



**CAILC/ACCVA**

**Healthy Lifestyles for Independent Living**

**ALA/AVA**

**Healthy Lifestyles for Independent Living**



**ACTIVE LIVING ALLIANCE**  
FOR CANADIANS WITH A DISABILITY

**ALLIANCE DE VIE ACTIVE**

POUR LES CANADIENS/  
CANADIENNES AYANT  
UN HANDICAP

## **Promising Practices for Healthy Lifestyles and Independent Living Programming for ILRCs**

### Introduction

The Canadian Association of Independent Living Centres (CAILC) recognized the need for further exploration of how an Independent Living (IL) lens could be applied to community based programs that aim to increase the level of physical activity for people with a disability. Here is some of the feedback from ILRCs (Independent Living Resource Centres) about the prospect of having an active living outreach model to increase their capacity to reach consumers:

*" we have a keen interest in developing innovative ways to reach youth and young adults and to promote healthy and active lifestyles. Connecting our folks with the resources to make this a reality will be very useful to us...we look forward to working with CAILC's national network of Centres and partner organizations on this important venture."*

*" projects such as this have positive impacts in communities such as those we serve in our area. Due to many physical and attitudinal barriers, many people whom we serve find it difficult to stay active. It would benefit us a great deal to have an increased capacity to provide the support that consumers need to develop and maintain an active lifestyle...this helps us to benefit from the knowledge and experience of a broad range of participants"*

The needs of Centres and the consumers that use them were articulated to the Public Health Agency of Canada. Support for funding followed and the project came to life. In 2005, the Physical Activity Contributions Program of the Public Health Agency of Canada funded a one year CAILC initiative that enabled the Canadian Association of Independent Living Centres to partner with the Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability (ALACD). The ALACD promotes, supports and enables Canadians with disabilities to lead active, healthy lifestyles and through its network, it has a wealth of information on active living opportunities. Given their extensive work in the area of active living there was a natural fit for this partnership to ensure the project's success.

The goals of the project were to:

- Provide health and active living resources and training to 28 ILRCs across Canada
- Establish a formal, one year partnership between CAILC and ALACD
- Facilitate a relationship between ALACD, their local affiliates and ILRCs
- Have at least 28 staff and ILRC volunteers take part in training at the national conference
- Design, distribute and implement a cross-disability, bilingual, plain language and accessible model for Canada's 28 ILRCs
- Make model and resources available for download to a broader audience on CAILC's website
- Ongoing sustainability of healthy lifestyle programming through core centre services for people with disabilities across Canada
- Creation of bilingual and educational PowerPoint presentations which would educate consumers, recreational facilities, other agencies and the general public on the importance of healthy lifestyle choices and universal design for people with disabilities

### Looking through an IL lens

Independent living is grounded in consumer choice, control and autonomy and activities and projects which are pursued by CAILC in order to maintain this principle throughout all aspects of the initiative.

The positive benefits of active living have been well documented; however, some people with disabilities may have been excluded from the traditional avenues used to access this information.

CAILC believes that embracing the IL philosophy is the cornerstone of a successful active living program and as well it is an important aspect to consider when striving to ensure that the project has a positive impact on Canadians with disabilities.

While this project is aimed at all consumers, it is especially important to people with disabilities. It helps to improve energy levels, increase mobility, improve bone and muscle strength, manage pain, relieve stress, control weight and helps people to cope with disability-related health issues. As well, it decreases the risk of developing various diseases such as heart disease, cancer, osteoporosis and diabetes. Even if people with disabilities are unable to do any physical activity, they can protect their health through nutrition, body awareness and seeking appropriate medical care.

As part of the project, CAILC, in conjunction with the ALACD, hosted a workshop on Healthy Lifestyles for people with disabilities at CAILC's national Annual General Meeting 2005 in Montreal. Prior to this workshop, a few ILRCs already had recreational programming in place and were able to share their expertise by giving presentations about their programs. The Winnipeg ILRC presented their longstanding program which is called Leisure Education through a PowerPoint presentation. This program is for consumers who are socially isolated in their own homes. They learn to try new activities so that they can acquire new interests which can help them integrate themselves into the community.

This is part of a three step process known as self awareness, community awareness and community involvement. Self awareness helps consumers to discover their interests and to find ways of getting around barriers which might prevent them from participating. It also helps them discover what is needed to get motivated to try new things. Community awareness assists consumers in finding out what opportunities are available in the community, how to pursue their interests and how to explore issues of accessibility and transportation. The community involvement component of Leisure Education allows consumers to explore new places, activities, programs and courses with the option of having a volunteer leisure buddy accompany them. As well, it offers consumers the opportunity to try volunteer work and also to strive towards greater independence.

Like Winnipeg, the ILRC in Thunder Bay also had a presentation on its Leisure Resource Committee during the AGM. This committee was established in 2003 with the objective to improve leisure and recreation opportunities for people with disabilities. This committee was comprised of representatives of 14 different local health, disability and recreation agencies.

The goals of the committee were to identify programs and services, identify gaps, obtain new information and create new programs and services. This was achieved by distributing an interest survey which was targeted to all people with disabilities. The results of this survey measured leisure and recreation desires, current level of satisfaction and barriers to leisure activities. Leisure service providers were also surveyed so that the Committee was able to find out what was currently available in the City of Thunder Bay to people with disabilities.

Also at the healthy lifestyles workshop, delegates from the Cowichan Valley Disability Resource Centre (Cowichan DRC) presented two videos which featured Recreation Integration Cowichan (RIC). This program received a generous donation from the Ronald McDonald House Charities and other sponsors which enabled them to purchase two sip and puff sailboats and two Trail Riders for consumers and their families to borrow. RIC hopes to expand its programs to add softball, curling, swimming, skiing and basketball.

We also held numerous information sharing conference calls throughout the project on the valuable ALACD resources/tools that we distributed to ILRCs prior to the conference calls. Chris Bourne who is the Community Development Manager from ALACD, provided training on the following tools:

1. **The Inclusion Action Pack: Increasing Active Living Opportunities for Persons with a Disability**—The purpose of this binder is to provide organizational leaders with a practical resource to guide them through the process and subsequent action of creating inclusive active living programs, services and leadership opportunities for people with disabilities. (available in both English and French)
2. **Active Living For Everyone: Suggestions for Including Persons with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Into Active Living Opportunities** – This guide gives a definition of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD). It also gives ideas on how to adapt active living activities for people with FASD. (only available in English)
3. **“Moving to Inclusion: Active Living Through Physical Education: Maximizing Opportunities for Students with a Disability” Educational Binder** – This binder is a comprehensive guide for instructors of physical education programs who wish to learn how to integrate students with disabilities in their programs. It gives practical guidelines on how programs can be modified so that everyone can participate. (available in both English and French)

We also became familiar with ALACD's annual Youth Exchange program. This program is based around a week of scheduled adapted activities where 50 youth from across Canada who have a disability come to Ottawa to create friendships, share experiences and try new activities. At the end of the exchange the participants become youth ambassadors and learn to become advocates in promoting active and healthy living when they return to their communities. Our partnership enabled ILRCs to educate youth about the Youth Exchange.

This year there was a dramatic increase in youth from ILRC communities participating in the event.

Throughout the duration of this project, staff from the ILRCs were taught to explore how their ILRCs could promote healthy lifestyle options for people with disabilities.

One of the objectives of the initiative was to develop a best practice model for developing healthy lifestyle/physical activity programming in ILRCs, hence the development of this tool. This model provides the ILRCs with examples of how to incorporate healthy lifestyles/active living into their core programming with or without funding. This document summarizes the core themes and provides options for integrating healthy lifestyle activities into existing programming. To supplement this model, there is also a list of website links which can be found in the Healthy Lifestyles section of the CAILC website at: [http://www.cailc.ca/CAILC/graphic/links/recreate\\_e.html](http://www.cailc.ca/CAILC/graphic/links/recreate_e.html).

Funding options vary from province to province leaving access to resources for Healthy Lifestyle programming unpredictable. Within this document we provide readers with various ideas on how to integrate active living choices throughout all core program theme areas on an ongoing basis or how to develop a separate program specifically for healthy lifestyles for Independent Living.

### **I. Core Program:** Independent Living Skills Development

ILRCs provide support to consumers with disabilities to enable them to develop Independent Living skills which allow them to live with dignity in their chosen communities and to access all aspects of society. One of the standards of IL Skills Development is that ILRC staff is dedicated to providing the tools necessary to teach individuals how to advocate on their own behalf. If needed, consumers have the option of having the IL Skills Development staff accompany them to initial meetings with organizations and service providers. ILRCs can provide IL skills development on a one-to-one basis, as well as by providing workshops and discussion groups. Consumers can learn more about active living and healthy lifestyles by attending workshops, discussion groups and information sessions.

Many people with disabilities face barriers due to a lack of access to recreational facilities. When individuals are faced with these barriers, the IL Skills Development program staff can help individuals learn how to advocate on their own behalf by providing them with the necessary tools that they can use to educate local recreation facilities on the benefits of accessibility and integrated programming. Consumers can become their own ambassadors and when advocating on their own behalf, they can provide a solutions based approach to help service providers with becoming inclusive of all community residents.

People with disabilities have every right to access all facilities and programs. Private businesses in Ontario must comply with the new Ontarians with Disabilities Act over a certain period of time. Educating businesses on the new legislation in a positive and proactive fashion may be extremely effective. Consumers can do this by applying skills which they learned about through participating in IL Skills Development activities.

One example of an ILRC which is teaching consumers about healthy living skills is the Centre serving the Niagara region. The Niagara Centre for Independent Living (NCIL) provides monthly workshops and seminars which focus on wellness of the mind, body and soul. Some examples of these are yoga classes, self-awareness training and self defense workshops as well as information sessions on good nutrition. These workshops and seminars can be provided by staff, volunteers, consumers or anyone in the community who has the appropriate expertise. Another activity which NCIL provides is one where the staff or volunteers accompany consumers to the grocery store or market to buy nutritious food so that they can learn how to make a healthy lunch.

Another example of an IL Skills Development Program is Winnipeg's individualized Leisure Education program which we learned about at the AGM in Montreal. A further example is the Disability Resource Centre in Kapuskasing which holds weekly workshops for consumers living with chronic pain. They also have guest speakers who come in on a monthly basis to talk about how various activities such as bowling, swimming and gardening can be adapted for people with disabilities.

### **II. Core Program:** Information and Networking

The Information and Networking service offered by ILRCs provides clear, accurate and up-to-date information that meets individual needs. It creates a positive impact for consumers and builds ongoing relationships between ILRCs and organizations in the community. As well, it ensures full accessibility by using alternate formats, plain language discussions and peer exchange, through sharing knowledge and experience. Some of the supports this core theme include are information about IL resources, disability related services, information about technical aids, community and social service resources, computer training and sports and recreation programs.

An ILRC can support individual consumers in the course of this program through a number of different ways. Firstly, it is important to provide healthy lifestyle, active living and recreation services information in an ILRC library and on its website. The ILRC library should include: up-to-date brochures on local recreation facilities, municipal pools, and other community events and activities. It is imperative to make sure that website links are active as there is nothing more discouraging than trying to visit a website only to find out that the link is inactive. As well, the ALACD has networks established in each province and territory which include hundreds of individuals and organizations connected with the active and healthy lifestyles of people with disabilities. CAILC's affiliate involvement in these networks will provide access to valuable contacts and information.

The South Saskatchewan ILC (SSILC) has a section in its library on healthy lifestyles which includes stories written by people with disabilities who lead healthy lifestyles and talks about how it has changed their lives. Consumers in the SSILC are also involved in the Regina in Motion program. Regina in Motion is a community initiative which is designed to increase the level of physical activity of Regina residents in the interests of improving their health and well-being. More information on this innovative program can be found at:

<http://www.reginainmotion.org/>. It is possible that other communities have a similar initiative in place.

All ILRCs can enhance their websites and resource libraries with the assistance of the Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability. The ALA has a wealth of valuable resources which can help ILRCs to support consumers in learning about active and healthy living in their communities. For example, there is a useful link to a national database of programs and activities listed on the ALA website which people with disabilities can get involved in to increase their level of activity. A link to this database can be found here:

<http://www.ala.ca/Content/Community&Events/Event%20Calendar.asp?langid=1>

The Canadian Paralympics Committee also has information on its website about how people with disabilities can get involved in active living. The link is: [www.paralympic.ca](http://www.paralympic.ca).

CAILC has an online list of website links in the Healthy Lifestyles section of its website which highlights the importance of healthy living. As well, CAILC and the ALACD have jointly developed a series of Healthy Lifestyles PowerPoint presentation slides which are on the internet. Some of the names of the slides are: Ten Point Accessibility Checklist, Benefits of an Active Lifestyle, Consumer Healthy Living Physical Activity and Healthy Lifestyles and lastly, Creating An Inclusive Environment. A link to these slides can be found here: [http://www.cailc.ca/CAILC/graphic/projects/health/presentation\\_e.html](http://www.cailc.ca/CAILC/graphic/projects/health/presentation_e.html).

### **III. Core Program: Research and Community Development**

Research and Community Development focuses on demonstrating IL models of services and delivery. The Participatory Action Research model most used in IL recognizes that persons with disabilities have the expertise in determining what works and what does not work for them. This is the key to developing programs and services that benefit the whole community. Partnerships formed between ILRCs and community organizations can support the realization of full participation of consumers in community planning and growth. Some examples of Research and Community Development activities would be: providing disability awareness training sessions to groups in the community and undertaking facility and web accessibility audits. Community Development can also encompass developing IL grounded models for various populations and environments. This enables new solutions to emerge to provide unique and responsive methods of support at the local, regional and national level.

Through its Leisure Resource Committee, ILRC Thunder Bay has created partnerships amongst itself and fourteen different health and municipal agencies. One of the outcomes of these partnerships was offering financial subsidies to recreation and leisure program admission fees when needed. Another outcome was the implementation of the Personal Attendant for Leisure (PAL) card. This card enables a person with a disability who requires an attendant to attend and participate in designated City of Thunder Bay programs and facilities. It recognizes that the person with a disability requires an attendant and the attendant will not be charged a fee. The City of Kitchener also accepts the PAL card at its facilities.

An important outcome of creating partnerships between local facilities and ILRCs is the mutual learning that results. ILRC staff, volunteers and consumers can educate staff and volunteers at local facilities about disability sensitivity and accessibility issues. The ALA has some information about disability sensitivity on its website which can be found here: <http://cms.nortia.org/Org/Org23/Images/PDFs/wordswithdignity.pdf>.

CAILC's Literacy for Independent Living project website has guidelines on how to make facilities wheelchair accessible which can be helpful when doing accessibility audits. It also has tips on how to communicate with people who are visually impaired and people who are deaf or hard of hearing. Although these documents were written for literacy practitioners, they are universal and can be applied to any situation. These tips can be found here: <http://www.nald.ca/lil/english/aboutlil/wheelchairs.htm>. The Active Living and CAILC PowerPoint presentations are very important tools with regards to conducting workshops for mainstream recreational facilities on the principles of universal design, and disability awareness. In turn, staff at local recreation facilities can educate ILRC staff, volunteers and consumers about what programs they have available and how they can be adapted to meet the needs of people with disabilities.

#### **IV. Core Program: Peer Support**

The Peer Support program is designed to provide opportunities for people with disabilities to share knowledge and experiences. As well, Peer Support gives consumers the opportunity to reduce isolation, and to develop leadership skills. It also assists consumers in exercising their rights and responsibilities. It can be offered on a one-to-one basis or in a group held in an environment of mutual respect and trust. Some examples of Peer Support activities are: opportunities to join social events, recreational activities and craft sessions offered by the ILRC.

The Ottawa-Carleton ILC (OCILC) has a regular Peer Support group which meets at a therapeutic pool giving consumers a chance to go swimming. Also, the Ottawa ILRC now offers regular adaptive yoga sessions.

The Independent Living Centre London and Area incorporates active living in its Peer Support program by having weekly exercise classes which are adapted for people with disabilities.

The Regroupement de Personnes Handicapées, Région de Haut-Richelieu also has an exercise class and offers golf for its consumers with disabilities. Wheelchair curling has become a popular Peer Support activity at Breaking Down Barriers in Collingwood, at the Disability Resource Centre in Richmond and also at the Independent Living Resource Centre in Sudbury.

## A Healthy Lifestyle Program

In communities where funding is available, creative and innovative consumer based programming can emerge. Below are examples of job descriptions that Centres have offered to lead such initiatives.

### *Leisure Resources Project Co-ordinator (ILRC Thunder Bay)*

The Project Coordinator will be responsible for the project management of the Leisure Resources Committee, and support the Leisure Resources Collaborative Project under the direction of the Executive Director. This position will be directly responsible for working with area recreational facilities to implement the removal of barriers for persons with disabilities.

This position will also be responsible for the collection of information relating to consumer needs as it relates to programs and services in the Thunder Bay community, as well as best practice information as it relates to adaptive recreation programs for persons with disabilities globally.

The coordinator will also have strong volunteer management skills, as well as event planning skills. They will be responsible for the training and support to volunteers throughout the project, as well as the implementation of a workshop to educate organizations regarding the best practices.

Direct and positive interaction with local organizations throughout the project is imperative. The Project Coordinator will be goal oriented; have honed time management and project management skills; and be able to troubleshoot and plan for potential setbacks.

### *Leisure Education Co-ordinator (ILRC Winnipeg)*

- To design, negotiate and implement Leisure Education and related programs that develops individual confidence, skills and lifestyles goals as related to the program.
- To provide support and direction to Leisure Education Consultants in the ongoing implementation of the program.

#### **DUTIES:**

1. To co-ordinate the Leisure Education Program which promotes the development of individual leisure pursuits through a highly individualized process of community leisure involvement.
2. To provide leadership to the Leisure Education team and related staff through regular team meetings and individual contacts, including their work related to the program and participants.
3. To explore, co-ordinate, and assist where requested, in the development of personal support networks which will provide the Consumer with appropriate resource/support connections i.e.: in volunteering, education, employment, leisure, skill development and advocacy.

4. Development of the program through required community networking in areas such as: computer loans, skill workshops, complimentary passes, calendar of events, community volunteer development and other areas as the need arises in the program.
5. Promotion of the Leisure Education program in the community educating students, service providers, recreation professionals and the community at large enabling acceptance and inclusion of people with disabilities in their community.
6. Ongoing presentations to Home Care Case Co-ordinators to maintain their awareness of the Leisure Education program.
7. Continuous development of the Leisure Education program in response to consumer needs providing program expansion without duplication of service.
8. Recruit and co-ordinate volunteers supporting the various administrative components of the program.
9. Complete the administrative duties of the program as required, i.e. entry/exit forms, admission/separation forms, review of incoming Adult Day Program referral forms, recording program statistics, quarterly reports, compile and update a data base of community resources, submit quarterly Home Care Invoices and other duties as required.
10. Develop and deliver the Leisure Education Orientation to consumers upon entry to the program.
11. To participate in ILRC Staff Meetings to share observations, feedback and recommendation as well as staff support for brainstorming, philosophical direction, policy and procedures etc.
12. To take the initiative to extend personal knowledge and skills by participating in seminars, staff development workshops, self-initiated reading/investigation with respect to consumers' specific needs.
13. Recruitment and management of staff and volunteers, including summer students.

### **Conclusion**

With the support of various programs run by the ILRCs, consumers can benefit greatly by living an active and healthy lifestyle as they define it. They can attend workshops where they will learn about the importance of nutrition and how to advocate for themselves when faced with any barriers which might prevent them from participating in recreation programs. Another way that ILRCs can support consumers is by maintaining a resource library of active living resources as well as an online list of active living resources. This can be done with the help of the ALACD and CAILC's online active living tools. ILRCs can partner with their local recreation facilities to help them eliminate barriers which might prevent people with disabilities from gaining access to their facilities. In turn, local recreation facilities can inform ILRCs what programs they have to offer for people with disabilities. Peer Support groups can provide active living opportunities to consumers by conducting yoga classes, exercise classes and even accompanying them to a swimming pool or curling rink. In closing, the best way to set up an Active Living program at an ILRC, is to look at the needs and interests of staff, volunteers and consumers.

Finally, it does not necessarily have to be a financial strain on the Centre to offer healthy lifestyle choices for people with disabilities. The key is to have staff and volunteers with the capacity to incorporate healthy and active living options in the Centre's core programming to benefit all consumers. Furthermore, it's important to explore how innovative partnerships involving consumers can enable the full, active and integrated participation of people with disabilities.