

Engaging Marginalized Members of the Community in the Axworthy Health & RecPlex

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Description of Initiative

Children and youth in Winnipeg's inner city are differentially affected by poverty, racism, and diminished life opportunities. The untapped resources of a university provide a cornucopia of engagement opportunities for children, youth, and other community members to be physically active, to join sport teams, and to take advantage of the university sport and physical activity resources.³ This study was an exploration of how successful the RecPlex and Community Charter has been in providing these opportunities.

Findings

Key Factors Contributing to Successful RecPlex Community Engagement:

Leadership

"We put the community leaders first."

Appealing Activities

"African Soccer, it's a lot of fun!"

Barriers to Engaging the Community:

Financial

"With money you could do a lot more"

Temporal

"What 1/3 of the time is set aside?"

Transportation

"Many of them need a way to get here"

Safety; Linguistic; Nutritional

History

The RecPlex initiative was first conceptualized around 2004 and opened in late 2014, with a formalized Charter mandating free access for community-based programs. The RecPlex building, funded through a combination of public and private funds, would jointly serve the UW's academic, recreational, and varsity athletics programming needs as well as the local community. From its initial conception, the RecPlex vision included both a community-engagement opportunity¹ and a potential stream of rental revenue to help support the operational costs associated with running and maintaining the facility.



Extensive RecPlex Facilities

Methods & Participants

Semi-structured in-depth phenomenological interviews⁴ of the lived experience of those charged with implementing the Axworthy Health & RecPlex charter were conducted.

Participants comprised those charged with the implementation of the Community Charter and interviews lasted between 60–90 minutes.

Transcripts were coded following the methodology outlined for situational analysis² and then analyzed to produce the findings.

Conclusions & Recommendations

Successful engagement of community is easiest with youth & newcomer populations.

Strong community-partner leaders are key to developing effective and sustainable community engagement.

Virtually all the barriers can be eliminated with additional financial resources. Opening the doors to the community is simply the first step in full community engagement, especially with marginalized populations.⁵

Using physical activity as a medium to engage local inner-city communities appears to be effective and beneficial.

References:

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5. Shannon, J., & Wang, T. R. (2010). A model for university–community engagement: Continuing education's role as convener. *The Journal of Continuing Higher Education*, 58(2), 108–112.