

DATE: April 30, 2010

REPORT TITLE: **AFFORDABLE ACCESS TO RECREATION IN PEEL**

FROM: Janet Menard, Commissioner of Human Services  
 Janette Smith, Commissioner of Health Services

## RECOMMENDATION

**That the Affordable Access to Recreation for Ontarians Policy Framework, as prepared by the Ontario Task Group on Access to Recreation for Low-Income Families, supported by Parks and Recreation Ontario and the Ontario Ministry of Health Promotion be endorsed.**

### REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- In 2009, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario endorsed the Policy Framework for Affordable Access to Recreation for Ontarians.
- The benefits of recreation are many and have been well documented and are substantiated in the Region of Peel's Families First initiative.
- Affordable access to recreation has been identified by the Peel Poverty Reduction Strategy Committee and the Province of Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy, *Breaking the Cycle*, as an important component of poverty reduction and social inclusion, particularly for racialized communities, children with special needs and newcomer families.
- Recently, the City of Mississauga launched ActiveAssist, an affordable access to recreation program that provides low-income families with access to recreation and the City of Brampton is currently revising its affordable access program.

## DISCUSSION

### 1. Background

In 2006, Parks and Recreation Ontario established the Ontario Task Group on Access to Recreation for Low-Income Families in order to work collaboratively to influence policy development in Ontario to increase access to recreation for low-income families.

The Framework, which was developed in collaboration with the Ontario Ministry of Health Promotion, City of Mississauga and Region of Peel among others, sets out a vision, objectives and strategic direction to guide decision makers in creating and promoting local access policies. Currently, many municipalities have either formal access policies in place or comparable programs that provide opportunities for low income families and their children to participate in recreational and community activities. However, the system lacks coordination and sustainable investments from provincial and federal governments.

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**AFFORDABLE ACCESS TO RECREATION IN PEEL****2. Why Recreation is Important**

The benefits of recreation and its importance for low-income individuals and families are well documented and include the following:

- health benefits – lowers incidence of illness and obesity
- psycho-social benefits – fostering life skills for success at school, home, reducing emotional problems, improving self-esteem, creating positive peer and family relationships
- breaking the cycle of poverty – developing self-esteem that helps to build confidence and resilience and protect against the risks of low success in school and the labour market
- wise financial investment – benefits achieved result in savings in health, social service and justice costs and greater contribution to the tax system through gainful employment

The 2008 report, the review of the Roots of Youth Violence authored by The Honourable Roy McMurtry and Dr. Alvin Curling, reinforced the importance of sports and arts in supporting learning, development and creativity of youth and recommended that “the Province work with municipalities, school boards and community agencies to remove barriers that include income level, transportation and a lack of usable space. The Province should move to immediately embed accessible sports and arts programs in the priority neighbourhoods”.

**3. Key Components of the Affordable Access to Recreation for Low-Income Families Framework**

Community recreation began as a grassroots movement to increase access for low-income families. Over time it has become inaccessible to many of the people it was intended to service. The Affordable Access to Recreation for Ontarians Policy Framework is intended to reverse this trend and is for use by the Ontario and Federal governments, municipalities (council and senior management), allied organizations, funders, the private and education sectors, community organizations and low-income Ontarians. It includes:

**a) Policy Objectives****i. Access Policies**

Municipal and community delivery organizations establish Affordable Access Policies to ensure individuals that face income barriers have equitable opportunities to participate.

**ii. Core Set of Free Universal Programs**

Communities are encouraged to identify a core set of recreation programs that will be universally available to children, youth, individuals and families and offer these programs without a user fee.

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**AFFORDABLE ACCESS TO RECREATION IN PEEL****b) Policy Strategies**

- i. Community Access to Space: maximize affordable access to community space that can be used for formal and informal recreation activities.
- ii. Partnership and Collaboration: establish community-based partnerships that will determine how to make affordable access to recreation a reality in communities.
- iii. Targeted Community Outreach and Engagement: build awareness among marginalized populations (i.e. youth, seniors, persons with disabilities, immigrant, low-income families and Aboriginal) of the benefits of recreation, affordable programs, and provide opportunities for community engagement in program design and delivery.

The Task Force is now in the process of working with communities throughout Ontario to develop action plans for the creation of affordable access programs.

**4. Recreation Initiatives for Low-Income Families in Peel**

Accessible and affordable recreation is an important tool in creating welcoming, socially inclusive communities for all residents.

**a) Poverty Reduction Strategy**

The provincial poverty reduction strategy, *Breaking the Cycle*, notes the importance of recreation in reducing poverty and as a result committed \$10 million annually in an After School Program that will support children in high needs neighbourhoods with new after-school programming and new initiatives focused on physical activity and wellness.

**b) City of Mississauga - ActiveAssist**

ActiveAssist is a fee assistance program designed to help low-income families and individuals in Mississauga participate in Recreation and Parks programs. This assistance is given in the form of a credit to a Recreation and Parks account. Each family member receives a credit of \$275 which is valid for one year.

**c) City of Brampton – Creating Available Recreation for Everyone (CARE)**

The City of Brampton is in the process of revising its affordable access program and is expected to launch its program in the near future.

**d) Town of Caledon**

Caledon staff has participated in discussions around the value of access to recreation and in observing the affordable access program development in Mississauga and Brampton.

**e) Families First**

Families First is an intensive case management program designed to assist sole support families in improving their quality of life through a focused and coordinated service model. The program is an integrated service model which includes social assistance, services for children, health and recreation through the partnership between Ontario Works in Peel, Peel Health and Children's Services. Sole support families in receipt of

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social assistance (Ontario Works) are offered Public Health Nurse supports, Employment supports, Childcare supports and Recreation supports for their children.

The overall effect of participating in Families First is significant and meaningful. Simply put – Families First changes the lives of low-income sole-support parents and their families and increases the well-being, social functioning, stability of life chances of children and youth. Both parents and children/youth experience significant and positive changes in their health, well-being and social functioning.

The data clearly and consistently show that children and youth significantly benefit from participating in the recreation component of the program. Their general health improves, the social and school competencies significantly increase, they develop stable friendships and support systems and their parents report fewer conduct disorders and behavioral problems.

### **5. Recreation for Children with Special Needs**

In some municipalities one of the challenges facing families of children with special needs is accessing recreational programs, specifically summer camps due to the added cost for a support worker for the child. Many children with special needs may require a support worker to help them benefit from the program and the salary cost is the responsibility of the family.

Many families enrol their children in municipally run summer camps to provide quality programs for their children while the parent is working. A family wishing to enrol their child in an eight week summer camp program could be faced with approximately an extra \$2,400 cost which makes accessing these programs challenging. Parents are challenged to find quality care and may be putting their employment at risk if they are unable to cover the cost.

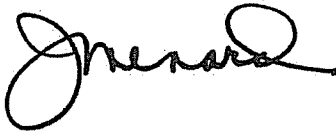
The Region of Peel with their municipal partners and stakeholders are convening a working group beginning in the summer of 2010 to look at the cost barriers and explore opportunities for long term solutions to ensure children with special needs are able to access camp programs without the families having to bear the additional costs.

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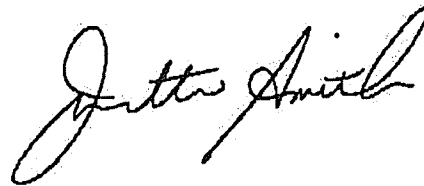
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**CONCLUSION**

Recreation benefits all who participate, whether for the simple enjoyment of leisure and fun time or the more concrete benefits that lead to improved health, life skills and a better future. Additionally, investment in recreation reduces down stream costs in health, social services and justice. Regional and municipal staff have participated in the development of the Affordable Access to Recreation for Ontario Policy Framework and are working collaboratively to ensure that local policies support the framework. Work is also being undertaken to address the many barriers to recreation faced by special needs children in Peel. Staff will report back with recommendations that will address these challenges.




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**Approved for Submission:**



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Report #: HS 10-18