

# activate

# your students



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## The Active Living Alliance

Your resource for leadership and adapted physical education ideas

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## Activating Youth - Exchanges Canada

Earlier this summer, the Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability in partnership with YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada, organized the inaugural gathering of youth with disabilities from across the country. Fifty-five teenagers ranging in age from 14 to 17 years converged on Brock University in St. Catharines, Ontario for five days of **FUN**, information, education and recreation this past June. The ultimate goal of the exchange was to give the teens an opportunity to interact with their peers from coast to coast while simultaneously providing positive experiences about the benefits of active living.

The youth were presented with a variety of diverse activities spanning from cultural and personal development opportunities to sport and recreational activities. Some teens ventured to the YMCA for a **SWIM** or out to the marina to try **SAILING** while others opted for dry land to go **HIGH ROPE ADVENTURING** or to

participate in **WHEELCHAIR TENNIS GAMES**. Every activity was designed so that all youth, regardless of ability, could participate in the pursuit of active living.

In addition to the broad exposure to cultural and personal differences, new attempts at various activities, and the making of new friends; the Exchange participants and leaders were able to discover tremendous qualities about themselves while making **MEMORIES** that would last a lifetime. Amber Ayers, one of the youth participants said, "I feel that I really learned about myself and what I can do". Taking this knowledge and new found sense of achievement back to every corner of Canada, we can be sure that these individuals will share their experiences with family, friends, teachers and their communities to act as leaders in the promotion of active living for people with disabilities.

The Youth Exchange, which was held in conjunction with the National Forum on Physical Activity and Disability, is one of the interventions that the Alliance is using to reach their goal of a 20% reduction in physical inactivity by the year 2003 for people with disabilities.

The Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability is currently applying for funding to host a youth exchange in 2002. We are optimistic that an exchange will be scheduled for the summer of 2002 in Ottawa.



## Everybody Plays ... EVERYBODY WINS

**A**t Bloorview MacMillan Children's Centre School in Toronto, Ontario, kids learn more than their ABC's. They learn about **INCLUSION**. The school is one of the first in North America to have initiated a **REVERSE-INTEGRATION** program where able-bodied children from the Toronto community are invited to attend a school for kids with physical disabilities.

Students and teachers alike have quickly found that making accommodations becomes a focus when classmates try to find ways to work and play together. Games and activities are structured in such a way that students are encouraged to brainstorm together to find ways to accommodate various challenges and disabilities. For example, one game involves the children pretending to be parrots flying through the rainforest in search of food. In order to play the game, the 'parrots' have to fly with, and be connected to a partner. But not all partners are able to hold hands.

"Instead of holding hands, what could I do?" asks Paul Alcamo, one of the teachers of the reverse-integration class.

"Use a noodle," calls out Megan Chan, age five.

"What if your partner can't hold onto the noodle?" the teacher wants to know.

"You could have someone tie it to your arm," says Philip Rosa another five-year-old.

"Great idea," Mr. Alcamo replies, as he attaches the noodle to his wrist with a piece of cloth. "Now we can stick together to find the fruit tree."

"By engaging the kids in **PROBLEM-SOLVING**, we try to adapt equipment or the play space or the actions in a game so that every child finds a way to play," Mr. Alcamo explains. "We give kids the power to include by giving them knowledge about their differences."

The able-bodied students are perhaps the big winners in the program because they are gaining an understanding that few people without disabilities will ever have. It's all about teaching kids that different isn't better or worse and that finding ways to include all people should be automatic, not a matter of choice.

For more information about the reverse-integration class please contact the Bloorview MacMillan Children's Centre at (416) 424-3866. You can also obtain information about developing physical activity programs suitable for kids of all abilities by contacting the Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability at 1-800-771-0663.

**This article is adapted from the January 2001 issue of Sites & Sounds, a staff newsletter of Bloorview MacMillan Children's Centre.**

*Instead of holding hands, Thomas Stephenson (left) and Gavin Hull use a foam swim noodle to stick together during a gym activity where they pretend they're a flock of parrots.*



## Administrators: Integral for Activating students

by Leslie Walker, Vice-Principal W.O. Mitchell  
Elementary School Ottawa, Ontario

**A**ctivating students in physical education means activating teachers! As an administrator it is my job to provide opportunities for teachers to become aware of the possibilities for their students. Workshops, curriculum connections, resource material, in-service training, collegial networking and communication facilitation all contribute to the enrichment of teachers and ultimately the students. It is also necessary for administrators to work closely with school councils to develop strategies for program implementation and for financial support to enhance programming at all levels.

Breaking down barriers with the intent of providing the best possible options for my students is my job. Barriers can be attitudinal, physical or financial and if these exist they must be embraced and broken down to ensure for positive outcomes. Currently, in our physical education classes we have experienced great success with our inclusive approach. That is, including students with disabilities in physical education classes. Students with disabilities are expected to attend regular physical education classes and are welcomed by their peers. Physical education specialists teach the junior and intermediate programs and they are knowledgeable about modifications and adaptations which provide essential and meaningful opportunities for students with disabilities. Without specialist teachers the comfort level in teaching physical education decreases, impacting on the quality of programming for all students. An administrator needs to be aware of these limitations in order for support or training to be made available. Observing classes, talking with teachers about their curriculum plans, discussing individual program plans (IPP/IEP) with classroom teachers, communicating with parents and supporting professionals are all necessary practices to enable educators to better meet the needs of their students and for teachers to feel more confident in the work that they are doing.

An active student is a healthy student and with each and every activity inclusive practices must exist. Intramurals, for example, can be organized for all grades and can be designed using non-traditional activities that would attract or encourage all students to participate on an equal playing field. Juggling, yo-yo clubs, dance troops, kinball and wheelchair basketball are some ideas that have been extremely successful in our large junior kindergarten to grade eight school. Teachers and administrators have to think creatively and positively about their commitment to ensure activities for students with disabilities exist in their schools. It doesn't take much to get moving! We just have to believe that it will make a difference!

## Including Children with Autism

by Andrea Prupas, B.Ed., M.A.

**Y**ou have just been told that there will be a new student in your grade three physical education class. Your student is a nine year old boy with autism. What can you do to provide the best learning environment for this child?

As teachers, we tend to panic when the term inclusion is used. Inclusion, in our mind, may be synonymous with dumping students with disabilities in our classes without support for students or educators. However, if we think of inclusion as a philosophy, not a specific placement, we can change our negative perception to a positive one. Respect, cooperation, group participation, openness, and a desire to see each person reach his/her potential are necessary components of an inclusive environment. Adopting an inclusive philosophy is not difficult when you have a team of educators who are committed to these components.

Autism is "a complex developmental disability that typically appears during the first three years of life" (Autism Society of America, 1996). Autism is a spectrum disorder, which means that symptoms can range from mild to severe. Children with autism have traditionally been difficult to include in the regular physical education setting, as they often need to improve behavioural, social and communicative skills. These areas to improve can include difficulty waiting, over or underactivity, repetitive behaviours, sensitivity to auditory and visual stimuli in the environment, lack of awareness of people and objects around them and language delays.

More and more parents and educators are recognizing the benefits of educating children with autism in the regular environment. Physical educators, however, often lack the training that is necessary to understand and teach children with autism. The benefits of physical activity include learning appropriate gross motor, fine motor, social, communicative and play skills. These benefits also extend to the child's peers, educators, and family. The individual's peers will gain an understanding of autism and a more realistic educational experience. As an educator, you will benefit from learning to adapt your material to individual needs, a necessity in order to teach all children in your class. The child's family will gain confidence and pride in their child's abilities and successes.

In the words of Karen Sewell, an experienced special education teacher who has worked extensively with children with autism: "Conquering deficits and acquiring new skills encourage self-esteem and independence. People with autism deserve the same opportunities as everyone else to achieve autonomy and self-reliance...Remember-everything you teach children with autism to do for themselves will be one more skill they will not have to depend on someone else to do for them the rest of their lives!"

For detailed information on physical education programming for children with autism, as well as references and resources, please visit us at [www.ala.ca/section\\_active\\_youth\\_e.cfm](http://www.ala.ca/section_active_youth_e.cfm)

**Contact a national health  
or disability  
organization to help  
you choose activities  
that are best suited for all  
your students' needs.**

**activity  
tip**

## More Than Just Credit



They could not have dreamed of a better way to spend five days. “I had an **AMAZING** time,” says Shannon King. “It was the most **INSPIRATIONAL** weekend that I have ever experienced,” professes Haley Randall.

What are they talking about? The exchange program designed for youth with disabilities held this past June, of course!

These two university students, Shannon and Haley, joined 48 others as volunteers during the tremendously successful exchange, thanks to Maureen Connolly, Associate Professor, Faculty of Applied Health Sciences at Brock University in St. Catharines, Ontario. A gathering of youth with disabilities from across Canada is a relatively seldom occurrence, so when asked to partner with the Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability to host the exchange, Dr. Connolly jumped at the chance. She recognized that this was a tremendous opportunity for Brock University students to simultaneously gain invaluable experience and earn a half credit towards their degree.

During the five days, students volunteered anywhere from eight to 16 hours per day, in addition to attending a training weekend prior to

the event. The students had to keep a journal of their experience and write a paper to earn their half credit.

For the students involved, the exchange was about more than just receiving a credit; it was about personal growth and being part of a special event that provided a novel experience for 55 young people who have a disability. “Every child/young adult that I had the opportunity to meet taught me about who I was and who I want to be in life [more] than anyone else [ever has],” Haley said. “Meeting these remarkable youth has changed my career path...I want to work in the special needs field! It is the most **REWARDING** job anyone could ask for,” explained Fiona Tozer, another Brock University student volunteer.

Throughout an educator’s career they will likely have students with disabilities in their classes. Due to the lack of adapted education or training at most post-secondary institutions, future physical educators need more opportunities like the youth exchange program to prepare them for their new careers.

In many communities across Canada, there are tremendous opportunities for colleges or universities to partner with organizations willing to provide volunteer opportunities for students. Most community organizations or schools would love the opportunity to help augment their programs while assisting future educators in their pursuit of knowledge and experience. If you are a post-secondary educator, and plan events for your students, keep experiences like this in mind. The opportunity to interact and support children with different abilities will open the door for students to flourish while they learn.

## Program Modifications that Really Work



Encouraging a teacher to modify a program to include a child with a disability will be a lot easier if you can offer some concrete suggestions. Often, the greatest barriers to accessibility are the fears that we all have of “doing the wrong thing.” Here’s a tip sheet to clip, copy and distribute with practical ideas for making their games and activities accessible to all.

In planning program modifications, think about equipment, skill complexity, the rules of the game and/or the space and distance in which the activity takes place.

### EQUIPMENT

- Using lighter, softer, larger balls will slow the game and allow more time to prepare for executing a skill.
- Choosing shorter, lighter bats and racquets gives greater control for those with less arm strength.
- Choosing larger goals or target areas reduces the number of misses and makes it easier for everyone to succeed.
- Substituting bean bags for balls makes catching and throwing easier for participants with limited use of their hands.
- Partially deflating balls for dribbling and kicking activities makes the movement slower and allows the player more time to prepare.

### SKILLS

- Substitute wheeling for running, rolling a ball off a lap for kicking, striking a soccer ball with a floor hockey stick instead of a foot.
- Simplify games by having players drop the ball and catch it rather than asking that they bounce it consecutively.
- Use props to enhance your player skills. For example, using a towel can extend a player’s reach in a game of tag.

### DISTANCE/SPACE

- Use a smaller playing area to make it easier for players of all skill levels to participate and be in on the action.
- Lower the target or move it closer to the players and you’ll reduce the number of misses and increase everyone’s feelings of success.
- Consider having a different starting or finishing point for the player with a disability to make the competition more equal.
- Choose a function on the team that requires less or more mobility based on the player’s abilities. For example, a player in a wheelchair could be a pitcher, a goalie or the designated foul shooter.
- Reduce the number of players on each team to increase the participation of each player.

## Getting a Head Start

Tristan Sadlier is just like any other five-year-old. He loves to play ball, any kind of ball activity, but when given a choice, basketball is his favorite. This past June, Tristan graduated from the **Future 4 Nations Aboriginal Head Start Preschool** in Mission, British Columbia. After spending the past two and a half years of his life attending the preschool, Tristan, a child with Cri du chat syndrome, graduated with new skills, abilities and a desire to be active.

Cri du chat (also known as cat’s cry) syndrome is a genetic disorder where part of the fifth chromosome is absent. The syndrome gets its name from the unique cry that babies with the syndrome exhibit, which is similar to the mewling of a kitten.

“Tristan had little motor movement when he began preschool - he could not walk, communicate or eat on his own. As the two and a half years went by, Tristan developed control of large and small motor movements - he learned to walk, run, use sign language and eat by himself,” says Brenda Kruska, an early childhood educator at the preschool who worked closely with Tristan.

“When Tristan began the program, he would stay close to an adult (and would not interact with the kids),” says Ms. Kruska. “By the end of the first year, Tristan was playing parallel to other children.” If an activity was paced too quickly, the children in the class were very receptive to Tristan’s needs and would slow down so that he could be included. Thanks to the **Support** of the children, staff and community members, Tristan developed into a strong-willed, independent person. “Tristan was always open to new physical challenges – he learned to ride a tricycle during this last year!”



Fostered by the belief that children are our nation’s most valuable resource, the Aboriginal Head Start (AHS) Initiative was established in 1995. AHS is an early childhood development program for First Nations, Métis and Inuit preschool children and their families living in urban and northern communities. There are approximately 3,200 children participating in 114 preschool centers throughout eight provinces and three territories across Canada.

The program was initially designed in partnership between Health Canada and Aboriginal communities from across the country. Today, elders, parents, staff and community partners are all involved in developing, delivering, and evaluating the program’s curriculum. The ultimate goal of the program is to provide a **Safe and Healthy** environment where children and their parents or guardians can build a better **Future** for themselves while receiving support from local non-profit community partners. Each of the 114 preschool centers uses a holistic approach to education in that they address each child’s social, emotional, physical, psychological, and spiritual needs.

For more information on the AHS Initiative, please contact Health Canada’s Aboriginal Head Start Urban and Northern Program at **1-613-952-5854**.



## Here to lend a helping hand

Considering the diverse abilities of students taking part in school based physical activities, adapting opportunities so that they are suitable for all participants can sometimes be a challenge. With this in mind, the Alliance's own **MOVING TO INCLUSION (MTI) RESOURCES** provide activity leaders and teachers with tips and strategies to include students of all abilities in physical education activities. Check out [www.ala.ca](http://www.ala.ca) for all of our MTI tips and features.

Recognizing that even the best resources could use some "live-help features", the Alliance has identified **INCLUSIVE PHYSICAL EDUCATORS (IPE)** in each province and territory to help get the ball rolling. Each IPE can assist you and your colleagues to get more students with disabilities active in physical education classes. Presentations can be arranged for professional development days and evening workshops or you can contact us to ask questions regarding a specific situation you are dealing with.

For more information about Moving to Inclusion resources or to contact one of our Inclusive Physical Educators, please call us toll free at 1-800-771-0663 or email your provincial / territorial Alliance affiliate at:

ALBERTA	<a href="mailto:ab@ala.ca">ab@ala.ca</a>
BRITISH COLUMBIA	<a href="mailto:bc@ala.ca">bc@ala.ca</a>
MANITOBA	<a href="mailto:mb@ala.ca">mb@ala.ca</a>
NEW BRUNSWICK	<a href="mailto:nb@ala.ca">nb@ala.ca</a>
NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR	<a href="mailto:nf@ala.ca">nf@ala.ca</a>
NORTH WEST TERRITORIES	<a href="mailto:nwt@ala.ca">nwt@ala.ca</a>
NOVA SCOTIA	<a href="mailto:ns@ala.ca">ns@ala.ca</a>
ONTARIO	<a href="mailto:on@ala.ca">on@ala.ca</a>
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND	<a href="mailto:pe@ala.ca">pe@ala.ca</a>
QUEBEC	<a href="mailto:qc@ala.ca">qc@ala.ca</a>
SASKATCHEWAN	<a href="mailto:sk@ala.ca">sk@ala.ca</a>
YUKON TERRITORY	<a href="mailto:yk@ala.ca">yk@ala.ca</a>

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## An Open Letter to Teachers

by Doug Nichols, Director, School of Physical Education, University of Victoria

Just the other day I was chatting with one of my neighbors, a 14 year old grade nine student. We have virtually nothing in common; our tastes in music, movies, snack food, body piercing, etc. tend to sit on opposite sides of any spectrum. We do however share one common love, the quite addictive "flow" feeling provided by most forms of physical activity. And although we even come to this common ground from two different angles (as a fifty something university professor I ponder more than I participate; as a 14 year old she doesn't care why she enjoys it, she just plain does!) we both believe (although we would express it differently) that our choices in physical activity go a long way toward defining who we are.

So, what does this chat between neighbors have to do with you? Well, I asked her about the types of activities (she called them "sports") that were available to her through her physical education classes. Her answer confirmed what I have observed in many schools in our area, and what I hear from colleagues from across Canada. "Same old, same old" she said. "Soccer in the fall, basketball and volleyball in the winter, track and softball in the spring...we do the same things every year...it gets kind of boring." Now this comes from a young person who is quite physically skilled and loves "sports" of all kinds. When I ask how some of her classmates who aren't so skilled feel about physical education she admits that they don't seem to like it much. When I ask about how many kids with disabilities participate in these activities she shrugs and says "Well, none in my school".

Knowing what we now know about the physical, health and social benefits of physical activity, and recognizing that patterns developed as children often follow us throughout the rest of our lives, this is not good news. If you are a teacher, and therefore a professional whose responsibility it is to nurture learning of all types (physical, mental, emotional) in all of your students, this is extremely disappointing. If you are a physical education teacher *this is a disaster* and should be unacceptable!

What can we do to change this? No one realistically advocates that those popular sports mentioned above be dropped from school curricula. But might there be alternative activities which would still meet your objectives of skill

development, team participation, knowledge and use of strategies and practices within rules and regulations, fair play regardless of outcome, pure physical pleasure? Might alternative activities which better encourage lifelong participation be offered? Can you spin the magic web of physical activity around a larger percentage of your student population without "watering down" the experience for those in your classes who are more physically capable? Is this possible? Of course it is. Is it easy? Nope!

We all believe that physical activity is important. Most of us believe that it should be an integral component of any school curriculum. It is the choice of activity that is critical. I fully recognize that most post secondary institutions don't well prepare physical educators to deal effectively with a wide variety of activities. We tend to teach what we know and what we are good at and most physical educators have been taught and are good at traditional team-oriented competitive activities. We are used to and comfortable with activities which revolve around the gym and fields. However, many jurisdictions are now, through expanded curriculum models, encouraging physical educators to consider alternative activities, many of which are more appropriate for full inclusion of students with disabilities (for specific examples see the 1997 CAHPERD Journal, Volume 63, Number 3).

The actual activity matters much less than the opportunity provided. More important is the message that is sent to and received by both students with disabilities and their able-bodied peers; our primary concern is significant participation in quality physical activity by every school member. Developing inclusive strategies and assisting all of your students to pursue physical activities which will sustain a physically active lifestyle is a goal that is well worth the effort.

For more information on developing inclusive activities or intramurals, please contact the Canadian Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (CAHPERD) at 1-800-663-8708, the Canadian Intramural Recreation Association (CIRA) at 1-613-244-1594 or your provincial Inclusive Physical Educator (IPE).

## A Young Man had a Dream

Ryan Heuman enjoyed the **experience of a lifetime** in an adventure that will never be forgotten, thanks to a remarkable teacher...

On June 16th 2001, Stelly's High School teacher, Peter Mason, was presented with the **Gerry York Moving to Inclusion Award** at Brock University. Dr. Doug Nichols, Director of the School of Physical Education at the University of Victoria, presented the award on behalf of the Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability. The Gerry York Award gives recognition for the outstanding work being done to include children and youth with disabilities in physical education. This award supports the Moving to Inclusion initiative – that children and youth with disabilities will always be included in physical education leading to healthy active lifestyles.

Mr. Mason received this national award in recognition for successfully including Stelly's student, Ryan Heuman, in the annual ascent of Mount Albert Edward, which is part of the high school outdoor recreation course. Ryan, a graduate of Stelly's class of 2000, is a person with cerebral palsy who uses a motorized wheelchair. The four day, 32 kilometer excursion in June 2000, involved 20 students, 10 adults and an innovative sled designed and built exclusively



for the purpose of helping Ryan achieve his goal: to **Reach the Summit** of the mountain with his classmates. Mount Albert Edward is located in Strathcona Park on Vancouver Island, British Columbia and stands 2,093 metres high.

On accepting the Gerry York Award, Mr. Mason stated that he believes "everyone can make a difference". As part of his acceptance of the award, Mr. Mason premiered a powerful video entitled **Daring to Believe**, which captured the significant impact of the journey up Mount Albert Edward. At Stelly's annual awards ceremony on June 28th, Mr. Mason rededicated the award to all of the students, staff and volunteers who participated in the 2000 Albert Edward journey.

Stelly's High School is located in Saanichton, British Columbia. Mr. Mason is a graduate of the University of Victoria's School of Physical Education, Class of '76.