

On The Move

by Jennifer Fenton

Cet article trace l'histoire du projet «On the Move».

"On The Move" began as a concept that initiated a project, that turned into a movement, that uses a commu-

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nity development process, and when put all together can be described as an approach (adapted from Charlotte Denny, 1995). On The Move encourages non-active teenage girls to participate in a fun-filled, supportive, low skill level, team recreational activity.

Based on years of research about the lack of sport activity programs designed specifically for girls, combined with the overwhelming successes of the initial On The Move projects implemented in Ottawa and Port Coquitlam, Sport Canada was convinced to further develop the On The Move concept. Subsequently, Promotion Plus—the B.C. Organization for Girls and Women in Physical Activity and Sport was contracted to implement an On The Move pilot project in British Columbia. Parks and Recreation organizations from the Lower Mainland, Northern B.C., and Vancouver Island participated in the pilot project and as a result contributed to the development of a comprehensive handbook that shares these valuable and practical experiences.

Years of experience gathered when the team responsible for spearheading the pilot project met to initiate the process. Discussion kept steering towards the many projects that now sit on shelves or initiatives that disappeared within a year. We were determined not to follow suit. We shared our experiences and relied on our feminist intuition as a guide. We formed some principles to guide our process. We wanted the project to: touch a diverse cultural representation of girls; acknowledge the socio-economic status of girls and women; challenge the traditional supply and demand theory of programming; consider regional representation of pilot sites; involve strong committed leaders in the field; be flexible and dynamic to reflect the needs of the pilot groups; encourage individual interpretation of the pilot project; recognize gradual progress and success; secure commitments beyond the

pilot project; assist in creating a tool that stands alone, is accessible, and reflects many voices; operate effectively within a low budget, yet accompanied by thorough personal and professional support.

With these guiding principles in mind we commenced the pilot process. The following paragraphs share the key characteristics of the process as a model to spark ideas for others challenging the mainstream approaches to developing community initiatives. The action process involved six phases: recruiting, educating, listening, supporting, learning, and recognizing.

Recruiting

The recruiting of pilot delegates and sites began with a telephone survey of recreation directors and programmers throughout the province. The purpose was to share the project with them and then listen. Experience told us to activate sites which involved strong leaders, and learn from them. From these selections we then entertained other important variables such as gender, including the Aboriginal community, and regional distribution in clusters. The purpose of clusters was to ensure regional support in a new venture as well as to secure a network for nurturing new sites to follow after the pilot. Other experienced stakeholders not involved directly with the pilot were invited to be a part of the Advisory Committee.

Educating

The initial plan was to host an educational and motivational workshop to kick off the pilot followed by visits to the field. We invited key players, advisory committee members, teenage girls (program recipients), and interested others. We shared experiences of similar projects as well as academic and practical issues surrounding the project. We provided a forum for discussion acknowledging the power of different experiences. We encouraged diversity and endorsed creative approaches to implementing On The Move in their own communities. We recognized the importance of not generalizing experiences or initiatives among the communities.

Listening

Once the pilot delegates returned to their communities we remained in contact to monitor and support their progress. We listened to the pilot delegates and heard the importance of getting the group together again to share their realities, experiences, barriers, and concerns. It wasn't until the delegates tried to implement the On The Move

concept in their communities that they realized the system was not as receptive nor as flexible as they had anticipated. We never undervalued the degree of difficulty in attempting something new, in essence creating change in a system that has been perpetuated for years. By the end of the project, we had hosted three similar listening, sharing, and supporting workshops, each one more inspiring than the next.

Supporting

Throughout the process we played a supporting role. We shared a concept and allowed the concept to take shape within each community, and we enthusiastically encouraged individual interpretation of the project and pace of action. Along with follow-up telephone support, our team made personal visits to the sites and met with as many involved individuals as was possible—we brainstormed and listened. We redefined success helping them understand that any progress was important progress; that making a difference for one girl was as important as making a difference to many. In a world that honours quantitative measures it was critical to challenge this notion and re-focus on the purpose of the project.

Learning and recognizing

The final workshop brought all the pilot delegates together again, along with new national recruits. The first part of the day was more sharing and learning while the end of the day highlighted a celebratory dinner complete with government dignitaries and other guests who recognized all of the participants in a special way. The end result found us swimming in an exhilarating wave of experiences. The new recruits left feeling that they were joining an essential movement; they were motivated and inspired. The pilot delegates knew they had been a part of some-

thing bigger than they had anticipated. They exuded pride and ownership.

Conclusion

Not everyone achieved their goals, not all sites followed through. Other priorities, other directions, new positions, or family crises caused them to deviate from their intended paths. We understood these unique complexities and also understood that our project and our goals would always be more our priority than theirs. On The Move projects continue today and the trickle effect is occurring as we recognize On The Move initiatives in many brochures around the province and across the country. New organizations are forming and exciting new ventures and partnerships are transpiring. We feel one of our most significant successes was the ability to create a movement that has energy of its own and consequently the commitment and signature from others that we have not personally guided. The following comments from our pilot delegates were elicited during an independent process evaluation:

It opened my eyes that there are a lot of girls who aren't active... that what I read about really is going on in our community.

In our Fall program we had three participants; we were really discouraged. Then a project team member arrived and changed our lives. She was so excited that we even had three participants and inspired us to go on. She really made a difference as far as my outlook was concerned.

From our point of view, they went from step to step and followed the right road in helping us get going. They had a handle on the right issues.

Sometimes you get the feeling that you're the only one out there doing it. Vancouver was a great opportunity to meet with others and share the good sides and the bad sides.

We feel strongly that we followed our guiding principles and that these led us to success.

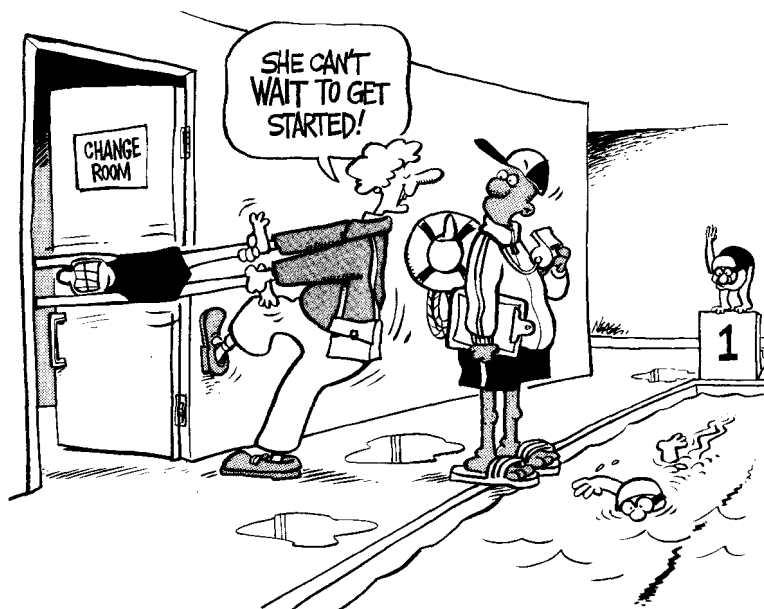
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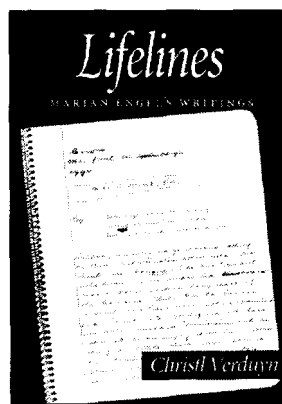
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