

Article/Project Title – International Information & Library Review:
Physical Literacy in the Library – Lethbridge Public Library – Lethbridge, Alberta CANADA

Contact Information:

Lisa Weekes, Manager: Information Services, and, Barbara Longair, Manager: Children’s Services
Lethbridge Public Library
810 – 5th Ave S
Lethbridge, AB
T1J 4C4
(403) 380-7312

Timeline:

Pilot Project start: March 2015
Official launch: May 29th, 2015
National Grant received: November 21st, 2015
Phase 2 start: January 2016

Project Description:

A book, a magazine, a tennis racquet anyone? Families in Lethbridge, Alberta now have a new opportunity to try out some options to have fun and keep fit, thanks to the availability of sports equipment and new programming at the Library.

This project came about from networking with community organizations in Lethbridge, Alberta. Many organizations talked about the health and wellness of the community. Dr. Mary Dyck, Kinesiology professor at the University of Lethbridge provided her research identifying a large “free play” gap in Lethbridge, as opposed to organized sports. This led us to the concept of physical literacy and its importance as foundational skills in everyone’s lives.

But why physical literacy in the library? Why not ecological literacy or media literacy or any of the other adjectives that get tacked onto literacy these days? After discussion we felt that physical literacy had the advantage of being a foundational skill for everyone in the community. Basically physical literacy enables an individual to move with competence and confidence and thus to want to move more, including getting out and visiting the library!

We see this project as promoting positive change in the community in a fun, barrier-free way. The health related benefits of being able to move include: improved chronic disease resistance, cardiac function, and improved bone density. Psychological benefits include enjoyment, reduced depression, anxiety, increased social connections, getting out of doors, and learning and mastering new skills. People who can move with competence and confidence become more independent. They can move and take care of themselves by being strong, flexible and able to endure. Children can learn fundamental movement skills which in turn will provide the foundation for lifelong daily activity.

Because Lethbridge has so many organizations who are willing to help the community with foundational movement skills, it was important for the library to supplement, not replace or create, the work that was already being done in our community. For example, the University of Lethbridge, PLAY Lethbridge, PLAY Coaldale, Lethbridge College - Be Fit for Life Centre, and the Lethbridge Sport Council all have existing programs or skill building activities. In order to build upon these activities, we could provide a

circulating collection of outdoor sports kits that encourage free play. We would promote the kits and physical literacy through programming and advertising.

We proposed the pilot project of a circulating sports collection. We received \$2500 for the project from the library. The library's existing Toy Library provided the model for circulation and acquisition logistics. The project's goals are:

- *Encourage* physical activity through physical literacy kits.
- *Integrate* the current infrastructure of the local libraries with the city's recreational spaces, and
- *Provide* accessible equipment and instruction to allow children, youth and families to be outdoors and physically active.

We were able to secure an Applied Studies student, Cristina Miller, from the University of Lethbridge in exchange for an honorarium paying for the cost of one of her courses. She was invaluable as she helped us source the items for the collection, organize and assemble the collection, and promote the collection in the community. Customers can borrow basketballs, baseball kits, soccer balls, skipping ropes, horseshoes and lawn darts, pickleball, Hi-lo scoopball, beach volleyball, and our now famous rubber chickens and rubber pigs: all motivational throwing tools.

Because of our existing relationships with the Lethbridge Sport Council and PLAY Lethbridge, we were able to integrate the library into their activities and become a host for their first ever Physical Literacy Summit at our Crossings Branch. We've also received national recognition through a 2015 Royal Bank of Canada Learn to Play Leadership grant.

The kits are "low-tech" and easy to use. We keep the items in big Ziploc bags catalogued as a kit; each item is barcoded. Each kit contains an instruction booklet that in very basic terms outlines how to use the equipment. The instruction booklets also contain a contents page with the barcode, and a "first time" user survey that gets returned to us. We keep the kits in a big Rubbermaid tote housed wherever there is accessible space. The kits circulate like the regular items.

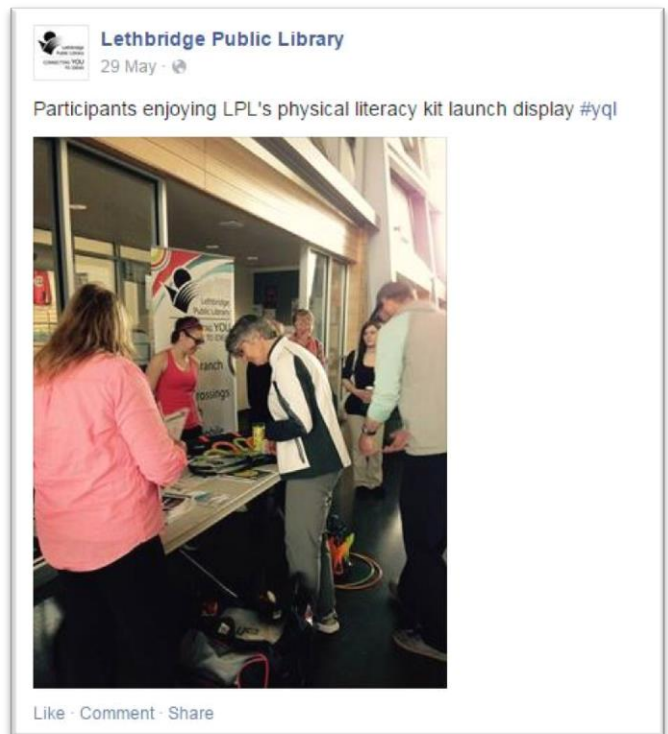
Library staff received training from our sports' partners on how to integrate physical literacy into our existing programming. We have also created new programming based on community feedback. For example, our Bookmobile is the start point for a walking club. Patrons can borrow walking poles to use and keep track of their progress. During the winter, we're running a "Move and Play" program for preschoolers to participate in structured physical activities, and then free play activities using items from our collections. Even our ESL Storytime has integrated physical literacy into their program by using a ball to play name and vocabulary games. It's a wonderful way to break down the intimidation of speaking in a group.

We measured the success of the pilot project through first time use surveys, circulation statistics, and staff and customer feedback. Thankfully the response has been overwhelmingly positive so we are now underway for expansion of the project in 2016.

"Chuck the Chicken" game at a local Bookmobile stop.



Social media campaign promoting the project launch.



Staff training.



Move and Play participant.

