



SPACE PUBLIC ACCESS TO COMMUNITY SPACE EVERYWHERE

Top Ten Reasons to Support Better Community Access to Public Space

1. Improve student performance

Studies have demonstrated the positive impact participation in school-based after-hours programming has by promoting greater parental involvement in school, greater student engagement, increased commitment to homework, readiness to learn, and more positive educational outcomes for children and youth. Summer and after-school programs also can reduce the back-to-school learning gap. (Kane, T., University of California, 2004; William T Grant Foundation and Royal Commission on Learning, Ontario, 1994)

2. Encourage artistic and cultural expression to create vibrant communities and expand capacity for learning

Opportunities for communities to 'come together' in community spaces involving the arts, dance, or music increase social connectedness and nurture the development of cultural and community life. In addition, there is increasing research on the value of the arts to learning and brain development and learning outcomes. (Ontario Arts Council 1997; and OMG Inc, et al. National Endowment for the Arts, 1991)

3. Promote life-long learning

A wide range of pre-school, school-age, youth, and adult education, newcomer upgrading/ESL programs depend upon access to affordable space such as schools. A community culture of lifelong learning creates a more educated, skilled, competitive and responsive labour force and more informed and interesting citizens. (Royal Commission on Learning, Vol II, Ontario, 1994)

4. Use of Public space is good value for taxpayers

Providing after-hours access to space maximizes use of space, giving taxpayers better returns on their investments. Research clearly demonstrated spin-off savings from after school recreation programs for children and young adults (e.g., lower costs for social assistance, counselling, and health services). (Browne, G. McMaster University, 1999 as cited in Community Dispatch, Community Development Halton, Vol 5 #2, November 2000)

5. Encourage physical activity, healthy lifestyle, and save money

The Romanow Commission (2002) concluded that a 10% increase in physical activity by Canadians could save \$150 million a year in direct health care costs and \$5 billion a year in indirect cost. Increasing access to sport and physical activity programs in schools and after-schools, weekends, and summer can have a positive impact on lowering the rates of childhood obesity and the onset of childhood diabetes. (Sports Matters Group, September 2005; Pre-Budget Brief to Federal Standing Committee on Finance)



6. Promote safer neighbourhoods and crime-prevention

Canadian and international evaluations demonstrated that quality after-school programs are cost effective. They yield measurable benefits within three years and reduce crime by 25 to 50% within 10 years. (Canadian Council on Social Development, Web site, Crime Prevention through Social Development, "When kids flourish, crime doesn't", 2007). Former Chief Justice of Ontario, Roy McMurtry has noted the importance of access to recreational opportunities for children and youth to reduce crime. (Toronto Star, January 8, 2001)

7. Increase opportunities for newcomer settlement and integration

English as a Second Language (ESL) and settlement programs provide essential supports to newcomers and help them adapt to their new life in Canada. Social-recreational, employment or training opportunities decreases isolation, build networks among newcomers and promote faster integration. (Basu, R., Department of Geography, York University. Vol 1, No 1. Education, Citizenship and Social Justice. 59-82, 2006)

8. Support and sustain free or low-fee community programs to foster access and inclusion

Free or affordable programs are needed to ensure access for lower income families and households. The cost of using public space is often passed on to participants creating barriers to participation for populations who might most benefit from these activities or leading to cancelled programs. Participation in affordable, accessible and recreational activities should be included in any provincial anti-poverty strategies. The Canadian Council on Social Development reports that there is a growing gap between children in higher and lower income families when it comes to participation in social and recreational activities. Lower income families struggle to meet basic needs and cannot afford fees for programs. (Canadian Council on Social Development, "The Progress of Canada's Children and Youth", 2006)

9. Promote volunteerism and community participation (for all age groups)

Volunteers are the hallmark of a healthy community. Their contribution to Canadian Organizations is estimated at 6.5 million volunteers hours annually, adding \$14 billion of volunteer labour. This significant contribution increases the non profit sector capacities in Ontario and across Canada. Freeing up access to community space creates opportunities for volunteers, social networks, skill-development and civic engagement which combine to create a healthier more engaged community. (National Survey of Giving and Volunteerism, 2001)

10. Promote community well-being

When "doors are open" in our Ontario public spaces after-school, on weekends and in the summer, we move forward on making our public spaces the active hub of their communities, full of supports and activities. Public space is a vital resource for community groups and the non-profit sector to partner and address local needs of children, youth, adults, seniors and newcomers. Schools and other public spaces are voting centres during elections, meeting places for the community, and provide refuge during civic emergencies. The contribution of community use of public space to community well-being is enormous. (Nozik, Marcia. Healthy Cities, Healthy Communities, Canadian Dimension, 1998). The full potential of better community access to school space remains untapped. The time to open it up is now!

Produced by: the SPACE Coalition, January 2008

For more info go to www.socialplanningtoronto.org and look for link to SPACE reports, or email: ljohnston@socialplanningtoronto.org