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Waterhen

Bringing People Together

Gym Night has been a big hit for kids in the Waterhen area. The ball really got rolling after a beach volleyball tournament at Manipogo Beach. A team from Rorketon, the Rockets, had a good showing at the high school level, and some serious sporting fever caught on. The CDPI advertised the Gym Night in Waterhen, Mallard, Rockridge, Rorketon and surrounding communities, and a surprising number of kids from various backgrounds got involved. Al Neath, CDPI project leader, bought all the equipment with CDPI funds – basketball, dodgeball, floor hockey, volleyball – and set up round robin tournaments. Lots of girls joined in too.

The action on the courts was intense, but the real success of Gym Night was in bringing together youth from different communities. “It’s not just about playing and working out,” said Neath, “but about developing bonds between the kids and the communities, some of which are pretty isolated.”

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Smaller communities in Manitoba can often feel isolated from health and recreation services available in larger population centers. Sometimes people in rural areas feel neglected and have been wary of government programs. But the committee in the Waterhen area is working to change that perception. A CDPI group representing 11 communities in the area meets regularly and are a tremendous support for each other.

One of the focuses of the CDPI group is to get feedback from the community before putting programs in place. Increasingly, community members are getting together and expressing the issues that are important to them. In addition to working with the local health unit on issues like diabetes and smoking prevention, one of CDPI’s goals in Waterhen is to educate people about the risks of a lethargic lifestyle. As a long-time resident and former mayor of Waterhen, Neath is a steadfast believer in the benefits of physical activity. “Lethargy is a major killer in these little communities, both emotionally and physically,” he said. “I really believe that mental health is a major issue in the small community. You turn into a different being when you’re physically active.”

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Take Note

In [Canadian] communities with a population over 300,000, some 37% of people are deemed active (defined as the equivalent of walking one hour daily), compared with 29% in communities with fewer than 1,000 residents.

<http://www.cflri.ca/pdf/e/rf0111.pdf>

Children and youth who engage in regular physical activity have increased bone mass; increased ability to fight infections; and improved motor skill development, cognitive and social functioning, and mental health.

<http://www.apcd.mb.ca/pdfs/physical-activity-action-plan.pdf>