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Stay-FIT Participant Report

PLANNING A PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND ACTIVE LIFESTYLE PROGRAM FOR YOUTH WITH CEREBRAL PALSY

Thanks to all the youth with Cerebral Palsy (CP) and parents across Ontario who participated in this study! We now have a better understanding of what helps and hinders youth with cerebral palsy to be physically active.

Thank you for your participation in the Stay-FIT Study!

Twelve youth with CP and 15 parents of youth with CP participated in focus groups and interviews across Ontario. Whether you live in a small town or a city, Stay-FIT researchers wanted to hear about what makes it easy or hard for you to be active. In this report, we will share with you the messages we

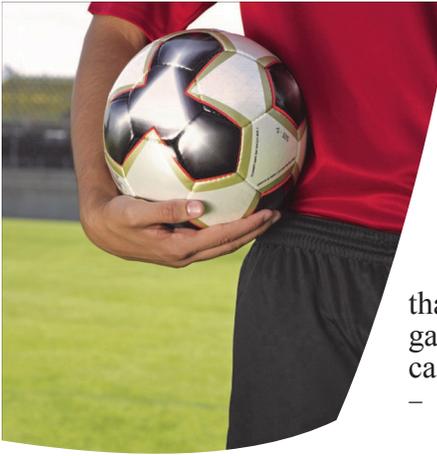
heard from participants and their solutions for how community agencies can make it easier for youth of all abilities to be active.

The message we heard most often from participants is easy to understand — that above all, kids just want to have fun!



Key Messages

- ⇒ Things in and around youth—like attitude and availability of transportation—can make it easier or harder for youth to be active
- ⇒ For some youth, problems related to their bodies—such as being tired or feeling pain—can discourage them from being active
- ⇒ Youth want to be active for many different reasons—to have fun, to hang out with friends, to be independent—but are not as motivated to be active for the health benefits alone
- ⇒ Individuals want to participate in physical activity in their own preferred ways—in a group or alone, in competition or at their own pace...



Why Be Active?

What motivates youth to become and stay physically active?

Youth told us that being physically active was important to them. They talked about health benefits and skill development as reasons why youth *should* be active. But when it came down to why they *wanted* to be active, youth agreed that activities had to be fun and enjoyable for them or they wouldn't continue. Other reasons

that youth participants gave for being physically active included:

- To spend time with friends or family members
- To gain physical strength and endurance in a way that was "not like therapy"
- To be independent and have freedom
- To meet goals and feel a sense of accomplishment

We heard some great reasons for being active. We also heard that not everyone was able to participate in their fa-

avourite activities or be as active as they would have liked. Some things that got in their way included:

- Transportation
- Lack of support from coaches, instructors, program leaders, etc.
- Not knowing what resources are available
- Cost of programs or equipment
- Ability to "keep up" with friends
- Inaccessible facilities or programs
- Difficulty being spontaneous

NEXT STEPS:

Turning Research into Action



Based on our discussions with youth with CP and their parents, therapists at children's treatment centres (CTCs) in Ontario, and community agencies, the Stay-FIT team plans to develop a program to promote physical activity in youth with CP. Future plans include partnering with community agencies to create sustainable changes and increasing awareness of the needs and preferences of youth with CP among coaches and instructors.

Ideas for Change

Youth and parent participants gave us some new and unique ideas for how community agencies can help youth with CP stay active

- Promote family involvement by creating opportunities for families to be active together
- Create sports teams that are inclusive and provide meaningful participation for athletes of different abilities
- Provide opportunities to try out new sports, activities, and the latest trends, such as Wii, yoga, and making music
- Eliminate transportation barriers. For example, by having a personal trainer come to your home, by developing more inclusive sports programs at school, or by improving local access to physical activity programs

Tips for parents and youth

- ⇒ Be proactive in seeking out information about physical activity opportunities. Speak with your therapist at your treatment centre, contact community centre, and ask other families what activities they participate in.
- ⇒ Plan activities that the whole family can enjoy together, like drop-in time at the local pool or going for a walk in the park.
- ⇒ Encourage youth to participate in activities that they enjoy. Help youth find ways to adapt equipment, sport techniques, or guidelines to suit their needs and abilities.
- ⇒ Remember that everyone has their own preferences for activity — some thrive on competition or group activities, while others prefer to be active on their own.

