

Background

In April 2004, Premier Gordon Campbell made this announcement at the BC School Trustees Association (BCSTA) Annual General Meeting,

“We need to make better use of our school spaces so they benefit BC communities. The School Community Connections Program will help school boards and local governments revitalize schools as centres for community learning and activity.”

Following this speech, the School Community Connections Program was launched by the BCSTA, in conjunction with the union of BC Municipalities, (UBCM).

Project Purpose and Timelines

The Vancouver Board of Education invited the Park Board to be a joint partner in a School Community Connections initiative, and a joint application made for \$ 175,000, which was available to each district in the province. The project vision was to open several secondary school gymnasiums to physical activity programming for broader community use. Funding for the research phase was granted in early 2007 (\$ 5,000) with a pilot phase slated for one fall-winter season from September 2007 to March 2008 (\$ 40,000).

The City of Vancouver labour dispute between July 23rd and October 18th, 2007 delayed startup of the pilot phase, which was rescheduled for January 12th to April 26th of 2008. This Phase II Pilot Project report was requested by the funder following the Phase II Pilot, before the final phase is approved later this year. Discussions are currently underway with the funder to obtain the balance of the project funding, and staff do not anticipate any difficulties in obtaining final phase approval.

Project Criteria

Projects must have three distinct stages: planning, development and completion.

Project must be a partnership between school boards and local government.

Funding is intended to provide up to 25% of implementation costs, with the balance to be provided by local government, the school board or other stakeholders.

The pilot established that the partnership would be between staff of the two Boards, exclusively, and that the Parent Advisory Committee and the Community Centre Association would not be directly involved in the program's implementation unless it proved necessary.

Project Governance

A Steering Committee of senior staff of the School and Park Boards was established to guide the early phases of the project. Staffing changes will continue to occur over time, but the positions identified as key to supporting the project are:

School Board: Associate Superintendent - North Area
Coordinator, Community Schools Teams

Park Board: Recreation Manager, Vancouver East Parks and Recreation District
Coordinator, Child & Youth Recreation Services

Goals in Vancouver

1. To make 3 or more secondary school gymnasias available on Saturdays for physical activity programming for children, youth, adults and families, over a 3 to 5 year period.
2. To develop new partnerships beyond those previously established thru other initiatives. (eg: MoreSport, the Britannia model agreement, etc.)
3. To implement affordable user fees and charges to help meet the program's staffing and equipment costs.
4. To review the successes and challenges associated with sustainability of such a partnership program over the longer term.

Evaluation Criteria

Staff identified four criteria at the outset of the pilot phase:

- Financial: test capacity for revenues to exceed operating costs of the service delivery
- Sustainability: does this partnership have merit to continue
- Degree to which project is able to meet end user's needs (ie: publics)
- Degree to which project partners' needs and concerns are met

Other criteria may be added over time.

Pilot Phase Program and Venues

2 partner groups were selected for the launch of the pilot phase in 2008: Windermere Secondary/Renfrew Park Centre, and King George Secondary/West End Centre. Windermere operated for 15 weeks over the 16 weeks of the pilot phase, while the West End operated for 11 weeks, ending as of March 29th.

Windermere Secondary features a large gym of over 11,600 square feet, in addition to a mezzanine viewing and table tennis activity area upstairs. Windermere has dividers which create 3 distinct gyms for simultaneous programming, which is not replicated in any community centre in the city. Windermere is 8 blocks from the Renfrew Park Community Centre. The Windermere Family of Schools project built a solid partnership with community centre and school staff, which served as a model for the development of the Community Schools Teams citywide.

King George Secondary, which features a gym of 7,000 square feet, is directly adjacent to the West End Community Centre. The Centre does not feature a gymnasium in its complex. The West End ice rink is converted to dry floor sport use each summer, but during the winter the secondary school gym must be rented by the West End Community Centre Association for sport programming. Following the development of the King George Community Schools Team, Park Board and school staff have developed a close working relationship in projects, programs and services for children and youth.

Pilot Phase Programs

Windermere: Programs included indoor tennis for all ages, children's soccer, child/youth basketball, youth volleyball, adult basketball, the sport of sitting volleyball (new), badminton court rentals, and drop-in table tennis. Both program registration and drop-in fee options were offered, and program instruction was offered for children's programs.

West End: Programs included children’s all-sports, badminton, basketball, cosom hockey, indoor soccer and volleyball for adults, and badminton for older adults. Both program registration and drop-in fee options were offered; staff were engaged as supervisors, no instructional sessions were offered in this phase.

Results

A variety of adults and youth participated directly or as spectators over the season.

Windermere programs served 1,303 clients over 14 sessions, including 349 registered patrons, 522 drop-ins and 432 spectators. (Average: 93 / week)

King George served a total of 115 drop-in clients over 11 sessions. (Average: 10 /week)

Considering that this was a new concept for Windermere and that King George had a history of weekend sport programs years ago and limited turnout in this phase, was surprising. Staff would expect that physical activity programs introduced in the Fall season with added community consultation should yield better results. Given the active demographics of the residents and the lack of a gym sport facility in the community center next door, the West End is a natural location for this type of a partnership.

Phase II Financial Summary

Centre	Staffing	Contracts	Promotion	Supplie s	Custodial Costs	Rental Costs	Totals
Gross Expenses							
King George	1,906.55	0	107.00	0	6,600.00	9,163.00	17,776.55
Windermere	4,627.60	1,471.00	464.25	162.42	8,400.00	11,662.00	26,787.27
Total Costs	6,534.1 5	1,471.00	571.25	162.42	15,000.00	20,825.00	44,563.82
Gross Revenues							
		Grant	Program Fees				
King George		15,000.00	319.15				15,319.15
Windermere		15,000.00	1,957.33				16,957.33
Total Revenues		30,000.00	2,276.48				32,276.48
Net Expenses over Revenues							12,287.34

Gym rental charges for non-profit groups are \$ 450 for a weekend 7-hour period, which climbs to \$ 119 per hour for a corporate group, or \$823 for the full day.

Custodial staff support rates are based on the collective agreement between the VSB and its Engineering staff, charged to groups at \$ 75.00 per hour. Gym rental recovery is used to help the School Board offset the costs of its many educational services, much like community centers are rented after regular operating hours.

Challenges

Major obstacles that continue to burden the project are high labour costs, particularly in the area of custodial services. Contrasting results in participation from one site to another may indicate a lack of sufficient marketing of the programs at West End which possibly resulted in a lower than expected participation rate. Infrastructure differences have created challenges

in dealing with 3 dissimilar organizations (School Board, Park Board, and Community Centre Associations) in terms of hiring, management, contractual and accounting procedures. Over time it may be possible to attract sufficient clientele to generate fees to meet the program delivery costs (eg: program staff, instructors, supplies and promotions), particularly for settings where the school gym is co-located to the community center. (eg: West End) Where schools and community centers are separated by several blocks, this could prove more of a challenge and will be answered following a full fall-winter season trial. Early results suggest that the gym rental and custodial costs will have to be reduced in order for this partnership to be funded and sustainable in the longer term.

Recommendations and Next Steps

Three specific factors influence the next steps:

- initiation of this project soon after the civic job action, meant that profiling this new initiative was harder to accomplish than it could have been under 'normal' operations in January 2008;
 - the low turn out at one of the sites, and
 - the more significant operating costs associated with a school located a number of blocks away, compared with where a center and school are located adjacent to each other.
- The following recommendations must be taken in context.

Therefore, we recommend the following:

- 1) that the Phase II implementation continue into 2008/2009 school year;
- 2) that the current sites continue in 2008/09 (West End-King George; and Renfrew-Windermere);
- 3) that the expansion of one additional site be considered for 2008/09; that, Phase III expansion begin planning and initial implementation stages in 2008/9 for full implementation of five sites in September 2009; and;
- 4) that, with an increase in the number of participating school/center partnership sites, the Park Board shall, commensurate with modest expansion, develop a strategy to widen and deepen the promotion of this project "city-wide", in order to gain exposure to the site specific programs and increase participation rates, particularly in the West End.

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