

Cross-sector Partnership with the Recreation Sector: Sports Associations and Leagues

Working together to create communities where it is easier for all children to live healthy lives.



Background

The Healthy Kids Community Challenge Middlesex (HKCCM) worked with cross-sector partners to promote physical activity, healthy eating and hydration, as well as reduced screen-time, with a focus to influence environment level change (e.g., physical, and social environment). “[Lead the Change](#)” was a foundational message that included building on existing community programs by providing funds and/or equipment, developing and disseminating educational tools, providing training and educational opportunities, and offering an award program. Community leaders were encouraged to change organizational practices in their respective organizations to support healthy choices. One way they did this was by developing partnerships with the recreation sector (e.g., recreation facilities and programs, sports associations and leagues).

This case study focuses on the challenges, strategies and actions to inspire others’ to develop partnerships with local sports associations and leagues to promote Bring Back Healthy Sideline Snacks Project. The purpose of this project was to work with local youth sports teams to promote and support healthy snacks and beverages. The aim is to highlight overall challenges experienced, recommended strategies and actions taken by the HKCCM that could serve as examples for others interested in working with those in the recreation sector.



Challenges Experienced

- **Shifting culture, changing practices and public perception:** Asking this sector to change the types of food provided at practices to be healthier (e.g., removing juice, adding fruit and vegetables) and asking them to remove or limit certain types of food (e.g., those with high sugar, or processed) incurred the risk of being perceived as being prescriptive and was referred to by some program participants as being the “food police”, leading to resistance to make this change.
- **Lack of a champion:** In some communities, there were difficulties in finding a person willing to champion the project and activities.

- **Hard to reach the decision-maker:** Using only a 'top-down approach' to make change makes it hard to reach those who have the power to make decisions and ensure the change happens. More strategies to make change happens at all levels (e.g., coaches, parents) were needed.



Overall Recommended Strategies from HKCCB Experiences

- **Work together for change:** Provide educational opportunities and engage in productive dialogue to identify how everyone has a part in making small changes in their environment. Engage in shared brainstorming activities and facilitate conversations to have partners consider possibilities for creating a healthier environment.
- **Build relationships and trust:** Invest time to build relationships with partners to understand the sector and build trust. Be able to articulate back to partners your understanding of the sector and the organizational barriers they may experience and opportunities to leverage the relationship.
- **Model clear communication:** Clearly communicate through various ways (i.e. verbally and in writing) the type of support your organization can provide and communicate expectations for both implementing activities and participating as a partner.
- **Find champions:** Reach out and find well-networked or influential people who will champion the cause. They will infect others to want to be part of the change. HKCCM reached out to coaches to invite them to be champions for the project and key messages of the initiative.
- **Highlight and recognize those who have made the change:** Illustrate how organizations have implemented changes and encourage others to make similar changes to their environment.



Examples of Actions

- Highlighted individual teams to celebrate their success of incorporating healthy snacks as part of their sports program by developing a video that showcases 16 County of Middlesex teams that stepped up to the challenge to bring back healthy sideline snacks.
- Used social media as a strategy to communicate information and engage partners. Encouraged people to send their photos of changes made for social posting.

- Secured endorsement from sports associations and teams for the creation of a set of snacking guidelines by changing of the wording from ‘policy’ to ‘guideline.’ One sports association ([Strathroy United FC](#)) adopted this as an association-wide practice.
- Hosted a Lead the Change Collaborative Community Leader’s Forum for leaders across the County of Middlesex to share education and provide a learning environment so they could consider how to champion environmental changes that support healthy living.
- Developed a number of resources (e.g., fact sheets, reports, pledges, active play ideas and toolkits) to support building healthy recreation environments.

Lesson Learned

Mobilize your community for collective action. Create a shared understanding of how everyone can make small changes in their environment to support healthy living.



About Keeping Kids Healthy through Collective Impact

This case study is part of an environmental scan serving to inform the Keeping Kids Healthy through Collective Impact project, an initiative that aims to build cross-sector linkages between health and social sectors in order to promote health equity and better address the social determinants of health. By sharing broadly the results from this case study, it is intended that others may find examples of strategies that can be applied in a variety of local contexts similar to those that were observed during the Healthy Kids Community Challenge activities as ways to promote cross-sector partnerships.

- To learn more about how this community is building cross-sector partnerships, visit [County of Middlesex](#).
- For other ideas to build cross-sector partnerships, visit the Ontario Public Health Association’s [Keeping Kids Healthy through Collective Impact project](#).
- We want to hear from you! Visit [opha.on.ca/KeepingKidsHealthy.aspx](#) to learn how to write your own case study and submit for publication.

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