

EVALUATION OF THE AFTER SCHOOL HOURS INITIATIVE - YEAR 1



FINAL REPORT - AUGUST 2013

Prepared by:



For:



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Introduction

Ever Active Schools (EAS) provides provincial leadership that promotes and supports healthy, active school communities. EAS accomplishes this mandate by providing learning opportunities, communication and knowledge exchange, developing resources and being a catalyst for collaboration and partnerships supporting the healthy school community. In alignment with the Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers support of the After School Time Period and *Curbing Childhood Obesity: Framework for Action to Promote Healthy Weights*, Ever Active Schools spearheaded capacity building and has provided solutions that have the ability to be scaled up through local project based initiatives. The Ever Active Schools After School Hours Initiative was made possible by funding provided by the Public Health Agency of Canada.

The target population of this Initiative was children and youth in the after school time period. Participating communities were Leduc, Thorsby, Warburg, Beaumont, and New Sarepta; all located within Leduc County. The intention of the Initiative was to promote current after school programs and add more opportunities that promote healthy eating and active living, through developing multi sectoral and local community partnerships.

Fifteen months into the Initiative there are numerous programs being offered in the participating communities; such as cooking clubs, physical activity/sports programs, 'healthy homework' programs, and many others. Note that not all communities offer all programs, and the activities they offer depend on the community needs and current capacities. While all communities have been involved with the Initiative since inception, many have only recently started offering programs, some for a little as three weeks and others for up to six months.

The after school time period (3-6p.m.) was the focus of this Initiative because it has been reported that children are sedentary for 59% of these hours, getting only 14 minutes of moderate to vigorous-intensity physical activity.¹ Additionally, 73% of parents report their children are watching TV, reading or playing video and computer games during this time.¹ Evidence shows that many children are unsupervised and left to determine how they will spend their time during after school hours, and that during this period of the day there are greatly increased levels of crime, experimentation with drugs and sex, accidents and injuries.²

Approach to Evaluation. As part of interim reporting, the After School Hours Initiative engaged an external consultant (Ernst & Young, EY) to complete an evaluation. Through this evaluation, a series

¹ 2007-09 *Canadian Health Measures Survey*—Reported in: Active Healthy Kids Canada (2011). *Don't let this Be the Most Physical Activity our Kids Get After School*. The active Healthy Kids Canada 2011 Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth. Toronto: Active Healthy Kids Canada.

² Clyne, Graham, (2010). *Stone Soup: The Recipe for An After School Strategy in Alberta*. Prepared for The Alberta Recreation and Parks Association. Found online at <http://arpaonline.ca/research/research-publications/>.

of interviews were conducted to gather information on the evolution of the program – identifying early successes, strengths, and opportunities for future development.

Objectives. The After School Hours Initiative identified three objectives, which are met through delivery of community-based programming:

1. Identify and engage community leaders, build capacity in rural communities for after school programming and develop resources to educate communities on healthy living behaviors in the after school hours;
2. Satellite out to rural communities, knowledge, training, resources and promotion of healthy living programs; and
3. Deliver and measure healthy living programming in rural communities – addressing the specific needs of each community.

In addition to the above objectives, an ongoing goal of the Initiative was to *build on and expand partnerships within Leduc and surrounding communities and between schools and community*; although interviewees were not asked specifically about this last objective.

Evaluation Overview, Approach and Questions

Evaluation is an intentional part of the After School Hours Initiative, as over time, the work intends to use the information gathered to inform the continued growth and expansion of these and other community-based programs.

To ensure objectivity, the overall approach was to have EY conduct interviews, on behalf of the After School Hours Initiative, with the participating communities, as Year 1 was drawing to a close (March 2013). Thirteen individuals participated in the interviews conducted by EY, including ten individuals involved in program delivery and three parents.

EY worked with EAS to identify evaluation questions (i.e. interview questions³) that would assist the After School Hours Initiative understand its current progress towards meeting the stated objectives. These questions included the following:

1. To what extent do you believe the program objectives have been achieved so far? What else needs to happen to get there? (Note: The interviewer asked for information specific to each of the objectives)
2. What has the program been successful at (i.e. positive impacts)? Example positive impacts such as testimonials/stories from teachers, parents or the children.
3. What are the program challenges/barriers to healthy living in the after school hours?
4. Do you think there has been a change in physical activity and nutrition habits in program users as a result of the program? Please explain.
5. Discuss the considerations and opportunities for the future of the program (i.e. expansion) to other areas of Alberta.
6. What does success of the program look like? How would you know when you get there?

³ Note: The email invite – including Interview Questions (which served as the interview guide), is included in this document as Appendix A.

Summary of Key Findings from Interview Questions and Considerations Moving Forward

Key highlights from interviewee responses are reported and presented for each question area below. Information gathered reflects the Initiative and development of other community-based programs.

Interviewees are more likely to give candid feedback about program delivery – including successes and opportunities for improvement, when speaking to an external party, such as EY.

Q1: Achieving Program Objectives

Key Findings

Interviewees were asked ‘To what extent do you believe program objectives have been achieved so far? What else needs to happen to get there?’ (Note: The interviewer asked for information specific to each of the objectives)

The following are common themes that emerged from the interviews, evidenced by specific quotes in support of these themes:

More resources are required to support achievement of the objectives. Building capacity for delivering programming still needs to be addressed (i.e. more personnel resources are required). There is concern about how to deliver a sustainable program when access to funding, resources and training is not always adequate.

"There is an absolute need for this Initiative but finding volunteers is not always easy, let alone getting them trained in the community so they can eventually train others to help." ~ Program instructor

"With funding cuts to education programs, it is harder to get dedicated resources to sustain and deliver this Initiative long-term (resources in relation to both volunteers and equipment)." ~ Program volunteer

The objectives of the Initiative are aligned with the needs of the community. The need for after school programming in small rural communities is very apparent. This Initiative is meeting the immediate needs of the participating communities in regards to promoting physical activity through programs that are engaging and well attended.

Those involved understand the objectives; however there is still room to increase community understanding. Awareness of the Initiative and the after school programs is growing. However, more effort is required in this area. Some communities have built up awareness among community groups and the municipality, while others have not.

Specifically, individual responses included:

“The City of Leduc doesn’t necessarily see itself as a ‘rural’ community, which is the intended focus of the program.”

“Leduc has more infrastructure and resources to deliver the programs, and – at times, it seems like the after school hours program is competing with other program offerings at the Leduc Recreation Centre.”

It is too early to assess full achievement of objectives. The After School Hours Initiative is in its infancy; it might be slightly premature to gauge whether or not the Initiative’s objectives have been met. At the time of the interviews, some communities had only been running their after school programs for as little as three weeks and others up to six months. The Initiative overall is beginning to meet some of the objectives, but more time will be required for some communities to realize the impact of the Initiative prior to an evaluation framework being applied.

Conclusions and Considerations Moving Forward

Given these responses, the following can be inferred about the Initiative and the programs in terms of meeting the stated objectives:

Link program delivery with the Initiative’s objectives. Align program delivery with the three stated objectives by showing, in a plan, how each community-based program contributes to the achievement of these. In this plan, state specific actions that will help each group meet the objectives, which would increase the likelihood that there is a common understanding of how achievement of these is supported by program activities.

Communities need and perceive benefit from multiple healthy eating and active living service providers. Communities would like to have multiple service providers support healthy eating and active living. Communities recognize that having a variety of service providers increases the likelihood resources will remain intact (at least in part) during times of budget challenges.

Develop an evaluation plan and framework. Program evaluation provides valuable information which can be used to inform the continued delivery of programs and services, enabling these services to continue to develop and align with evolving needs. Program evaluation assists in identifying areas for improvement and expansion.

Q2: Progress Towards and Defining Success

Key Findings

Interviewees were asked ‘What has the program been successful at? For example, positive impacts such as testimonials/stories from teachers, parents or the children.’ The following are common themes that emerged from the interviews, evidenced by specific quotes in support of these themes:

Increased physical activity. Of the after school programs that have been running throughout the year, there has been a significant increase in students participating in physical activities. The program has provided opportunities for children and youth, who might not otherwise have the access to physical activity programs (for example, it is not feasible to participate in organized sports).

*“Look Mrs. X, I am sweating!”
~ Teacher referring to the student’s excitement and learning while
partaking in a physical activity program*

Participants have improved healthy eating choices. Children and youth are becoming more aware about the importance of their health. Parents have commented that their children are eating things that they did not think they would eat. For example, some parents have noticed their children are choosing to pick an apple for a snack instead of something sugary.

Participants are developing positive healthy habits in the home. The program is teaching children and youth about healthy habits that they are applying to everyday life. For example, in the cooking class, children and youth have to help clean up their dishes, and are now helping their parents with the dishes at home.

*“My kids come home to the supper table and can’t stop talking
about the program!”
~ Parent referring to child’s enthusiasm*

Strong attendance rates. Parents are very happy the programs are running and are at capacity. Many of the communities have waiting lists for their programs. Parents have commented that their children come home to the supper table and cannot stop talking about the program.

The programs make a positive difference in the social fabric of the community. The program has helped children and youth with self-esteem issues; they are becoming more confident and aware of their capabilities.

"I'm seeing young teen girls who have participated in the self-defense program really develop a sense of confidence, and the teen boys in the weight lifting program are realizing that they are capable of so much more!" ~ Facility Manager

Increased access to healthy eating and active living programs. The program has identified that many children and youth in rural communities do not participate in organized sports because of cost pressures.

Conclusions and Considerations Moving Forward

Given these responses, the following conclusions about the success of the Initiative and of the programs can be drawn:

Programs are needed and well received in communities. The Initiative has received high praise across all communities as being one that is very much needed in the community. People want to see more programs offered in terms of variety of programming, frequency of programs and more community involvement. This Initiative will be set up to flourish and continue to make a real difference in the communities it serves, providing it has the right resources and supports in place, and by engaging in ongoing evaluation to identify and implement improvements in program delivery.

Q3: Challenges and Barriers to Living Healthy in the After School Hours

Key Findings

Interviewees were asked ‘*what are the program challenges/barriers to healthy living in the after school hours?*’ The following are common themes that emerged from the interviews, evidenced by specific quotes in support of these themes:

Getting home from the program can be a challenge for participants. Most students travel to / from school by bus, so unless a parent is able to pick up their child at the end of a program, students are not able to participate.

"I have two other young children (not in the program) and scheduling around them all is difficult let alone trying to get away from work on time in order to pick [program participant] up from the cooking class." ~ Parent

More people are needed. There is a definite need for the program, but there is a lack of resources and volunteers to support program delivery. Some communities believe there have been expectations put on them to deliver the program but do not have the people or capacity to do so.

More funding is needed. Communities do not have the required funding to support extra resources (e.g. people and equipment). When funding from Ever Active Schools runs out, communities are worried that the program will not be sustainable.

Increased access to healthy snacks is needed. Access to healthy snacks in the after school hours seems to be a challenge. Some communities offer healthy snacks to program participants but many do not. Healthy snacks tend to be more expensive and not always readily available.

Programs need to be tailored to the age and gender of participants. There are some children and youth that will only participate in gender specific programs (i.e. girls only). This is more apparent in girls, however also holds true for individuals that are not part of organized sports programs. Due to the diverse range in ages, abilities, maturity and skill sets in the various classes, this presents a challenge to the instructors to keep the participants engaged and / or have enough time to complete the scheduled activities.

Conclusions and Considerations Moving Forward

Given these responses, the following conclusions about the Initiative and the programs regarding meeting the stated objectives can be drawn:

Identify key challenges and barriers and develop a plan to address these. Engage the communities in discussions regarding key program challenges and barriers to program delivery. Following these discussions, develop a plan to address any challenges and barriers that are made apparent. This approach will provide an opportunity to improve the overall Initiative at the frontline.

Parents and teachers believe they can overcome transportation challenges. While transportation was listed as the greatest barrier to participation in the programs, parents and teachers believe that parents who are committed to having their children participate in the program will find

transportation options and not identify “lack of access to transportation” as a reason for not participating in the program.

*"I have kids participate in the program and I choose to work later so that they can! As a parent, it is my job to make sure they have access to fitness and proper nutrition. This is my commitment to my kids."
~ Parent with children in the program*

Q4: Changes in Healthy Eating and Active Living Habits

Key Findings

Interviewees were asked ‘Do you think there has been a change in physical activity and nutrition habits in program users as a result of the Initiative? Please explain.’ The following are common themes that emerged from the interviews, evidenced by specific quotes in support of these themes:

Individuals have noted some improvements in participant eating habits. Some of the after school hours programs provide participants with healthy snacks or education on healthy eating and this has brought about more awareness. Some teachers have noticed students bringing more water to school instead of sugary drinks. Children and youth appear to know some nutrition knowledge, which reflects what is taught in school. Moving forward, the Initiative could put in place a tool or process to better understand the degree to which proper nutrition habits are translating into everyday life.

Children and youth are more engaged in physical activity. There has been a noticeable change in program participants’ physical activity habits. This has been demonstrated by an increase in recreation facility use and increased program attendance. In some communities, children and youth are returning to recreation centres on their own time to engage in other activities. Children and youth are being creative and coming up with their own games to play.

Conclusions and Considerations Moving Forward

Given these responses, the following conclusions about the Initiative and the programs regarding meeting the stated objectives can be drawn:

Change in healthy eating is more difficult to assess than physical activity. Program providers feel they have control over achieving one hour of daily physical activity with participants, which meets the Physical Activity Guidelines for Children and Youth. It was noted however, that although it was possible to influence healthy eating during the program hours, it is difficult to measure if this behaviour is translating to the time spent outside the program.

Enhance the program’s ability to assess and monitor change. An increased emphasis on assessment and monitoring change through evaluation is needed and will enable Ever Active Schools to learn more about the impact of initiatives and programs. Parents and families can contribute to the development of this assessment and support the gathering of information.

Q5: Expansion of the After School Hours Initiative in Alberta

Key Findings

Interviewees were asked to ‘*Discuss the considerations and opportunities for the future of (expansion of) the Initiative to other areas of Alberta.*’ The following are common themes that emerged from the interviews, evidence by specific quotes in support of these themes. (Note: Program leadership has attempted to implement a number of these considerations in Leduc County, which need to continue to be explored.)

Seek corporate sponsorship and partnership. Request corporate sponsorship in order to get more funding to provide lower income communities with access to resources, physical activity equipment and healthy snacks to provide to students involved in the after school hours programs. Partnering with other community organizations was also recommended in terms of supporting program delivery and sharing resources.

More training in support of youth and student leadership is needed. Encourage youth leaders of the communities, such as graduate students or high school students, to get trained, so that they can help lead programs. There may be grant opportunities available for post graduate students.

Ask students, parents and teachers to generate ideas about possible After School activities. Survey children and youth and school community leaders about preferred after school activities through a needs assessment. This provides shared accountability and responsibility for participant’s health and program experience. This could also include parents and teachers sharing ideas and successes on how to improve the program.

Continue to tailor the program to participant needs. As the program continues to grow and participation increases, the results of the needs assessment can be used to help direct program foci. For example, develop programs tailored to participant ages, interests and genders. When resources are available, there may be opportunities to design the program and activities to meet known needs or to increase program staffing levels to allow for expansion.

Make use of existing community resources. Know what resources are available within the community and be open to consolidating so others can participate. It was emphasized that it is important to have people resources in the community that can deliver the programs, and an ability to educate and train interested personnel and volunteers.

Conclusions and Considerations Moving Forward

Given these responses, the following conclusions about the Initiative and the programs regarding meeting the stated objectives can be drawn:

Use needs assessments to help set direction. Identification of pertinent needs and interests from a needs assessment survey will assist in laying the groundwork for moving programs forward. Developing a plan based on the results will assist in identifying and managing the execution and implementation of these opportunities. Continuing to involve the communities (i.e. parents, teachers and participants) will be paramount in getting them to instil ownership and pride in the Initiative.

Looking Forward

Ever Active Schools began work on the After School Hours Initiative in January 2012. Within the past three to six months, different locations throughout Leduc County have begun delivering programs tailored to the needs and interests within their communities.

Evaluation. The current evaluation, as outlined in this report, reflects the implementation of the program delivered in Leduc County. Moving forward, the Initiative is using the learnings from Leduc County, to develop similar programming in Slave Lake. Future evaluation should reflect this growth.

Ideally, the future evaluation approach would be aligned with a broader strategy. The strategy (including required resources, activities and the intended impact of these activities) should be aligned with the overarching strategic objectives.

Within the context of the evaluation presented, future evaluation activities may be designed to support:

- **Learning more about the impact of EAS activities on child and youth healthy eating and active living.** Develop and implement tools and processes to gather information to understand the impact of the After School Hours Initiative programs in terms of the achievement of the stated objectives, and specifically, the impact on program participants.
- **Identifying needs and available resources in the target communities.** Using evaluation methodologies to identify programs that are well-received within the community, including those that could be offered on more occasions during the week or throughout the year.
- **Facilitating and understanding the scope of municipal involvement.** Interviewees report that the community supports the Initiative and is now expecting the programs to continue to be offered. In support of program sustainability, explore how municipal governments are providing investment, funding and helping to raise program awareness.
- **Exploring and understanding possible corporate sponsorships and community partnerships.** Interviewees identified some program challenges and barriers that have been faced during the “early days,” and suggest exploring partnerships and collaborations with community and corporate organizations.
- **Furthering research into key areas** of transportation, volunteers, funding, access to healthy snacks, physical activity equipment and tailoring programming to interest.
- **Increasing child and youth participation.** Since the program started, there continues to be increasing numbers of participants. Explore further resources to support this growth.
- **Continuing involvement of parents and families.** Parents recognize the impact of the program on their children and their ability to make positive choices regarding healthy eating and active living. Continue to explore ways to involve parents in program delivery.
- **Continued community ownership and development.** Parents, teachers and community leaders are reported to see the value in the After School Hours Initiative and programs. Continue to explore how the communities are taking greater ownership of and providing direction for development of programming.

Highlights and Anecdotes from Ever Active Schools

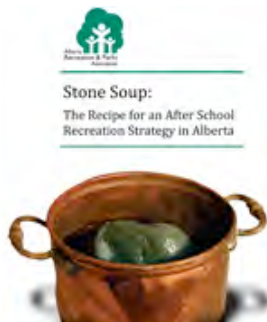
In addition to the information gathered by Ernst & Young on the After School Hours Initiative, Katelynn Theal, Community Coordinator for the Initiative, had some personal highlights and anecdotes to share:

Strong Participation: The After School Hours Initiative is running at capacity in four communities. Many of the drop-in programs have wait lists and constant requests to add participants. Some instructors are getting over 40 participants on a given evening.

Facilitation of Collaborative partnerships and Services: When the Initiative was first launched in New Sarepta (Fall 2012), programming was offered by the Church Pastor and the librarian one day per week. By spring, the community was working together by providing additional personnel support and facility space. Here are some examples of how collaboration within the community is being demonstrated:

- The school provided gym space two days per week;
- One teacher provided her time to instruct Zumba one day per week;
- The school promoted the program to students which was integral in increasing the awareness of the After School Hours Initiative;
- The Church provided space to accommodate the cooking club and the Pastor tutored children at the homework club. In return for this involvement, Ever Active Schools helped promote an after school program that the church offers (an adventure club) that is very successful;
- The library provided space for the homework club and the librarian helped with program delivery and grant writing to access funds for healthy snacks; and
- The County provided staff for the physical activity programming and has begun training staff in literacy and fundamental movement skills.

Katelynn Theal, the After School Hours Coordinator, compares the success of this small community to the “Stone Soup” document written by the Alberta Recreation and Parks Association.



“The title for this report refers to a cherished fable. It is the story of a hungry man who finds himself in a village where everyone is carefully guarding what little food they have. Thinking creatively, he puts a large stone in a big pot, fills it with water and starts to make ‘stone soup’ for the entire village. Each of the villagers, impressed by his effort to make something they can all share, eventually finds they do have something they can contribute and before long, there is a hearty soup for all to enjoy.”³
refer to foot noted reference on page 3

The essence of this story tells us that many hands make light work. Applied to the After School Hours Initiative, the more the community is involved and partnerships are developed, the more successful it will be and the healthier and more active children will be in the hours after school.

The full details can be found at <http://arpaonline.ca/research/research-publications/>

Creative solutions: In Thorsby, creative negotiations were made to allow for after school programming to start. The recreation complex had the space but no staff. The centre provided free space (formerly rented) for the community users who, in turn, provided an after-school program for children and youth.

Dedicated Volunteers: Many of the programs were delivered by volunteers. Without them the programs would not have been successful. In Warburg, we had a local mom handle most of the program planning. On some nights, she had 47 participants show up, and she is eager to repeat the program in the fall. Below is a comment from her about the program she delivered.

“Hey, so here are all the pictures. It was a great experience. Kids exercised for an average of 80 minutes and not once complained. I believe that children LOVE being active and this program proves it. I had several comments and emails stating how thankful the parents were for the program and how much the kids loved the program. I structured it as free time, water break, organized play, snack break, free time. Often kids did not want to leave.”

Moving Beyond the Initial Funding Term

Moving beyond the initial funding term, EAS has secured additional funding from the Public Health Agency of Canada to continue to support participating communities throughout the County, to work towards building capacity for more programming and sustainability. Additionally, EAS will take a similar community development approach in Slave Lake, implementing lessons learned and considerations provided by the evaluation team to begin a coordinated approach to after school programming.

Lastly, EAS will provide knowledge exchange and communication between and among those within Alberta who are providing after school programs within their communities. EAS is creating a platform to allow these community leaders to share successes, discuss challenges and seek additional resources. EAS will share key considerations based on findings from Leduc County in order to support these communities.

Appendix A – Email to Interview Participants (includes Interview Questions)

April 12, 2013

Email to: Interview participants
From: Katelynn Theal
Subject: Healthy Hearts After School Initiative – Program Evaluation

Good Morning All,

As this initiative transitions from year one into year two, Ever Active Schools has engaged an external consultant (Ernst & Young) to conduct a series of interviews to understand the impacts of the Healthy Hearts After School Initiative to date. And to share some stories from each of the communities.

As part of this process, I am requesting your participation in a one hour interview with a representative from Ernst & Young. In these interviews, you will be asked to describe your perspectives on the programs' successes to date, the key challenges you think the program faces and opportunities and improvements for the future of the program.

Please respond to me and Michelle cc'd on this e-mail confirming your participation by Friday, April 19th at the latest. A representative from Ernst & Young will contact you directly to arrange a mutually convenient time to meet. We would like to have as many of these meetings as possible between now and April 24th. If you are able to travel to Leduc it would be much appreciated. Alternatively, a teleconference can be arranged.

I have attached a letter outlining these details, and also a sample of some of the questions that will be discussed to help you reflect more before the interview.

I would really appreciate your time to assist with this process. You all have been a great asset to driving this program forward and I would love to hear from you about the program, and to share the story from your community.

We can set up a teleconference at your convenience if time is a concern.

Thanks

Katelynn Theal

Attachment:

The questions below have been provided that will guide the discussion, please consider them as they relate to your experience with the program:

1. To what extent do you believe the program objectives have been achieved so far? What else needs to happen to get there?

Program objectives:

- Identify and engage community leaders, build capacity in rural communities for after school programming, and develop resources to educate communities on healthy living behaviours in the after school hours.
 - Satellite out to rural community's knowledge, training, resources, and promotion of healthy living programs.
 - Deliver and measure healthy living programming in rural communities – addressing the specific needs of each community.
2. What has the program been successful at (positive impacts)? Ex. positive impacts, testimonials/stories from teachers, parents or children etc.
 3. What are the program challenges/barriers to healthy living in the after school hours?
 4. Do you think there has been a change in physical activity and nutrition habits in program users as a result of the program? Please explain.
 5. Discuss the considerations and opportunities for the future of (expansion of) the program to other areas of Alberta.
 6. What does success of the program look like? How would you know when you get there?

I trust that the upcoming meeting(s) will be insightful, and I appreciate your assistance in achieving our common goal to provide opportunities and resources for the rural communities of Leduc County to address the barriers to physical activity and engage in after school programming.

If you have any questions, please feel free to call me or Michelle Dodds of Ernst & Young at 780.441.4138.