



WellSpring

Sharing physical activity knowledge

ALBERTA CENTRE FOR ACTIVE LIVING • MARCH 2018 • VOLUME 29 • NUMBER 03

Physical Literacy And You (PLAY) Groups in Alberta

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Introduction

As an inherent part of the lifelong journey, physical literacy is recognized as essential and foundational for an individual’s future participation and value in lifelong physical activity.¹

More specifically, physical literacy is “the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life.”²

As interest in physical literacy started to gain momentum in Alberta, groups of like-minded people began to organically come together, wanting to learn more and learn from each other. Over time, these groups have evolved into what are now called Physical Literacy and You (PLAY) Groups. This article will provide an overview of the purpose of PLAY Groups, their value to community partners, and how individuals can get involved.

What are PLAY Groups

PLAY Groups in Alberta provide a forum for professionals and volunteers from health, education, recreation, early childhood, and sport to come together to network and support physical literacy development in their communities. Physical literacy has been the common ground, effectively bringing various sectors to the table. There are now 13 established PLAY Groups in Alberta, with the concept spreading out-of-province to communities like Kamloops, BC and Sudbury, ON.

Within Alberta, PLAY Groups are supported by the Be Fit For Life Centres, and they are run in collaboration with many community partners. In each community, PLAY Groups look and operate differently, based on the needs of that community and who is coming to the table. While some groups are still forming, all are evolving. Some have missions, visions, and joint initiatives, while others are focused mostly on information sharing and networking. While all of these groups may operate differently, they have a common theme: large-scale social change comes from better cross-sector coordination rather than from isolated initiatives of individual organizations.³

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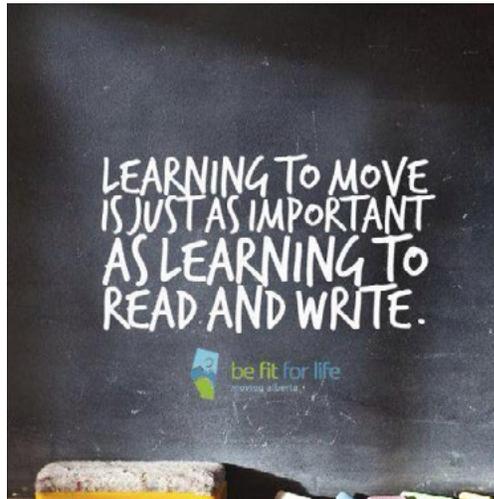
With recent interest in supporting physical literacy, Be Fit For Life Centres and many partners supported the creation of PLAY Groups — a forum for professionals and volunteers with an interest in physical activity to work together to support physical literacy development in their communities.

This article provides an overview of PLAY Groups in Alberta and how to get involved.



The Value of PLAY Groups for Partners and Communities

Bringing partners together from a variety of backgrounds and disciplines allows for bridging of multiple perspectives and leveraging resources. Partners meet in-person and online to share physical literacy best practices, resources and strategies, and identify areas for potential collaboration or partnerships. PLAY Group attendance is voluntary and there are no logos or egos! Current participants keep coming back and new participants keep joining.



PLAY Calgary is one of the more established and longest running PLAY Groups. PLAY Calgary's membership has grown to 240 members, representing 70 organizations across all sectors in Calgary. When group members were surveyed and asked what they wanted to get out of being a part of PLAY Calgary, they were interested in:

- networking,
- collaborating on projects,
- improving parent education,
- learning more about physical literacy,
- learning about and coordinating on grant opportunities,
- collaborating on staff and leader training, and
- evaluating physical activity policies.

"The reason I started coming was that we were trying to get super in depth into physical literacy and we wanted to be involved and connected, and we were learning a lot! The reason we keep coming back, because we feel like we know a lot now, is the networking piece. [We're also] seeing what's new out in the community and different ways to introduce physical literacy that's not just super training-based, more play-based or different sports and what their take is on physical literacy. It's kind of neat to see."

— Hollie Cressy, Manager of Sport Development, WinSport

"I thought it was a great way, starting a new job, to network and see what's out there. I really enjoy that we're all so diverse, coming from bigger organizations to smaller partnerships, but we all have the same mandate. We're all really interested in youth and their development, especially their physical literacy."

— Megan McCormick, School Health Facilitator, Ever Active Schools and a newer member of the group

PLAY Calgary has representation from organizations with a municipal, provincial, and/or national scope. The members have formed subgroups based on their interests, which range from early childhood to older adults.

"What has kept me here is just being more 'ear to the ground' in what's going on. There are so many things I wouldn't have known about. It's helped me understand more of my city contacts. While my work sometimes brings me outside of the city, it's nice to feel like I have a pulse on Calgary and what partners we can work with. And then when I'm in other communities, I can say 'well Calgary is doing this, how can we bring it to other places?'"

— A PLAY Group member

Physical literacy is the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life.



Members from outside of Calgary have also joined to learn what has worked in other parts of the province and how they can implement a group in their communities.

"What started me coming is my fascination with physical literacy, both personally and professionally. What keeps me coming back is the networking and staying current with what is going on and being able to pass that onto my staff...[After starting a group in High River.] It's very slow. But you know, hey, 50% more! Instead of 2, now there's 4. So we're growing!"

— Tracy Morgan, Town of High River, and member of PLAY Calgary

Along with the networking and sharing, the group has organized mass leader training and a facilitation guide for use in other communities.

"What keeps me coming back is probably the connections I make and a big part of it is the training that I do with our leaders and day camp staff."

— A PLAY Group member

"We took the PLAY Superhero Training that was developed as a spin-off of this committee and trained our staff throughout the year. This will be the fourth year of Superhero Training!"

— Sandy Smith, City of Calgary, and planning committee member for Superhero Training

"What has kept me here is just being more 'ear to the ground' in what's going on. There are so many things I wouldn't have known about."

Learning, Building Momentum, and Advancing Physical Literacy in Alberta

PLAY Medicine Hat has also had success in planning a collaborative training event for camp leaders from many organizations in the city. The project was inspired by the annual event delivered by PLAY Calgary and the practices shared through the groups. Red Deer and Edmonton have also hosted their own versions of PLAY Superhero Training. Initiatives that took one group several years to develop are being adapted and modified by other communities in significantly less time.

To continue the momentum of shared learning, Be Fit For Life launched www.PLconnect.ca, a website designed to connect physical literacy champions across Alberta. This website is a social networking site for physical literacy, where members can find and join their regional PLAY Group, post questions to the broader group to help them in the work they are doing, nominate their colleagues to share success stories, and share and browse through a bank of resources. Most importantly, PLconnect.ca provides a venue for PLAY Groups to communicate with each other — post meeting agendas, share documents, and send messages to other members. The site will also be used for shared learning opportunities. For example, Dr. Vicki Harber will be leading a series of four workshops with application ideas for developing social-emotional learning through quality physical literacy experiences. The series is designed for PLAY Groups to attend together and work through the content as a community. The next session is on April 12th, 2018.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Many organizations have seen the need for collaboration in their community to provide quality, developmentally appropriate, inclusive, and safe opportunities for all members to participate in physical activity. Funding to support the formalization and creation of PLAY Groups came from a Bilateral Physical Literacy grant from Alberta Sport Connection and Sport Canada. The Be Fit For Life Network, along with many other community partners in each region, have supported the groups through ongoing facilitation, technology and communication, and the administrative detail needed for the groups to function smoothly. With the Bilateral funding coming to an end, we are looking at new ways to build on the momentum and coordination of these groups.

Finding a PLAY Group in Your Area

Join the movement. All are welcome. Currently, there are PLAY Groups in the following regions:

PLAY Calgary	PLAY Lethbridge
PLAY Central (Red Deer & area)	PLAY Medicine Hat
PLAY Foothills	PLAY Okotoks
PLAY Fort McMurray	PLAY Parkland
PLAY Grande Prairie	PLAY West Country (Rocky Mountain House & area)
PLAY GREAT (Greater Edmonton area)	Vermilion Wellness Coalition – PLAY
PLAY Lac La Biche	

Visit www.PLconnect.ca to find a PLAY Group closest to you or to see who is already a member! To learn more, you can also contact your local Be Fit For Life Centre at www.befitforlife.ca/contact.



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