDonald emphasizes, it’s all about “working better together with none of this ‘us versus them,’ and how we can make sure everyone’s benefitting.”

Collaboration is a cornerstone to becoming a CS4L community. So too is programming that fosters physical literacy for all. And Ryan, in his work with recreation programming, understands how important that focus can be. “Rather than referring specifically to sport and LTAD, it’s following CS4L’s other push – simply physical literacy. I really see how that fits in with the specific groups that I work with.”

“Being a parent now of young kids, you just want to make sure that your kids are physically literate because everything you’re learning, so what am I going to do to make a difference and how can everyone else in my community make a difference so that who my kids grow up with is going to be physically literate and want to play outside,” says MacDonald.