



Family Gym Nights

Target Risk Factor:

Physical Activity

Target Population:

Preschool (6 yrs & under)

Young adults (18-34 yrs)

Adults (35-49 yrs)

Project Lead(s):

The Community Partner lead for this project was the Altona & Area Family Resource Centre.

The project was carried out by facilitators contracted to lead the evening sessions.

Community:

Altona

RHA:

Central

Project Partners:

Altona Chronic Disease Prevention Initiative Committee

Altona & Area Family Resource Centre

Altona Recreation Office (Town of Altona)

Border Land School Division

Community schools in Gretna, Rosenfeld as well as Elmwood School in Altona

Project Details:

Multiple event or ongoing project

Description:

Family Gym Nights came about through discussion at the Altona CDPI Committee table regarding gaps for physical activity for particular groups in our communities. We also discussed the fact that the sooner children become active, the better chance they will stay active.

Family Gym Nights are an opportunity for preschool children ages 3-5 and their parents to join in an hour of fun physical activity in a local gym at no cost. The sessions are led by trained facilitators. The goal is to provide an outlet for physical activity for preschoolers in the winter as

well as to help parents become more aware of the activities that are important to the healthy development of an active child and the practical things they can do to provide those outlets.

Time:

Initially, the project started with 6 sessions in Altona, using funds from CDPI to pay for a facilitator. The shared services arrangement between the community and the school division made it feasible to find excellent space along with equipment at no cost.

The first series was very well received by the parents who participated. They indicated in their feedback that this was a great opportunity for them and their children, and would really appreciate more sessions.

Parents had a very positive response. The CDPI committee, in reviewing the feedback information decided to allocate funding to more sessions in Altona and to start with sessions in Gretna and Rosenfeld, two smaller communities close to Altona. This decision was made to address the problem of families not being able to access programming because of transportation issues.

As a result, over the 5 years of the Altona CDPI project, we have "grown" this program to the point where it now runs with 12 sessions each in Altona, Gretna, and Rosenfeld with excellent

Objectives:

The focus of the Family Gym Nights was to address the need for physical activity for young children. Our belief is that we need to instil the values of physical activity very early and that parents need support and low cost opportunities to meet this need. With this being a parent/child program and not a drop off program, it has also provided the opportunity to give parents information about the amount of physical activity their preschoolers need daily, what activities are appropriate for them, and what resources are available in the communities. The facilitators have also modeled many ideas for parents to take away and use at home.

Planning Supports:

The Altona CDPI Committee completed a scan of the communities to identify what resources were available for which age groups. We also held a Community Forum on Health in 2007. It was out of this information that we decided that resources for preschoolers were few and those that were there were expensive. We also saw the need to include parents in the program that was developed.

Results:

We have seen the communities respond to this program. 2009-2010, participation was as follows:

- Altona: 164 parents and 196 children
- Gretna: 100 parents and 126 children
- Rosenfeld: 41 parents and 97 children

Parents said that the program was well run and that their children really enjoyed coming. The children themselves often arrived with requests for particular favourite activities.

What worked:

The partnerships worked. Because of the presence of both the School Division and Recreation at the Altona CDPI table, and because of the shared services arrangement between the Border

Land School Division and the Town of Altona Recreation Office, the program was given free access to school gymnasiums in the three communities. As a result, the program was relatively low cost, requiring only the facilitator contract funds. The Altona & Area Family Resource Centre took on the coordination of the programs in each community and the task of finding the facilitators and collecting the data.

The Altona program had good support immediately and these parents gave us feedback to adapt the program better to their needs.

What didn't work and any changes made:

Initially, we had difficulty with attendance in Gretna. We actually put out a mailer to every box in Gretna in the first year to raise awareness about the program.

However, word of mouth has been our best advocate, and the program is now well attended and well received in Gretna.

In Rosenfeld, we realized we had to make changes. It appeared that there weren't enough preschoolers available to make the program work and the parents did not want to come out in the evenings. Again, we did not give up after some initial disappointments. We changed the program to an after school activity program and included a wider age of children. Obviously, the organization looks a little different. However, this seems to have met the community needs more effectively.

Unexpected Outcomes:

The facilitators have become very dedicated to making the programming exciting and age appropriate and have accessed training opportunities such as "Shake Rattle & Roll, Wiggle Giggle and Munch and one was able to attend the In Motion - Active Start, a workshop focusing on the importance of physical activity in the first 6 years of life.

Parents are valuing the program highly and requesting extension of the current program. One parents comment: "What? The program is over for the summer? This is my child's and my special time together!"

Other notes:

We are hopeful that this program will be "adopted" by Recreation and/or the Family Resource Centre after CDPI funds are no longer available.

Resources

Volunteers:

With parents attending with their children, we generally do not have a need for volunteers. However, in the past years, we did have volunteers assisting.

We are also hopeful in the future with the CDPI Peer Leadership project training high school students, that, if we needed volunteers, this group could assist us.

Facilities:

We have used the school gymnasiums and appropriate equipment in Gretna, Altona, and Rosenfeld.

The Altona & Area Family Resource Centre has provided coordination, advertising, data collection, and been the banker. It has also provided equipment from its resources for some other programs.

Equipment:

This has been provided without cost by the schools and augmented by the Family Resource Centre with its equipment.

Total Costs:

Costs covered by CDPI Grant: \$2160 for 36 sessions (12 in each community)
The balance provided by in-kind or partner contributions.

Contact Information:

Cheryl Pearson RN BSCN MCEd
Healthy Living Program Facilitator
Regional Health Authority - Central Manitoba Inc.
cpearson@rha-central.mb.ca