



Physical well-being

A healthy mind and body

More than half of Canada's children and youth are not active enough for healthy growth, says the Public Health Agency of Canada. And experts agree that being inactive is a major factor in obesity.

As we have discussed in our past two issues, obesity is of great concern in Canada and other Western nations. Governments are responding with healthy living programs, and this country is taking steps to educate Canadians regarding their need to be physically active. Canada's Sport Minister Michael Chong has said he hopes to get 71 percent of teenagers between 14 and 17 working out over the next six years, compared with the 66 percent who currently do. He is also introducing a tax credit for young people taking part in athletics and other forms of physical activity such as dance classes or exercise groups.

Because youths spend so much of their time in schools, school nutrition programs and physical education classes are another focus of Canadian efforts.

A new report by the Heart and Stroke Foundation, called *Tipping the Scales of Progress*, says a dramatic increase in school time dedicated to fitness is required to help turn back the obesity epidemic in children and prevent an explosion in the

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number of Canadians living with chronic illnesses such as heart disease and stroke. The report recommends that elementary and secondary school students get at least one hour of mandatory structured physical

activity at school every day. Currently, primary school children get as little as 30 minutes of physical education weekly, and physical fitness is not a required course after Grade 10 in most of the country.

In fact, Canada's physical activity guides for children and youth recommend 90 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity per day.

Youth development organizations like the Cadet Program can obviously be part of the solution to inactivity among young people.

"In today's technology-oriented world of computers and video games, youths need physical outlets more than ever," says Susan Mackie, director of communications for Scouts Canada. "Exercise promotes fitness, mental health and self-esteem; encouraging outdoor activities for

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Maj Ken Fells, deputy commanding officer of CSTC Argonaut in Gagetown, N.B. and a former physical education teacher, leads cadets during morning physical training classes at the camp. Physical fitness is integral to the CSTC program. (Photo by CSTC Argonaut public affairs)

our youth will help them build a firm lifelong foundation of fitness and the self-fulfillment that will make them productive citizens. Physical fitness and outdoor activity go hand in hand in all Scouts Canada programs.

CADET PROGRAM EFFORTS

Promoting physical fitness and a healthy lifestyle among cadets has long been an aim of the Cadet Program. Physical fitness is particularly integral to the cadet summer training centre (CSTC) program; however, each element has its own approach to local physical fitness training.

Every army cadet participates in a fitness test each year. As part of mandatory training, components of physical fitness are taught, with examples of activities/sports to help improve the cadets' fitness and promote a healthy lifestyle.

Sea cadets learn about basic nutrition and exercise, based on Health Canada's physical activity guide.

The air cadet fitness program is based on the Canada Fitness Award—a program of six fitness performance tests that give an overall picture of a cadet's physical fitness. Crests are awarded, based on achievement levels. Senior cadets who have attained the excellence level help motivate younger cadets. 'Sensible living' specialists are also invited to squadrons to talk about hygiene and nutrition, drugs, alcohol and smoking. Although there is no formal test, cadets have to attend presentations to complete second-year training.

As a result of the Cadet Program Update, the aim to promote physical well-being among cadets is more clearly defined than ever. "Physical wellness is not a state of perfection, but rather, a life-long process of healthy mind and body development," according to Cadet Program parameters.

If the Cadet Program is successful in its aim, cadets will develop an understanding of the benefits of fitness and a healthy lifestyle. This understanding, combined with ongoing participation in fitness activities and recreational sports, will help them develop positive attitudes and behaviours that will benefit them far beyond their years in Cadets.

In the updated program, personal fitness and healthy living, as well as recreational sports, will be common activities across the elements. The approach will be consistent, with an elemental flavour. Corps and squadrons will pursue physical fitness through a range of activities; some—like recreational sports and biathlon—will be common to the three elements. In the updated CSTC program, one set of fitness and sports-related courses is being developed for use by all three elements. Improvements to evening and weekend extra-curricular activities are also being explored. ✱



Are we doing enough?

Are we doing enough to promote physical well-being among cadets? The 'reviews' are mixed, but overall, there seems to be a lot going on. Here's what some officers have to say.

Capt Garnet

Eskritt, CO of 294

Air Cadet Squadron

in Chatham, Ont.,

says some cadets in

his squadron walked

more than 1000 kilo-

metres this year to

prepare for the

Nijmegen March in

Holland in July. As

part of the CF con-

tingent, they walked

160 kilometres in

four days, with 10-

kilogram rucksacks on their backs.



The march originated in 1909 with Dutch military efforts to increase the long-distance marching and weight-carrying ability of infantry soldiers. It has evolved into a prestigious international event that the CF has participated in since the Second World War. During the war, Canadian soldiers liberated the area around Nijmegen.

Capt Eskritt says, "The walk was physically and mentally very difficult, but with proper training and team work, it was a rewarding experience for everyone."

The Canadian contingent is made up of Regular and Reserve members, cadets and veterans from across the country. ✱

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NCdt Richard Fortin, an instructor with 37 Sea Cadet Corps COURAGEOUS in London, Ont., says his corps has monthly sports nights following ceremonial divisions and throughout the year, holistic fitness classes for cadets in all phases of training. A senior cadet who had aged out

prepared the holistic classes on exercise and diet. Cadets learned everything from how to live a healthy lifestyle to how to stretch and exercise without injury.

Beyond that, however, 20 corps cadets took part in a physical fitness challenge at the end of the training year—a 500-kilometre bike ride over four days!

Training for the ride was rigorous, including moderate and intermediate rides indoors, as well as outdoor cycling over increasing distances. Cadets had to complete a minimum number of training rides to qualify for the main ride. This required them to train from eight to 10 hours a week over and above their mandatory/optional cadet training.

“The cadets were looking for more rides, rather than less,” says NCdt

Fortin. “They were very energetic and there was never a shortage of enthusiasm.”

Not only did the cadets become physically fit and have fun, but they also supported the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario in its work to address youth obesity. The corps partnered with the London branch of the foundation for the marathon ride. The foundation launched the ride, talked to the corps about healthy eating choices and provided materials for presentations.

For their part, the cadets raised funds during their training rides to support the work of the foundation. The cadet who raised the most money won a personal computer. An added incentive for sponsors was the chance to become a reviewing officer for ceremonial divisions or for the annual inspection, based on the level of sponsorship. *



Lt Llorra Brown, an instructor with 531 Air Cadet Squadron in Trail, B.C., bemoans the fact that not all CSTCs require morning physical training, and some have even bused cadets to breakfast in past summers.

She says the amount of physical activity that cadets participate in may not be enough when one considers how much time they spend in classroom lectures and adds that it's too bad that not all interested cadets have the opportunity to compete in

biathlon. “The growing popularity of biathlon is phenomenal,” she says.

Sometimes, however, small things make a difference. At 531 Squadron, instructors encourage cadets to walk and run as much as possible. At the gliding site, they all help to launch the glider. When they move to and from the runway, they run.

“Cadets need positive leadership,” says Lt Brown. “When they are dropped off to the athletic staff for physical training and their own flight/platoon/divisional staff are elsewhere, they get the idea that physical activity is only for cadets. We should all participate with our cadets—not only to help enforce the idea of a healthy lifestyle, but to reiterate the importance of it for a lifetime.” She believes that if cadets see their leaders demonstrating healthy lifestyles, the chances of them learning to lead healthier lives increases. “For many cadets, CIC officers and civilian instructors are the most positive and sometimes the only real adult role models they have.” *



Maj Chris Barron, chief instructor and deputy CO of CSTC Whitehorse, Yukon, says the balanced and wide-ranging physical activities offered through various courses at Whitehorse are working. “I believe most cadets at our facility return home in better physical shape than they would if they had been home all summer,” he says. “This has been proven in the fitness testing, which sees cadets achieve better results on their second testing at the end of camp.” *



planning a whole evening of circuits: groups of cadets will spend 15-20 minutes at each station, learning various methods of exercise, as well as proper eating.”

Another idea she would like to see implemented in the Cadet Program is a “fit and slim challenge”. Corps/squadrons of equal size would compete, with everyone (including officers) weighing in and doing a Canada Fitness test at start-up. Results could be sent to a regional/provincial/national site. A second weigh-in and fitness test would follow a few months later, with another at the end of the training year. “This would supplement sensible living classes and sports nights/CO's parades,” she says. “I think this would be relatively easy, with the goal being to lose, say, 10 percent of the total weight of your corps/squadron, or some such strange number”. To start, she would like to challenge other corps/squadrons in northwest Alberta. Recognition, she says, could be a feature article in *Cadence*.

“If we don't start doing something soon—not just talking about healthy lifestyle choices—we are going to start seeing major health issues with our kids and officers alike,” Capt Zmaeff says. *

Lt(N) Keith Nutbrown, CO of 349 Sea Cadet Corps in Chilliwack, B.C., agrees with experts who say that the largest contributor to teen obesity is the sedentary lifestyle of today's youth. “Television, Internet and video games were not available to the same extent to previous generations,” he says. He's not certain that the current program can do much to fix the problem.

Although he schedules a fitness program into his corps' training schedule, he says the nine periods are not enough to see specific fitness improvements, but provide more of an introduction. *



Maj JoAnn MacDonald, CO of 583 Air Cadet Squadron in Maple Ridge, B.C., says “Teen obesity is an issue that my squadron has been thinking long and hard about.”

The squadron schedules a sports night every two months, but it goes beyond that to promote a healthy lifestyle. “One of our solutions is Operation Get Fit—an annual multi-squadron exercise designed to fulfill the cadet physical fitness performance objective,” she says. Started by 861 Air Cadet Squadron in Abbotsford three years ago, it grew to a wing exercise this year, with all Fraser Valley Wing squadrons participating.

The exercise took place over the long May weekend and included cycling, orienteering, leadership tasking scenarios and a games tabloid of inter-squadron sports. Each leg of the bike route was 47 kilometres, with the route developed to provide a safe riding environment for everyone.

For approximately 13 weeks before the exercise, participants completed five hours of physical fitness a week—mostly on their own. “This prepared them both mentally and physically for the challenge,” says Maj MacDonald.

A checkout ride before the weekend ensured cadets and bikes were ready for the trip. “It was a great opportunity to increase their level of physical fitness, have fun and use exercise towards Duke of Edinburgh credits,” she says. *

