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After school Recreation Programs Work Force Development Strategies



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The after school movement for adolescents and youth has been largely ignored until recently. This interest in after school programs “increased markedly following reports that juvenile crime peaked between 2 p.m. and 6 p.m. on school days” (Asper, 2009, p. 2). Later the issue of childhood obesity became a concern in United States provoking a further interest in after school programs (ASP’s)* as potential sites for increased physical activity and recreation for children and youth (Larsen, McMurray and Popkin, 2008; Siendentop, 2009).

In Canada, the interest in after school programs for adolescents and youth arose out of research on the long-term health care costs of childhood inactivity and obesity and also research focused on the “critical hours” (i.e., 2-6 p.m.). Quality after school programs were reported to decrease behavioural problems, increase self-esteem and self-efficacy, improve communication skills, and decrease levels of depression (Little, Wimer and Weiss, 2008).

Although after school services are being developed across Canada, the question remains whether there will be an adequate work force to provide the quality programs, in particular, in recreational and physical education development. This document examines the issues and barriers associated with labour force development in after school recreation programs and identifies the promising practices that may assist in addressing them.

Methodology

A literature review of labour force development practices particularly in the area of after school programs was conducted. This included an examination of the current training programs at post-secondary institutions for child care workers, and a review of the incentive system implemented in Alberta to support the labour market needs of early childhood development and child care workers and interviews with key informants.

Additionally, interviews and a review of web-based information was completed examining two Alberta-based post-secondary institutions to determine the degree of youth-focused content that is provided in child and youth care courses, as well as other coursework that might prepare professionals for working in an after school setting.

A background report titled After School Recreation Programs Work Force Development Strategy Backgrounder was completed prior to this report and provides the foundation for the work force strategies discussed. This report is available on the Alberta Recreation and Parks Association’s Website. www.arpaonline.ca

After School Recreation Programs Work Force Development Strategies

In recent years, a number of new public and private investments have been made across Canada to support the development of recreational after school programs. While the nature of these programs varies considerably, funders at every level are realizing the potential of after school programs to help address some of the most difficult social and health problems faced by youth and our communities; including obesity, inactivity, poor nutrition, educational attainment and criminality.

As with any community based intervention, our ability to improve any of these critical outcomes is entirely dependent on the blend and quality of the programs offered. Needless to say, the abilities, training and support offered to staff - and their continuity – are prerequisites for providing high quality after school programs. How then are we to ensure that ASP’s are able to attract, support and retain a labour force that is able to deliver effective programs?

The approach used over the past 20 years was to develop systems of support for early childhood development, complete with shifts in funding, policy commitments to well trained and qualified staff, formal alignment with post-secondary institutions and other critical systems (e.g. education) certainly offers some good examples of “supply side” investments that work. Building and delivering a “system” of high quality recreational ASP’s will also require the longer term support of many different partners - many of whom are already aligned with the important outcomes these programs can provide.

This report offers some concrete suggestions about potential partnerships and investment strategies that would support the labour force needed to deliver and sustain high quality programs, perhaps the most critical piece of the after school puzzle.

Workforce Development Strategies

Workforce development strategies have been pursued to varying degrees by the provincial, territorial and municipal governments, several non-profit and voluntary organizations, as well as some considerable support from educational institutions. Applicable strategies including the approach taken by the Ministry of Child and Youth Services in Alberta offers some excellent illustrations of the kinds of strategies – used in a comparable sector - that could support the development of a labour force able to deliver high quality ASP's.

Challenges and Issues

After school programs are faced with a number of interrelated human resource issues driven in large part by how the work is currently structured. Given this situation, the labour pool that is attracted to this type of work is limited and results in a fairly transitory workforce, requiring constant and ongoing supervision. Often reliant on post-secondary students from a range of post-secondary faculties (and even high school students) after school programs - especially those that require vigorous physical activity – have a limited pool of qualified support to draw from. These issues, while not insurmountable, do affect the ability to attract and retain qualified staff who can deliver a quality service. Until these circumstances are addressed, funders and other partners cannot, and should not, expect to achieve the many important potential outcomes associated with after school - the very reason for their investment.

Promising Practices in After School Workforce Development

Studies focused on the development of an after school work force are limited in number and tend to be descriptive rather than experimental studies with control measures (e.g., examining the differences between programs implementing staff training with a program that does not). As such, it is not possible to definitively identify “best” or evidence-based practices in after school human resource development. The literature review does however reveal ten “promising practices” that have the potential to positively impact the development of a sustainable and competent work force.

The need to develop strategic partnerships with a variety of stakeholders including post-secondary institutions, to develop an adequate training and credential program for staff including effective ways for knowledge exchange, and the need to ensure attractive career paths are available by targeting policy influencers at a national level are all avenues to developing a national after school agenda that focuses on physical education and nutrition.

Development of a National Strategy

Recommendations, suggestions for future action, and next steps in the development of a national after school labour development plan are outlined. Discussions with key informants across Canada is warranted to determine whether these promising practices are worthy of consideration and pursuit in supporting Canadian after school programs and their labour force development issues. The input of current employees, post-secondary instructors, and employers across Canada would also inform the development of an action plan.

Focus on Alberta

Suggestions for future action, and next steps in the development of a provincial after school labour development plan must also be considered. There are a number of strategies and actions that will contribute to the building and sustaining of a higher quality work force for after school recreation programs. By focusing on informing, attracting, and retaining a high performance workforce, Alberta will be in a position to support the labour force needed to deliver and sustain high quality programs.

Moving forward with these strategies will require a good deal of cooperative leadership from (larger) organizations working in the sector; aligned membership associations, and those who are developing and revising public policy to better support after school recreational programming.

In recent years, a number of new public and private investments have been made across Canada to support the development of recreational after school programs (ASPs).^{*} While the nature of these programs varies considerably, funders at every level are realizing the potential of after school programs to help address some of the most difficult social and health problems faced by youth and our communities – including obesity, inactivity, poor nutrition, educational attainment and criminality. As with any community based intervention, our ability to improve any of these critical outcomes is entirely dependent on the blend and quality of the programs offered. Needless to say, the abilities, training and support offered to staff - and their continuity – are prerequisites for providing high quality after school programs. How then are we to ensure that ASP's are able to attract, support and retain a labour force that is able to deliver effective programs?

The approach used over the past 20 years was to develop systems of support for early childhood development, complete with shifts in funding, policy commitments to well trained and qualified staff, formal alignment with post-secondary institutions and other critical systems (e.g. education) certainly offers some good examples of “supply side” investments that work. Building and delivering a “system” of high quality recreational ASP's will also require the longer term support of many different partners - many of whom are already aligned with the important outcomes these programs can provide.

This report offers some concrete suggestions about potential partnerships and investment strategies that would support the labour force needed to deliver and sustain high quality programs, perhaps the most critical piece of the after school puzzle.

^{*}The term “after school recreation programs” has been defined as “any child and youth recreation based programming that is offered between the hours of 3:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m. Monday - Friday, 3 - 5 days a week, during the school year. These programs are purposefully delivered and are intended to improve the social and developmental outcomes of children and youth, by increasing participation in quality recreation and other activities.”¹

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

Workforce development strategies have been pursued to varying degrees by the provincial, territorial and municipal governments, several non-profit and voluntary organizations, with some considerable support from educational institutions. This document will highlight some of the most applicable strategies explored by these sectors. For our purposes, the approach taken by the Ministry of Child and Youth Services in Alberta offers some excellent illustrations of the kinds of strategies – used in a comparable sector - that could support the development of a labour force able to deliver high quality ASP's.

Government of Alberta Children and Youth Services

In 2008 Alberta introduced new child care legislation, regulations, and standards for child care programs. Challenged to create an additional 14,000 child care spaces in a five year span, the Province realized that a comprehensive “systems’ approach (e.g. beyond opening sites) and investments in recruitment, training, certification and staff retention, would be critical to their success.

Although the initiative was primarily focused on improving the availability of spaces; enhancing access to licensed childcare, and reducing costs for low / middle income parents and those with school age children, the strategy prudently included a number of concrete strategies – and real investments - to assist child care operators with their efforts to recruit, pay and retain staff who could deliver quality programs. Organizational accreditation, and incentives to raise the qualifications of supervisory and front line staff, became a critical component.

To ensure the approach used was suitable in various parts of the province, each Child and Family Services Authority, together with the Ministry of Children and Youth Services was responsible for developing and implementing a specific plan, which focused on four broad goals: helping families, creating and sustaining spaces, recruiting and retaining child care professionals, and addressing regional challenges.

Accreditation - arguably a precondition of quality programming - was encouraged and incented through the Alberta Child Care Accreditation Funding Program and once licensed, child care centres were able to seek support in a number of ways:

- **Quality Funding:** Intended to help meet and maintain the accreditation “standards of excellence”, the Quality Funding Grant was made available to improve quality programming and provide resources for staff and children over and above provincial regulatory requirements. Pre-accredited programs can receive \$4,000 annually and accredited programs can receive \$7,500 annually.
- **Staff Support Funding:** This funding provides a top-up for certified day care staff, over and above the wages paid by the employer.
- **Benefit Contribution Grant:** The Benefit Contribution Grant is paid to eligible licensed day care programs to offset the cost of the mandatory employer payroll contributions such as Canada Pension Plan, Employment Insurance and Workers’ Compensation Board (WCB) premiums, general holiday pay (statutory holidays) and vacation pay associated with Staff Support Funding and the Staff Attraction Incentive Allowance. This funding is calculated and paid monthly at a rate of sixteen percent (16%) of the total Staff Support Funding and the Staff Attraction Incentive Allowance issued on that month’s payment.
- **Professional Development Grant:** This funding is to assist with the education costs for certified staff to obtain higher levels of certification, and with the costs of attending approved conferences or workshops. Use of the full amount of the Professional Development Grant is limited to post-secondary tuition and required course textbooks to get to the next level of child care certification. The amount varies depending on work hours but can be up to \$1,000 per fiscal year.

Applicability to After School Labour Force Development

- **Staff Attraction Incentive Allowance:** This funding assists child care programs in addressing difficulties to attract higher levels of certified staff, effective April 1, 2009 the Staff Attraction Incentive Allowance is offered under the Alberta Child Care Accreditation Funding Program to staff certified as child development workers and supervisors. The Allowance offers funding up to \$5,000 (\$2,500/year over two years) to help recruit trained staff who have at least six months of child care experience and have not worked in the child care field for at least six months. Eligible staff must be certified as a child development worker or child development supervisor and be working in a licensed day care program, licensed out-of-school care program or a contracted family day home agency.

The Staff Attraction Incentive Allowance is also available to people who are new to the child care profession and do not have the six months of previous child care experience. These individuals are eligible to receive \$2,500 after working one year in a licensed day care program, licensed out-of-school care program or a contracted family day home agency. Eligible staff must be certified as a child development worker or child development supervisor.

- **Child Care Bursary Program:** Child Development Supervisors who wish to attend approved child care conferences or workshops can apply for up to \$500 through the Child Care Bursary Program in accordance to the Bursary Program's eligibility requirements.
- **Awards of Excellence:** The Ministry also supports an annual conference which features key note speakers and a significant evening recognition event that awards those working in the child care sector.

The Alberta Government credential programs focuses on early childhood development and child care. The program does not focus on development through recreation thereby limiting the courses applicability to many after school programs. The Alberta Government credential programs are accessible for unlicensed after school programs (e.g., recreational programs, drop-in programs) although staff completing these courses in unlicensed programs do not have their salary increased through provincial funding.

While these policy tools were not used to support the specialized skills required to help with adolescent and youth development or physical education and recreation, the comprehensive approach used to build out and sustain the child care system has a number of obvious implications for after school labour force development, including:

- a. Regional planning:** Given the diversity of communities across Canada, even within territories and provinces, it is difficult to propose a single strategy for labour force development across the country. Similarly, the blend of programming used in ASP's (recreation, health, and learning) is likely to vary considerably based on local capacities and the priorities of the system partners. That said, the key principles – including investments in supply side and system funding – are entirely transferable to after school.
- b. Investments in Quality:** Recognition of the importance of quality programming and the support required to provide it, is certainly required in ASP's. The ability to realize any of the important outcomes associated with recreational after school programs is directly tied to the quality of programming and the staff that provide it.
- c. Addressing Wages:** Like the child care sector, ASP's chronically suffer from low wages and part time work that often includes split shifts (e.g. before and after school programs). Direct incentives for wage top ups, the use of attraction and retention bonuses, and support for mandatory payroll costs, offer some concrete illustrations of the range of policy tools that could be available to develop and sustain a quality after school labour force.
- d. Commitment to Ongoing Training:** The supports for staff development and continuous learning are an example that translates well to after school labour force development. While there have been numerous public investments focused on opening new sites and programs, the support for staff training and development – with the exception of a few large service providers – has been sorely lacking. Although the net result is more ASP's the quality and outcomes of these offerings is difficult to discern.

Municipal Support for After School: Supportive Investments

In 2009, the Alberta Recreation and Parks Association reported that municipalities in Alberta “are providing some after school recreation, most commonly in municipal facilities. Some also extend their reach by collaborating with non-profit organizations... and many recreation and parks departments whose mandates have evolved to indirect program delivery (e.g. only a funder) face even greater challenges in ensuring their children and youth are well-served. With reduced staffing and budgets, they lack the capacity to respond to unmet needs. This challenge is particularly acute in communities with no community-based agencies that can offer sustained, quality after school programs.”²

Although many communities around the country have seen their Recreation and Community Services Departments move out of direct service there are still a number of ways that these towns and cities may be able to support recreational ASP’s – beyond simple funding support.

The City of Calgary has created a unique partnership to support the Calgary After- School strategy that included both a financial investment and commitments to ensure the programming is high quality. A collaborative effort between The City of Calgary (i.e., FCSS, Community and Neighbourhood Services, and Recreation) and its community partners, these programs include a good mix of homework time, sports, drama, music, the arts, and recreation. Importantly however, the strategy included provision for an after school Coordinator position who works directly with the Recreation Department to trouble shoot, advise and support six after school programs. This staff position includes time to provide training and follow-up on issues; a chance to nurture and support partnerships, and to deal with issues as they emerge.

At the same time, the City has engaged four (4) Community Development Workers to be involved in supporting Calgary after school. These workers are responsible for working with internal business units (including Recreation) and external agencies to further the goals and aims of the Calgary after school initiative.



The decision to include a celebratory event for leaders and innovators in the child care sector is worth noting. Included as a key event during the province’s 2 day training event, this annual celebration, and the range of supports being made available, sends a strong message to those in the sector – and the broader community – that this is important and valuable work.

It is important to recognize the current trend among governments is to support “demand-side” funding for participation in recreation and sport, and more recently arts and culture programs. While there are some serious limitations to the effectiveness of providing redeemable tax incentives to participate, the very usefulness of these investments will be lost if the quality of what is available is poor.

Post-secondary Institutions

They meet with all the service providers within a specific geographic area 1-2 times a year, to discuss issues and concerns related to the implementation of after school programs – with a big focus on staffing and training. These meetings help to identify possible collaborations and new partnerships; opportunities for collective training; and ideas about how to leverage and engage the resources of other groups in the community.

There is also a commitment to identifying common training needs among all the various partners who are supporting the after school strategy and hosting shared professional development opportunities – supported whenever possible by the City itself. At the same time, organizations that have specialized staff or skills are invited to help with the training sessions, which are free for all participants. Only two years along, and this partnership has already identified a calendar of training workshops open and accessible to all those involved in the after school partnership.

The decision to invest in centralized trouble shooting; having a contact and liaison with other municipal departments; the redeployment of existing staff with good linkages and partnership experience; and the commitment to shared training and staff development – among all the partners – offers an excellent illustration of how municipalities can help to ensure their investments in ASP's result in better quality, and cost effective, programs. Leaving each site to fend for itself is, by any comparison, a poor alternative.

Post-secondary institutions across Canada have considerable experience in supporting labour force development strategies and are well positioned to develop degree, diploma and certificate programs that would encompass the range of skills and knowledge need to work in ASP's. While there are some linkages at the margins, including the use of various student placements, a fully developed strategy to train and certify professionals would be a great step forward.

While the situation varies across the country, many ASP's do rely on students to fill staffing positions either as part of their practicum hours or as employees when not attending classes. In the best case scenarios these students support the work of the Program Manager or Site Leader but there are instances where they provide, and are directly responsible for program delivery. Most often these post-secondary students are recruited from the faculties of Child Studies, Social Work, and Kinesiology/Physical Education and Recreation. While there is applicability to ASP's the curriculum in Child Studies is focused on early child development (i.e., 0-6 years of age) and does not concentrate on the development of children's play and recreational skills in older children. By special request, these students can ask to be involved in a practicum in programs for children who are older. Similarly, faculties of Social Work do not generally focus on working with youth nor do they offer training in arts, culture, physical education or recreational elements in their programs. While students from Kinesiology/Physical Education programs have many of the skills need to support the recreational components of after school programs, they, too, have a limited skill set relative to what is needed for a high quality blended ASP.

Using student placements to support ASP's should not be seen as the only solution to address the shortage of qualified staff and further, these placements are intended to provide real benefits to the students who take them. For example, there is good evidence to suggest^{3,4} that some faculties - in particular Education – do benefit from having their students involved in after school placements. There may be also be some potential to engage student placements who are involved in the faculties of Nursing (e.g. Community Nursing); Community Health Medicine; Rehabilitation and Disabilities Studies; Therapeutic

Non-profit and Voluntary Organizations

Recreation, Engaging these potential partners will however, involve some work to establish the “fit” between the skills they are developing and the learning opportunities that come with delivering an ASP in a neighbourhood, school or community setting. For example, there are few ASP's with fully integrated participation of special needs children - an ideal opportunity for students from Rehabilitation and Disabilities Studies to contribute.

Beyond the opportunity to recruit student placements, community colleges are the most natural place to develop of professional certificates and courses in youth development, after school management and recreational and physical development of youth. Bow Valley College for example, has already developed a one-year out-of-school care certificate, specifically designed to enhance skills and knowledge for professionals working with 5 to 14 year old children. The program focused on age-appropriate activities and program-related operational and health and safety standards. Similarly, there are existing qualification and training programs, like HIVE FIVE® that can easily be incorporated into a new and broader curriculum intended for after school staff.

As with the example from the child care sector discussed above, the development of a system to provide monetary rewards and on-going support to professionals to complete the coursework, whether through a community college, a provincial organization or a non-profit organization would provide an increased incentive for professionals to complete their training and/or certification. The development of national and/or provincial programs and professional standards for accreditation would fill an important gap.

It is important to acknowledge the “chicken and egg” problem facing community colleges and other post-secondary institutions. They would need some assurance of an ongoing demand for these programs, sufficient to warrant their development. Although there has been considerable growth in after school programs right across the country, this has largely focussed on opening new programs and sites – not on building the infrastructure or addressing the immediate and longer term issue of recruiting, training, and supporting ‘certified’ staff. Without some sense there will be investments of this nature, it may be difficult to get any post-secondary partners to ‘anticipate’ a real demand.

A number of the larger organizations engaged in after school program delivery (e.g., Boys and Girls Club, YMCA) do offer a fairly good range of training and development opportunities to their employees. These organizations have the advantage of providing full or part time employment in other programs to augment the part time hours available in the after school program, improving staff retention and making professional development opportunities more cost-effective. These organizations may also offer leadership programs to help youth involved in the program or living in the community, move into paid employment - although these efforts, and strategies to recruit leaders from local high schools, require some caution. Aside from the licensing and legal restrictions of having youth under 18 working with minors, there are safety, maturity and even disclosure issues that arise. Where it is practiced, there must be policies in place to assure that youth supervising other youth receive adequate training, on-going supervision and support.

Retention of staff is somewhat easier for larger organizations with relatively stable funding and municipalities involved in ASP's as there are opportunities to develop a career path for staff that incorporates, but goes beyond after school programming. After school recreation programs may benefit from partnering with other non-profit organizations in their immediate community to develop and retain staff where the skills are overlapping or complementary (e.g. mental health, public health). This sort of strategy, which has been employed by a wide-variety of non-profit organizations, has proven to be a cost-effective alternative in a number instances including the Human Resource Network in Edmonton and the Disability Services Human Resource Network in Calgary. Similarly, there are existing school based strategies that could easily incorporate greater support for recreational after school programs into their mandate with some, like Alberta Recreation and Parks Association's Active Creative Engaged Communities (ACE) quite well aligned and able to link these programs to other community and private sector partners.

Staff recruitment, training and retention is an expensive and time consuming activity and any shared or collective strategies – among the partners involved in ASP's – could significantly reduce the costs of this activity, eliminating a significant amount of duplicated (and often competitive) effort. There may also be an opportunity to engage the local volunteer organizations to assist with the recruitment and training of volunteers and even staff. Here again, some investment in system level supports would help address a long running problem and could significantly improve the quality and continuity of staff – core components of any successful program.

Projecting Labour Force Needs

The number of after school recreation programs that exist in any jurisdiction is difficult to determine because there is seldom one central body or association charged with this task. Where inventories do exist, they tend to be incomplete and these lists do little to leverage the many benefits that come with a shared informational porthole. In Alberta, a parent can find an extensive listing of day home, daycare, before- and after school care and even babysitting programs, but there is no place to easily find the after school recreation programs that are available. Consequently, there is no real way to gauge the potential demand for service, much less the labour force that might be required.

Building a central inventory of after school recreation programs would be a good first step in the creation of an after school recreation strategy in any jurisdiction and potentially critical to labour force development. Beyond simply marketing what is available to local parents and families, a common shared information porthole could serve other purposes, including staff recruitment, potential job sharing and opportunities to participate in common training and professional development. Well designed, the porthole could also provide an opportunity to assess the number of requests for programs and services, relative to the demand and could clearly identify areas in the local community that are underserved. While there are usually some rational criteria used to determine where ASP's may be needed (generally focused on “risk” factors or income), in practice, programs are located and developed where there is support from local school and/or community centre staff and administrators.

While there are many potential benefits from developing a central informational porthole, and the opportunity to create an important community planning tool, there are external, environmental and economic factors that also need to be considered in the projections of program demand and the workforce required. Wait lists do provide some insight, but demographic statistics on children families and family composition; projected population growth; local labour force participation rates - especially for women – and estimates of planned economic growth, employment projections, etc., all need to factor into these projections.

Individually, the organizations involved in ASP delivery, are unlikely to develop this sort of capacity or sophistication although there are some efforts made by government to undertake labour force projections. For example, The Alberta Government recently completed an evidence-based analysis of short-term labour market trends and conditions.⁵ Program Leaders & Instructors in Recreation & Sport and Early Childhood Educators and Assistants were two occupations identified as facing “potential imbalances in the labour market in the near future” (i.e., shortfall in professional numbers). Although it is difficult to assess actual numbers, it is fair to assume the demand for skilled after school professionals who can lead recreational and physical education classes for children and youth will increase as the economy recovers. Unfortunately, this will coincide with a growing demand for employees in a myriad of occupations that offer greater financial reward.

CHALLENGES AND ISSUES



After school programs are faced with a number of interrelated human resource issues driven in large part by how the work is currently structured. Generally part time, including split shifts, the sector has traditionally paid low wages, and benefits are often nonexistent. Given this situation, the labour pool that is attracted to this type of work is limited and results in fairly transitory workforce, requiring constant and ongoing supervision. Often reliant on post-secondary students from a range of post-secondary faculties (and even high school students) after school programs - especially those that require vigorous physical activity – have a limited pool of qualified support to draw from. Larger organizations have the ability to mitigate some of these challenges by combining shifts with other services they offer, providing full time hours and in some instances, benefits. The real benefit: more skilled and committed employees who work for a longer period of time – the most critical element of program continuity and quality.

Summary of Key Issues:

There are a number of obstacles to labour force development, some of which are inherent in the way the after school positions are currently structured and supported. These issues, while not insurmountable, do affect the ability to attract and retain qualified staff who can actually deliver a quality service. Until these circumstances are addressed, funders and other partners cannot, and should not, expect to achieve the many important potential outcomes associated with after school - the very reason for their investment.

Part-time Employment

The hours of after school programs usually necessitates hiring part-time employees with the exception of the program coordinator. These supervisory positions are often shared among a number of programs. If the organization is large enough they may be able to offer employees full-time employment with a number of part time “pieces”.



Recruiting Qualified Staff

Given the part-time nature of the employment, many after school programs are still reliant on some voluntary support, post-secondary students and youth leaders who have been trained while they were participants. Unfortunately, only a limited number of these personnel have the knowledge and skills to offer quality recreation and physical activity options for children and youth.

Transitory Employment

It is fair to say that working in after school recreation programs is not viewed as a career but may support individual efforts to find other, often related, work (e.g. youth services, recreation, teaching, human services professional). Given the level of training offered, the lack of program resources and the absence of standardized recognized and transferable qualifications, it remains difficult to generate a long term commitment to being an after school employee.'

Low Wages

Quite a number of (especially unlicensed) after school programs are not really able to pay a competitive wage although some licensed programs (e.g. Alberta) receive an annual training allowance for their staff, top-up wages for each position, and funds to augment employee benefit costs. Given the absence of personal, ancillary, and professional development benefits this remains problematic.

High Turnover

Given the fact that the hours of employment are part-time, the wages are low and the work is viewed as transitory there tends to be high staff turnover. The expense and the strain on program managers associated with constantly recruiting staff are considerable and the lack of continuity in staffing – one of the most critical elements of program quality – is harmful.

Lack of Training Incentive

Staff employed in many unlicensed after school recreation programs, do not have an incentive to complete training and education to enhance their skills and few programs or organizations are able to afford monetary assistance or provide salary increases for completing professional development courses or acquiring new credentials.

Post-secondary Focus

According to interviewees, current training offered at post-secondary institutions in child and youth studies tends to focus on children 0-6 years of age. Students can complete practicum placements in facilities with older children but the focus of the program is on early education. Growing interest in the “middle years” may help adjust and expand this focus.

Training Expense

The high turnover of employees requires after school programs to constantly train their staff in basic first aid, nutrition, various program procedures and familiarize them with the resources and program specifics they need to know. Providing quality physical activity for example, requires knowledge of recreation (e.g. healthy); the skills associate with different activities; and ideally some understanding of engaging and motivating young people and behaviour management. Where programs make intentional efforts to be inclusive, specialized training and support is even more essential. Outreach to special populations – even girls – requires specific skill sets and purposeful methods.

Employee Perception of the Importance of Physical Activity

The attitudes of employees in relation to physical activity and nutrition are critical for program success. Lack of specific training in recreation, physical education, health care or child studies may influence their commitment and ability to provide quality recreation and vigorous physical activity in their programs, even where there is appropriate facilities and equipment.

Outreach to Rural and Remote Communities

After school development in smaller communities often struggles for lack of facilities and the extra costs or arrangements required for transportation, although attracting trained and/or qualified staff is a more critical issue in terms of delivering a quality program. With little proximity to post-secondary partners and a much smaller pool of potential employees to draw from, often the wages that can be afforded by after school programs may be insufficient relative to the cost of living in a remote area.

Lack of Standardization

Unlicensed programs do not have required program and staffing standards although some have adopted “HIGH FIVE®” and most insist on some basic standards like CPR and first aid training. The National Youth Development Learning Network, a coalition of youth-serving agencies who collectively service 40 million youth and employ 100,000 paid staff in the United States suggest that there is a need to develop standards for after school programs that address the context, content, and process of after school programs. They suggest that these standards would establish clear guidance for excellence in the field; ensure staff have a foundational knowledge and skill in youth development; and communicate an organization’s commitment to continuous personal and professional improvement – critical to a more competent and satisfied workforce.

Most of these challenges can be addressed if there is a willingness to try collective approaches, innovative partnerships and the insight to provide resources that support program quality – and that starts with staffing. For many good reasons, funders are considering new investments in after school programs, but until they shift some of their focus from new site development to supporting the costs of better staff, more standardized training and the skills required for high quality programs, they should expect little return on their investment.

PROMISING PRACTICES IN AFTER SCHOOL WORK FORCE DEVELOPMENT

Studies focused on the development of an after school work force are limited in number and tend to be descriptive rather than experimental studies with control measures (e.g., examining the differences between programs implementing staff training with a program that does not). As such, it is not possible to definitively identify “best” or evidence-based practices in after school human resource development. In general terms, the level and quality of evaluation in after school programs is quite unsophisticated.

The literature review does reveal ten “promising practices” that have the potential to positively impact the development of a sustainable and competent work force. Although the source is American, many of these strategies are applicable in a Canadian context and worthy of close consideration.

1. Partner to facilitate post-secondary student placements.^{6, 7, 8, 9}

After school recreation programs, especially smaller programs with part time staff actually rely on post-secondary (and even late secondary) students to fill out the staffing complement. With some support and training, students from the faculties of child and youth studies and recreation, physical education and kinesiology can be especially helpful, and their participation is considered a credited field placement. There are other faculties however, who may be appropriate sources for post-secondary student placements including public health, education, community nursing, disabilities studies, and community health sciences that have not historically used after school sites as placements for their students.

Recruiting these new partnerships will require a clear outline of the benefits of the field placement and how it aligns with the goals of the particular profession and faculty. There would also be a need to co-develop new and age appropriate curriculum that aligns with the actual work in the field. Studies in the United States show that Faculties of Education find numerous benefits from placing their students in after school programs. As the focus in many US after school programs is on academic enhancement, these placements are an ideal “fit”. While there are obvious limitations to using younger students, there may also be an opportunity to develop placements suitable for high school coop students, some of whom may elect to stay in the field.

2. Develop a standard after school and youth professionals credential.^{10, 11, 12}

Credentialed programs have been shown to have significant positive impact on the quality of programming, the retention of staff, and general staff confidence. Two good examples include the School-age Youth Development Credential (SAYD) and Youth Practitioner Apprenticeship Programs (YDPA) developed under the auspices of Achieve Boston, an initiative dedicated to improving quality in after school programs. SAYD is a competency-based credential program involving college-based courses, community-based training and field work. Staff are encouraged by a \$1,000 bonus when they successfully complete the training.

Youth Practitioner Apprenticeship Program (YDPA) is a national initiative developed by the US Department of Labour to provide an out-of-school time certificate for current and future youth workers. They use mentoring, direct instruction, and on-the-job training. Interestingly, the 4-H organization is very active in this initiative.

The development of a standardized credential program for after school recreation programs will have to address some of the existing barriers including resources funds for staff to complete the credential program and likely some form of bonus or compensation for completing certification, however structured. Establishing a common community based approach, where most service providers in the same jurisdiction agree to insist on the same training and standards could help raise program quality and invites the opportunity to share these costs among many partners. Creating a ‘prerequisite’ qualification however, could discourage potential applicants and may not seem particularly valuable to staff with existing credentials.

Similarly, there are opportunities to partner with the public sector where they are involved in the licensing, training and support of after school programs. Expanding the incentives, training and development opportunities, currently available to licensed service providers, would be a cost effective way to support the many smaller community based programs that operate independently and raise program quality. Allowing and encouraging

After school staff to attend other specialized training and professional development opportunities focused on healthy youth development, would also help raise program quality. In provinces like Alberta it would be a relatively easy matter to expand the suite of supports and incentives used in the day care strategy to include staff working in after school.

New partnerships with post-secondary institutions and different faculties are critical to the development of any form of certification and course content that could be built around what is already being used. A number of Ontario colleges have incorporated HIVE FIVE® into the core curriculum of their Recreation and Leisure programs and more of the jobs in recreation service delivery are requiring staff to take a full day workshop on the “Principles of Healthy Child Development (PHCD)” and have made this training an expectation much like CPR and First Aid. The gradual and growing adoption of these programs as an industry standard, and the fact they are used and useful in the field, suggests they should form at least part of whatever credential program is established.

There is already some momentum in this area. Bow Valley College in Calgary has developed a one-year out-of-school-care certificate, specifically designed to enhance skills and knowledge for professionals working with 5 to 14 year old children. The program focuses on age-appropriate activities, related operational procedures, and health and safety standards. Unfortunately, the program developer and instructor indicated the course is poorly attended, suggesting there is no monetary or professional incentive to complete it. Without support from most of the service providers – where they insist on and support staff to become “qualified” - post-secondary institutions cannot on their own establish a recognized and meaningful credential.



3. Expand the range and reach of partners and stakeholders.^{13, 14, 15, 16}

The development of a work force strategy for after school recreation programs will require the development of partnerships and networks beyond recreation providers and post-secondary institutions. Many groups including health promotion and mental health agencies, schools, community centres, skill building and mentoring organizations, disabilities services, charitable service clubs, and businesses and philanthropists who have healthy child development and youth identified as a focus for their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) – all have a role to play. Well developed and successful programs, especially those who have sustained themselves over time, are those that are able to develop an expanded network of support. Unfortunately, most of these partnerships are local, particular to the individuals or communities involved, and not readily transferable. At the same time, these networks and partnerships can be important vehicles for the funding and delivery of quality cost-effective human resources development opportunities and additional program resources.

Recognizing the critical role and expanded network of partners and supporters in after school recreation programs, this function was built into the approach used in British Columbia. In an effort to enhance the quality of after school programs is Ministries of Education, Health and Tourism, Sports and Arts agreed to co-create “Action Schools! BC” (AS!BC). From the outset they worked to develop a model that promoted collaboration and the dissemination and sharing of information and knowledge across sectors. Part of the effort included standardized Program Manuals and common training sessions. In Annapolis Valley, Nova Scotia the Provincial after school Strategy is a three-way partnership between Nova Scotia Health Promotion and Protection – Regional Office, Annapolis Valley Regional School Board and the municipality, town or village. This arrangement sees each of the partners contributing funds towards the salary of a program leader, who is employed by the municipality. The program leaders are made up of physical education teachers, educational assistants, high school and university students, parents and volunteers and each group designs their programs to run in a the local school

or community facility, at no cost to the participants. This partnership, with these staff supports, allows participants to enjoy a variety of non-competitive and non-traditional physical activities throughout the year including six-week sessions of yoga, kick boxing, ball room dancing or step classes. Common HIVE FIVE® training and assessments are provided by the NS Health Promotion and Protection.¹⁷

Local neighbourhood and community development initiatives are also well suited to facilitate the development of an after school recreation strategy as they provide their own sort of linked network at the local level. Providing safe and nurturing environments for children and youth that supports their physical, psychological, and social development is certainly consistent with the focus of most community development efforts and nature of the curriculum used in any after school program has the potential to link with other important local issues including crime reduction, adequate nutrition, physical inactivity, and bullying. There are positive economic benefits as well including the opportunity to hire local people, engage neighbourhood businesses and, with adequate after school care for their children, more parents can find and sustain employment.

The recruitment of staff from local schools into paid employees in after school programs (more common in the United States where many programs have an educational focus) still represents an important potential partnership opportunity in Canada. There are often staff in schools who work part time including educational assistants and others with somewhat specialized skills, which would enjoy more stable employment and income by taking on after school responsibilities. This would add continuity for the children and youth who participate and would help to align the after school priorities with the values and directions of the school administration (e.g. anti-bullying, good citizenship and voluntarism). Developing strategies to recruit workers who are in part time positions in fields outside of education (e.g. mental health, health promotion, youth workers, etc.) may also provide a ready source of skilled employees.

4. Develop web-based training programs.^{18, 19, 20, 21}

Websites, webinars and podcasts are cost-effective and commonly-used training tools by post-secondary institutions, business, and community groups and allow people to learn when it is most convenient for them. Podcasting is increasingly being used as it is a relatively inexpensive, effortless, and flexible tool for distance learning. Blends of online and face-to-face instruction tend to have stronger learning outcomes than face-to-face instruction alone. Studies indicate that any script developed for online instruction should offer participants an opportunity to interact with one another to discuss critical - and practical - issues, essentially creating an ongoing “community of practice”. Even teaching tools should incorporate an interactive component. Given the wide diversity of groups providing after school programs, not to mention their geographic dispersal, electronic methods of training are ideal for supporting after school recreation program work force training and development and particularly well-suited to engaging leaders and practitioners in more remote communities.

Developing a website for Canadian after school recreation programs may be a cost-effective strategy to develop the work force for after school recreational programs in a country of this size. The website could include features like an inventory of after school programs; links to other sites (e.g., After school Corporation (TASC); training opportunities and conferences of interest; general information on physical education, recreation, and nutrition for children and youth in an after school programs; program fun challenges (e.g., walk a mile a day); and even daily suggestions sent by Twitter or Facebook. Ideally, the development of a single porthole for these resources would be informed, and in fact designed, to meet the actual and practical needs of local program leaders from across the country.



5. Develop learning communities and networks to reduce costs of training and increase exchange of information.^{22, 23, 24, 25}

Developing networks to share resources, reducing and pooling work force development costs is now a well utilized strategy in many parts of the non-profit sector. “Club Possible: Building Attitudes Today for an Active Tomorrow” was developed when eight regional organizations sought to align their efforts and create a community-wide intervention for after school programs focused on physical activity and healthy eating for children (i.e., 5-12 years of age). The group included a County Health Department, a University, a Visiting Nurse Association, and four of the larger after school providers (i.e., YMCA, Boys and Girls Club, Camp Fire USA, and Girl Scouts). Respecting the need to reflect local circumstances, the partners did not design a single strict curriculum but did develop a way to share high quality staff training modules and an activities-based toolkit that provided local staff with instructions and guidelines about program implementation. All the local after school staff were invited to the YMCA’s 4-hour training sessions in “Healthy Lifestyles Principles” and the University offered 8 hours of training in promoting physical activity. A graduate student met with each program once a month for a year to do follow-up after the training, to share and suggest program options and to discuss evaluation strategies.

In the Canadian context, there are large organizations providing after school recreational programs who may want to consider how they can design and offer training to smaller organizations or assume a leadership role in standardizing some of the training, program, quality and evaluation expectations for quality after school recreation programs. In practice, only these organizations – in conjunction with governments - have the capacity and connections to resource a shared training and professional development strategy.



6. Provide workshops with face-to-face follow-up to facilitate knowledge transfer. ^{26, 27, 28, 29}

Institutionalizing the coordination role is a critical feature of maintaining and nurturing any network. When the after school Corporation (TASC) was established in 1998 to enhance the quality and availability of free after school programming for public school students in New York City and State, it was their intention to provide ongoing support including grants, training, and technical assistance to all the non-profit organizations who were partnered with a local public school. In fact the TASC model mandates that a full-time site coordinator to encourage participation in professional development opportunities and improve program quality.

Ongoing coordination offers an opportunity to better address the issues associated with high staff turnover and the many challenges of simply providing quality programs in a community setting. In this environment, knowledge transfer and the adoption of new methods and techniques (e.g. workshop-to-workplace) are unlikely without some form of ongoing support and encouragement. The coordinator role and responsibility dramatically improves the ability to provide training follow-up, ensuring new concepts are adapted and adopted in the field and is a great opportunity to provide ongoing advice on emerging issues, evaluation, share new promising practices and support quality program implementation. Recognizing that front line staff want and need options for program delivery rather than fixed curriculums, trainers and coordinators should focus on general principles, suggesting a range of workable activities and approaches rather than prescribing materials. The City of Calgary and the Northwest Territories after school initiatives have both recognized the importance of these roles and supported a full time coordinator's position.

7. Develop career paths and competitive compensation for after school personnel. ^{30, 31, 32, 33}

The development of career paths and competitive compensations has been shown, in many other fields, to significantly improve retention. Admittedly easier for larger organizations with multiple program offerings like the Boys and Girls Club or engaged municipalities, but small stand-alone organizations will continually be challenged to create career path strategies for their employees. While other opportunities do arise from working with partners and community members in after school programming and career paths do develop in natural and informal ways, there is a need to bring greater intentionality and focus on retention and career path development. This could include simple incentives like priority access to new jobs after a set term (e.g. 2 years) of working in an after school program, along with staff's agreeing to participate in a certain number of requisite training and/or certification opportunities.

Given existing capacity issues, ensuring the availability of good training opportunities for after school staff – particularly as a retention / career path strategy – should not be left to the sector on its own. A commitment from the partners in any after school strategy – like health, education, recreation, municipalities – to include staff without charge in their own training programs would significantly expand the range and benefits of learning opportunities available. Cooperating to share training programs among groups with a common focus (e.g. health child development, youth mental health) can also significantly reduce costs for all the participants. Here again, there is an important coordination role as the development of a functioning network of organizations, community groups and even businesses that are willing to include and engage after school staff in their training and development programs would require some time and energy. That said it is a reasonable and cost effective option to address this long running problem.

8. Target policy makers and key influencers with clear messages and solutions.^{34, 35, 36, 37, 38}

Studies indicate that there is still a considerable gap between evidence-based or best practices and their adoption in service provision and policy development, often the case in after school strategies. In particular, the many measurable benefits of after school physical activity programs, the work force issues that impact program quality and an understanding of the potential policy levers to address these, are not well known. Good government relations strategies require more than descriptions of the gaps and issues and need to offer clear evidence of benefit - including economic impacts – practical examples of exportable frameworks or models that could be adopted, and solutions that might address the weaknesses in current approaches.

Increasing the after school sectors' sophistication, in terms of influencing public policy, is an important element of addressing the many ongoing work force and labour development issues. While much has been done by individual organizations, including their national offices, a cooperative approach to developing – and a commitment to disseminating – some key messages about after school programming across the country would be helpful. Smaller, remote and stand alone organizations could use these materials when they speak with their own governmental or funding representatives.

It will be critical in any public policy strategy, to be completely honest and identify the clear link between retaining quality staff, and the ability to provide programs that can actually create measurable and meaningful outcomes for children and youth. Rather than lament the many work force challenges in after school programming the strategy should identify the sorts of policy levers and incentives that might work and where investments in centralized, shared or coordinated approaches could make a real difference.

9. Develop a national after school agenda that focuses on physical activity and nutrition including investments in infrastructure.^{39, 40}

Canada, along with six other countries (i.e., Australia, Brazil, Netherlands, New Zealand, Switzerland, Scotland) have established national plans and targets for activity levels for children, adolescents, and adults. While Canada's plan does acknowledge the importance of the after school period, most of these 'plans' lack for delineation of roles or leadership responsibilities for implementation and consequently, have little ability to measure or evaluate their impact. Without a strategy and an assigned responsibility to evaluate progress the likelihood of success seems small. This lack of clear focus however, provides a good opportunity to position the after school period - across the country - as public policy tool that is not only quite visible (e.g. politically appealing) but is a useful, cost effective and measurable strategy to improve physical activity levels and address other nutritional and health promotion issues among children and youth.

Not surprisingly, quite a number of Provincial and Territorial governments, along with some Federal departments (e.g. Public Health Agency of Canada PHAC), are now making new investments in after school programming. These initiatives and the momentum to consider public supports for broader after school strategies are significant for labour force development and present an important opportunity. It is absolutely critical to ensure we direct some percentage of any new resources to the issues of work force recruitment, retention, training and development, including support for coordination roles, partnerships and the creation of shared program resources and evaluation tools. Investing in system supports (or supply side investments) are the only reasonable way to expect quality and measurable outcomes across programs – a much more important consideration than increasing the absolute number of sites that are opened.



DEVELOPMENT OF A NATIONAL STRATEGY

Across North America there are a significant number of children, adolescents, and youth involved in out-of-school time program. The positive social, emotional, academic, and health benefits of these programs have been documented. Equally documented is the importance of a well developed, stable, and competent work force to ensure the quality of the after school programs.

Although appropriate management and supervision strategies contribute significantly to the recruitment, development, and retention of loyal employees, the nature of after school programs make these practices necessary but insufficient in addressing labour force issues. The issues these organizations face are structural and will therefore require a concerted effort of all stakeholders (e.g., government, associations, business, post-secondary institutions) to address them.

Given the review of the literature a number of promising practices have been identified. The Canadian political, governance, social, and legislative context is different from the United States, where a number of these practices are drawn. Further exploration and discussion with key informants across Canada is warranted to determine whether these promising practices are worthy of

consideration and pursuit in supporting Canadian after school programs and their labour force development issues.

The input of current employees, post-secondary instructors, and employers across Canada would also inform the development of an action plan.

The Alberta Ministry of Child and Youth Services had provided an example of the types of programs that have been helpful in sustaining and developing a workforce. Using its incentive programs as a potential model or case study in discussions with policy influences in the other provinces and territories may prove to be useful.

FOCUS ON ALBERTA

This work was completed to act as a foundation in the development of a national labour force development plan. Further work will be completed on the development of this plan however we must also examine the development of this plan at the provincial level.

Current practices within Alberta may provide a starting point for a labour force development plan. Relevant organizations and practices have been identified.

The following information was taken from the respective organizations' web sites and from information gleaned during the interviews.

Government of Alberta Children and Youth Services

In 2008 Alberta introduced new child care legislation, regulations, and standards for child care programs. This was followed by details of a child care investment plan to increase the availability of child care, assist child care operators in their efforts to recruit and retain staff and help low and middle-income parents, including parents of school-age children, with the cost of child care.

Each Child and Family Services Authority in the province together with the Ministry of Children and Youth Services was responsible for developing and implementing a regional plan, which focused on four goal areas: helping families, creating and sustaining spaces, recruiting and retaining child care professionals, and addressing regional challenges.

Once a licensed day care program has applied to the accreditation agency to become accredited, in order to receive accreditation funding, the program must also apply to the Alberta Child Care Accreditation Funding Program. The types of accreditation funding are:

1. **Quality Funding:** Intended to improve the quality of programming to help meet and maintain the accreditation standards of excellence. The Quality Funding Grant is available to improve quality programming and resources for staff and children over and above provincial regulatory requirements. Pre-accredited programs can receive \$4,000 annually and accredited programs can receive \$7,500 annually.

2. **Staff Support Funding:** This funding provides a wage top-up for paid, certified day care staff, over and above wages paid by the employer. The following summarizes the accreditation funding for staffing support:

Types of Funding	Pre-Accredited Programs	Accredited Programs
Quality Funding Grant	\$2,000/yr	\$3,750/yr
Staff Support Funding ¹		
• Child Development Assistant	\$1.44/hr	\$2.14/hr
• Child Development Worker	\$2.70/hr	\$4.05/hr
• Child Development Supervisor	\$4.42/hr	\$6.62/hr
Benefit Contribution Grant	16% of Staff Support Funding 16% of Staff Attraction Incentive Allowance	
Professional Development Grant ²	Up to \$600/yr/staff	
Child Care Staff Attraction Incentive Allowance ³	New Staff \$2,500 Returning Staff up to \$5,000	

¹ Based on direct child care hours claimed up to 100 hours per month, inclusive of programming/ accreditation planning. For the months of July and August, the maximum is 181 direct child care hours per month.

² Available for staff certified as Child Development Assistants and Child Development Workers.

³ Available for staff certified as Child Development Workers and Child Development Supervisors.

3. **Benefit Contribution Grant:** The Benefit Contribution Grant is paid to eligible licensed day care programs to offset the cost of the mandatory employer payroll contributions such as Canada Pension Plan, Employment Insurance and Workers' Compensation Board (WCB) premiums, general holiday pay (statutory holidays) and vacation pay associated with Staff Support Funding and the Staff Attraction Incentive Allowance. This funding is calculated and paid monthly at the rate of 16 percent of the total Staff Support Funding and the Staff Attraction Incentive Allowance issued on that month's payment.

4. **Professional Development Grant:** This funding is to assist with the education costs for certified staff to obtain higher levels of certification, and with the costs of attending approved conferences or workshops. Use of the full amount of the Professional Development Grant is limited to post-secondary tuition and required course textbooks to get to the next level of child care certification. The amount varies depending on work hours but can be up to \$1,000 per fiscal year.

5. **Staff Attraction Incentive Allowance:** This funding assists child care programs in addressing difficulties to attract higher levels of certified staff, effective April 1, 2009 the Staff Attraction Incentive Allowance is offered under the Alberta Child Care Accreditation Funding Program to staff certified as child development workers and supervisors. The Allowance offers funding up to \$5,000 (\$2,500/year over two years) to help recruit trained staff who have at least six months of child care experience and have not worked in the child care field for at least six months. Eligible staff must be certified as a child development worker or child development supervisor and be working in a licensed day care program, licensed out-of-school care program or a contracted family day home agency.

The Staff Attraction Incentive Allowance is also available to people who are new to the child care profession and do not have the six months of previous child care experience. These individuals are eligible to receive \$2,500 after working one year in a licensed day care program, licensed out-of-school care program or a contracted family day home agency. Eligible staff must be certified as a child development worker or child development supervisor.

6. **Child Care Bursary Program:** Child Development Supervisors who wish to attend approved child care conferences or workshops can apply for up to \$500 through the Child Care Bursary Program in accordance to the Bursary Program's eligibility requirements.

The Ministry also supports an annual conference which features speakers and a recognition event and award for excellence in child care.

Accreditation of Early Learning and Care Services

The Accreditation of Early Learning and Care Services (AELCS) is a not-for-profit organization, funded and contracted by Alberta Children and Youth Services to deliver accreditation services to child care programs and out-of-school care programs that have engaged in an intensive self-study of their practices. Their role is to assess child care programs and out-of-school care programs against quality standards of care. They accredit licensed child care centres, out-of-school care programs, and contracted family child care agencies that meet either the Alberta Child Care Accreditation Program (ACCAP) Quality Standards or the Alberta Out-of-School Care Program (AOSCAP) Quality Standards.

Appendix I provides a copy of the AOSCAP Quality Standards with indicators for out-of-school programs. Standard 3 focuses on the activities are offered. For instance, Standard 3.1 reads "A range of activities, including recreational activities, are offered to children in a safe, supportive environment", with one indicator being "recreational activities are offered to promote the physical health and well being of children". Their website also includes self-study guides and other documents helpful to out of school care programs.

The City of Calgary –After school

Calgary After school (CAS) is a collaborative effort between The City of Calgary (i.e., FCSS, Community and Neighbourhood Services, and Recreation) and its community partners. The purpose of the initiative is to address the need in the community to provide quality, safe and affordable after school programming opportunities for youth ages 6-16 during the "critical hours." The term critical hours refers to 3 to 6 p.m., the time when children are not in school and less likely to be supervised by parents who are working. This three hour period is critical for children and youth, because of their potential for making poor decisions that can result in accident, injury or crime. Calgary has a higher than the national average number of two parent working families with children between the ages of 6-16. After school Activities included in the Calgary After school program, such as sports, drama, music, the arts, and recreation help children and youth develop good social skills, increase self confidence, and help to motivate them to succeed in school.

The City has also created an After school Coordinator position whose responsibility it is to work with the Recreation Department to support six after school programs, to provide training and follow-up, to nurture and support partnerships, and to deal with issues as they emerge. These programs make up approximately 49 per cent of all the participants in the Calgary After school Program.

There are also four Community Development Workers involved in Calgary After school. These workers are responsible for working with internal business units (including Recreation) and external agencies to further the goals and aims of the Calgary After school initiative. These staff meet with all providers within a specific geographic area 1-2 times a year, to discuss issues and concerns related to the implementation of after school programs – one of those being staffing and training. It is from these meetings that collaborations and opportunities present themselves for collective training and leveraging. The needs and expertise from the organizations involved in CAS are assessed and plans and training are implemented that benefits all involved CAS. Wherever possible, these trainings are paid for by The City of Calgary – Calgary After school and there is no cost to the participant in the training. The City has posted a calendar of training workshops for partnering agencies offering after school services.

Mount Royal University

Mount Royal Child and Youth Studies offers a Bachelor in Applied Child Studies, a Child and Youth Care Counsellor Diploma, and an Early Learning and Child Care Diploma. The Early Learning Child Care diploma focuses on training professionals to work with children aged 0-6 years. The Child and Youth Care Counsellor Diploma prepares professionals to be youth justice workers, family support counsellors, and child and youth care counsellors. Interviewees noted that these programs do not prepare students to provide recreational and physical education programs to adolescents and youth.



Bow Valley College

Bow Valley College in Calgary, Alberta developed a one-year out of school care certificate, specifically designed to enhance skills and knowledge for professionals working with 5 to 14 year old children. The program focuses on age-appropriate activities as well as related operational and health and safety standards. The program developer/instructor indicated that this course has historically not been well ascribed to because there is no monetary incentive for professionals to complete it.

PRIORITY ACTIONS FOR ALBERTA

There are a number of strategies and actions that will contribute to building and sustaining a higher quality work force for after school recreation programs and the recommendations below are meant to inform this development over the next 3-5 years. Moving forward with these strategies will require a good deal of cooperative leadership from (larger) organizations working in the sector, aligned membership associations, and those who are developing and revising public policy to better support After school recreational programming.

I. DEVELOP PROVINCIAL NETWORK

A critical first step to support work force developing is the creation (or expansion) of Provincial / Territorial “Networks” or Associations. These groups would have a number of important responsibilities but would focus on the creation of opportunities to build capacities and share resources with all After school service providers – large and small, public and charitable. Given their mandates, Provincial Parks and Recreation Associations may be well positioned to facilitate the development of these networks and could help steward their initial development.

I.1 Approach key providers (e.g., Boys and Girls Club, YMCA) with a proposal to develop a Provincial/ Territorial after school recreation providers’ Network and/or Association. The network’s scope, structure, and the responsibilities of participating organizations should be dictated by the member organizations although a focus on work force development should be central to their mandate.

I.2 Work collaboratively with provincial public information systems (e.g., Inform Alberta) to create an comprehensive and accessible list of after school recreation programs both locally and across the Province / Territory. This can be used to track the demand for service (location and age of children) relative to the supply and would support site development decisions.

I.3 Gather basic demographic information (e.g., number of employees, programs offered, number of children, children’s ages) on these programs to inform future briefs and communiqués.

I.4 Create a common website or portal designed specifically to support the development and improvement of After school recreation program. This could initially be hosted and built out from the site of a large aligned organization or association (e.g. Provincial / Territorial Recreation and Parks Association’s; Boys and Girls Clubs; YMCA’s, etc.) but should be hosted by a community” based organization. Initially focused on information sharing and the provision of training, development and potentially certification, the Network would immediately link providers to all the resources available in other jurisdictions with a shared interest in After school programs that include physical education, recreation, and nutrition information.

I.5 Seek funding for a Coordinator or the development of a short term “Secretariat” to lead the first 3-5 years of Network development. This individual or small staff group would facilitate the actual implementation of the Network/ Association and build out the capacities that are detailed throughout this report (e.g. government briefs, certification and necessary credentials, new partnerships, common training curriculum, web based and remote support, etc.).

Although securing resources can be a challenge, it is important to recognize that the work – focussed as it is on building long term and shared capacities – aligns well with the priorities of many funders.

2. INFORM

Information sharing will play a vital role in addressing work force pressures in After school recreation programs. The thrust of these recommendations is on expanding and increasing access to information that will support informed decision making on the part of key policy influencers, program developers and employers, but would also support employees, youth entering the workforce, and individuals considering employment in After school programs.

2.1 Provide key influencers and decision makers with sufficient information (e.g., economic impacts, case studies, and policy positions) regarding the benefits of quality After school recreation programs; the clear need for a work force development strategy; and some of the many tools and mechanisms – many of which are outlined here – that could address the current challenges.

2.2 While there are obvious reasons for recreation departments and Health Promotion Ministries to be interested in After school development, briefs should be prepared for each of the other potential partners - notably health and education – that incorporate the specific language and policy goals of their Ministry and demonstrates the alignment with the outcomes of high quality After school programs. All briefs must outline the need for “supply side” investments in work force development, without which program quality cannot be assured.

2.3 Contact research centres that may be interested in demonstration projects, program evaluation and longer term research projects that focus on the impact of quality After school recreation programs on healthy child and youth development. This information can be used to further inform public policy development as After school programs are expanded.

2.4 Develop a clear policy position outlining how quality after school recreation programs align with the Federal Government’s Public Health Agency’s commitment to reducing childhood obesity outlining the need for investments in workforce infrastructure.

3. ATTRACT

Improving opportunities to attract employees to this field will require a concerted effort that begins with students, young people and the post-secondary institutions they attend. Working with a number of stakeholders, this strategy would include the development of promotional materials and the creation of new learning and training opportunities aimed at high school students and a new and broader range of ‘aligned’ faculties within post-secondary institutions.

3.1 Develop personal case stories, videos and training slides about the profession of after school recreation, including the benefits for professional staff and the children and youth they serve. These should be readily available through the common web site / portal to high school guidance and teaching staff and post-secondary instructors whose course content aligns with After school programming.

3.2 Develop some standard information that local After school programs can use to approach post-secondary institutions about mutually beneficial practicum placement in an After school program. These should be tailored to “fit” the interests of more traditional recruitment sources (e.g., Child and Youth Studies and Recreation/ Physical Education/Kinesiology) and other faculties that are well suited to supporting and delivering quality After school programs (e.g., Education, Community Health Sciences, and Disability and Rehabilitation Services).

3.3 Target recruitment efforts on other community based organizations whose staff are frequently employed on a part- time or casual basis with mutually beneficial job sharing opportunities. These potential employees would include but are not limited to: school staff and volunteers, educational assistants, disability, rehabilitation and youth workers, youth workers, public health, health promotion, community development and mental health employees, sports and physical fitness instructors.

3.4 Provide a bundle of resources and a network of support to community development initiatives to improve the likelihood that they will be able to implement high quality After school recreation programs at the local level. These are natural networks to help facilitate the recruitment of potential employees and volunteers and with support from the local business community, may be well positioned to provide access to facilities, program equipment and help with overhead costs.

3.5 Use the Provincial or Territorial Association or Network to share best practices around recruitment, partnerships with post-secondary faculties and job sharing successes.



4. DEVELOP A HIGH PERFORMANCE WORKFORCE

While the numbers are difficult to assess there are significant numbers of employees currently providing After school recreation and other forms of programming during the after school period. There is a need to expand the availability of common, accessible, shared and cost-effective strategies to support these employees and improve the quality of programming they are able to provide. Once developed, Provincial / Territorial Networks should focus on:

- 4.1** Assessing the actual human resource and developmental needs of existing employees and develop strategies to deliver cost-effective collective training and certification opportunities. Larger After school providers should be asked to provide leadership in this area.
- 4.2** Develop web-based training programs (e.g., webinars) that can be accessed by after school recreation programs free-of-charge. Augment these sessions with regular updates (e.g. “tips of the day” Healthy U website) and short case examples or features outlining progressive practices that other programs are employing. The website should also articulate the general principles and suggested activities and approaches that would underpin a quality after school recreation program (e.g. recommended minutes of ‘vigorous’ activity; defined how).
- 4.3** Develop partnerships with post-secondary institutions, health organizations, government departments, other non-profits, and the business community to facilitate inexpensive quality training for After school employees. This might include preferred access to relevant training, providing extra spaces or allowing free of charge participation for these staff and is a relatively cost effective way for a range of organizations to support work force development and quality After school programming.
- 4.4** Hire a support coordinator for rural communities. This person could provide follow-up on the application of new concepts into the workplace and provide advice on an on-going basis on issues, evaluation, and program implementation.
- 4.5** Support the development of a post-secondary out-of-school care certificate. Collaborate with these institutions to ensure that physical education, nutrition, and recreation best practices in after school recreation programs are incorporated into the course work.

5. RETAIN

There is a need to focus on retention as it is so critical to establishing rapport and working effectively with children and youth. These recommendations suggest ways to enhance the attractiveness of working in After school recreation programs so that employees, despite some of the issues associated with the work, remain engaged in the industry.

- 5.1** Seek funding to implement a recruitment and retention model similar to that implemented by the Alberta Ministry of Child and Youth Services for the child care sector. This would involve the development of career paths, qualifications, certification of programs, and competitive compensation for after school recreation personnel who complete training requirements, and annual recognition awards and/or events (e.g., Healthy School Communities Award).
- 5.2** Survey current students and employees to obtain their opinion on strategies that strengthen recruitment and retention processes.
- 5.3** Encourage after school service providers to use the Human Resource Council for Voluntary and Non-profit Sector¹ HR Standards Checklist and Toolkit.

CONCLUSION

Although after school services are being developed across Canada, the question remains whether there will be an adequate work force to provide the quality programs. This is particularly true for recreational and physical education development. A number of strategies and actions that will contribute to the building and sustaining a higher quality work force for after school recreation programs have been identified. However in order to move forward with these strategies cooperative leadership from organizations working in the sector, aligned membership associations, and those who are developing and revising public policy to better support after school recreational programming is necessary at both the provincial and national levels.



¹ <http://www.hrvs-rhsbc.ca/about/overview.cfm>

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