

UBCM COMMUNITY EXCELLENCE AWARDS

Partnerships: Local Government Partnerships Supporting Physical Activity and Healthy Living

Municipality of Saanich, Greater Victoria School District #63 and the Cordova Bay 55 Plus Association

Cordova Bay Community Place Development

Project Summary

An outstanding model of success in community partnerships has been created by the development of Cordova Bay Community Place. The Municipality of Saanich, the Greater Victoria School District #63 and the Cordova Bay 55 Plus Association have demonstrated excellence in collaboration in designing and developing community program space within an elementary school to increase the healthy lifestyle choices seniors and families of the Cordova Bay Community. This partnership has improved the access to physical, social and recreational activities in this community by creating local infrastructure and building local relationships. The success of this initiative has diminished the impact of barriers to participation especially for seniors in Cordova Bay that were not able to access other recreation services because of transportation and cost issues. Furthermore, this project assisted the School District in sustaining an elementary school in Cordova Bay while providing the Municipality with a cost effective venue to host senior's and community recreation services. Cordova Bay Community Place opened in February 2006 and has not only improved the community's access to activity but has opened the door to new relationships that have contributed to the overall health of this community.

Cordova Bay Community Place – Summary Report

Unique Partners, Innovative Solutions

The Cordova Bay Community Place initiative represents a solid collaboration between the Municipality of Saanich, School District #63 and the Cordova Bay 55 Plus Association. This unique initiative brought together School District facility design and maintenance staff, school principal, Saanich Recreation programmers and managers, parents, community residents, seniors and architects to design an activity space that would meet the needs of this community. This cooperation was successful as all parties were able to satisfy their basic mandates, as well as to realize additional benefits by pooling resources.

Through this unique partnership an innovative solution to meet community needs was discovered. The Cordova Bay area has a socially active group of older adults which had started to organize their own recreation and leisure opportunities out of any spaces they could find. As interest, participation and membership grew; it became more and more difficult to find appropriate local spaces that could safely and adequately support physical and social activities for more than 20-30 people at a time.

Meanwhile, the population of children in this community continues to decline. The elementary school was experiencing continual loss of students and the potential for closing the school was foreseeable. This conclusion, albeit not foregone, was a reality that many families did not want to face in their own community.

The innovative solution to address both these community issues was to bring them together for the development of Cordova Bay Community Place. By re-designing and renovating existing school space to facilitate community use it has increased the viability of the school facility and added a new focal point for the seniors, adults and families of this community.

Benefits

This partnership has provided benefits at the individual and community levels. This initiative has resulted in an increase in social and physical activity opportunities for many citizens in Cordova Bay. Barriers to participation and healthy lifestyle choices such as a lack of transportation and financial constraints meant that many senior members of this community were not able to access existing recreation programs and services. Cordova Bay Community Place has opened avenues for citizen participation in programs such as yoga, dance, bridge, art and aerobic fitness classes. Participation in community recreation programs enhances social and physical well being contributing greatly to an individual's health.

The development of this community space within an elementary school setting has facilitated relationships between seniors, parents and children. Inter-generational programs are enhancing these relationships as seniors share their expertise in arts and

crafts with the children of the school. The relationship is reciprocal. In return the seniors have experienced renewed energy and a new sense of belonging and importance in their community as children are learning that seniors are an important part of their neighbourhood. As a result of these relationships the community is stronger, social networks are being established creating a safer environment for young children. There is a growing sense of the important contributions of the senior's population to the overall health and well being of this community.

Increased Awareness of Opportunities for Healthy Living

The increased range of opportunities for physical, social and recreational activities as a result of the development of Cordova Bay Community Place is now well known to this community. Saanich Parks and Recreation publishes an Active Living Guide that has highlighted the Cordova Bay Community Place as a new activity space offering community recreation programs such as Yoga, Gentle Fitness and several forms of dance. The Active Living Guide is published three times per year and is delivered to 32,000 homes with another 20,000 copies available for pick up.

Cordova Bay Elementary School and the Cordova Bay 55 Plus Association have included extensive coverage of the development of the community space in their monthly newsletters which go to over 700 residents in the area. These articles have chronicled the phases of construction and have highlighted the expanding opportunities for participation in physical and social activities for children, families and seniors.

The grand opening ceremony for Cordova Bay Community Place was attended by over 400 parents and residents. At this event it was very clear to the public that this facility was the result of joint efforts by School District #63, the Municipality of Saanich and the Cordova Bay 55 Plus Association.

The benefits to this community were also very evident in the many testimonials at the opening event. These speeches highlighted the myriad of ways that this project has enhanced the well being of the Cordova Bay community. The outcomes of this initiative range from increasing activity options for seniors to building relationships between the generations represented by the school and the 55 Plus Association. Tangible results include improved access to services and increased social networks within the community. The unique bond between the school and the 55 Plus Association was the focal point in the grand opening ceremony.

Need

The Saanich Parks and Recreation Master Plan of 2001 identified significant public interest in the greater utilization of School District facilities for community recreation use. The shared development and use of School District and Municipal facilities is widely considered a cost effective strategy to meet community educational and recreational needs.

Initially, Saanich Parks and Recreation was approached by several seniors from the Cordova Bay community. These seniors wished to have recreation and social program opportunities located in their community. The barriers of transportation and cost made it difficult for many seniors to access programs and services at existing Saanich Recreation Centres.

These seniors and Saanich Recreation staff began meeting regularly. They conducted community forums to identify specific needs in this community and initiated delivery of social and recreation programs in local community spaces such as a restaurant hall and church. The first programs included coffee socials and various day trip options. The participation rates grew quickly and the Cordova Bay 55 Plus Association was incorporated in March 2004. Other program offerings for the association included yoga, tai chi, arts and crafts, tap dance and other social programs.

As programming and participation increased the need for a “space of their own,” became more evident. Meanwhile, the school district and Cordova Bay Elementary school were experiencing some challenges of their own. The population of children in this community was declining significantly and discussions were underway considering the future viability of maintaining an elementary school in this location.

Saanich Recreation, the Cordova Bay 55 Plus Association and Cordova Bay Elementary School (School District #63) staff completed a community consultation process to determine the feasibility of converting existing space within the elementary school and creating new space. This project has proven to be a very successful model of effective joint school development and use. The partnership has provided community space to host social and recreational programs locally alleviating the barriers of transportation and cost.

Process for Collaboration

Several years ago, seniors in the Cordova Bay Community approached Saanich Parks and Recreation staff to investigate the potential for offering programs and services in their community. This first inquiry was to be the seeds for the formation of a committee of community members and municipal staff tasked with improving service delivery for this community. This group conducted several focus groups with seniors in the community to consider specific program options. The results of this community input lead to the delivery of programs and services. Participation rates grew quickly and the need for a designated community space became apparent.

As the opportunity to partner with the School District developed and the option of converting school space looked more feasible the committee grew to include school representatives and parents. Safety and traffic concerns with the proposed development of the community space were addressed through several community forums that included Saanich Police, School Administration, parents, citizens, teachers and municipal staff. The issues were addressed through this community consultation process and the project was initiated in 2004.

The working committee now shifted to a Design and Construction Advisory Committee to facilitate input into the development process. This committee met bi weekly throughout the design and construction phases in order to maintain a high level of community involvement and feedback into the process. Through this committee, specific design needs of the 55 Plus Association, the school and the Municipality were identified and addressed. This committee consisted of the School Principal, Municipal Recreation Managers and Programmers, 55 Plus Association members, School District Maintenance and Facility Administration staff, Architect, Construction Managers and members of the School's Parent Advisory Council.

Operating agreements, detailing all aspects of use by all parties, are the key to the future success of this initiative. The day to day issues arising from these Operating Agreements are handled by both formal and informal communication between the parties involved. These Operating Agreements will be reviewed annually by the committee which oversees the Reciprocal Use Agreement between the Municipality and the District #63.

As construction completed, the committee has now shifted to be a working committee for the implementation of the shared use of this community space and the adherence to the operating agreements established to support use of Cordova Bay Community Place. This committee will meet twice per year to discuss and address any issues arising from the community use of and access to the school space.

Partnership Contributions

Each partner has contributed to the development and implementation of Cordova Bay Community Place. All partners have contributed human resources to the project in terms of providing support and input in designing the space and maintaining staff involvement on the various forms of committees charged with overseeing the design, construction and implementation phases of this project. Other contributions to Cordova Bay Community Place include:

Municipality of Saanich

- Approximately \$435,000 in capital funds to design and renovate existing school space to accommodate community programming and senior's use
- Marketing of community programs and increased awareness of activity options through publication of 52,000 copies of the Active Living Guide

School District #63

- Owner of the land and building that host the Community Place
- Approximately \$100,000 in capital funds for upgrades to mechanical and heating systems, windows and building envelope improvements
- Community access to other spaces in the school including the gymnasium and classrooms

Cordova Bay 55 Plus Association

- Approximately \$20,000 in funds for furnishing and fixtures for the community space and office

Potential Interest for Similar Initiatives

The unique and successful nature of this partnership between a Municipality, School District and a community Seniors Association has generated a great deal of interest from around the province. The School District and Saanich Parks and Recreation have received numerous requests for information regarding the process of collaboration, the Operating Agreements and the implementation of sharing space and building inter-generational relationships. School Districts and Municipalities across the province are considering this model as an innovative solution to their own infrastructure and community challenges.

This model of cooperation was presented to the British Columbia Parks and Recreation Association Directors and membership to great interest. At the B.C. Parks and Recreation Association annual membership conference in Vancouver in April 2006, Saanich Recreation Program staff discussed the development of Cordova Bay Community Place with several other Municipalities. A great deal of interest was expressed from Vernon, B.C. where the School District currently takes a Grade 5 class to a local residence complex for seniors to host their class for 3-5 weeks of the year but would love to facilitate space for a seniors group in the schools.

Finally, the collaborative process in the development of Cordova Bay Community Place has encouraged future partnerships within our own district. This great partnership has fostered a good relationship with School District #63 as they begin construction of Royal Oak Middle School and the development of a joint use agreement between this district and the Municipality of Saanich for future use.