



EVERYTHING BETTER

# Supporting mental health through physical activity

WRITTEN BY: PARTICIPACTION

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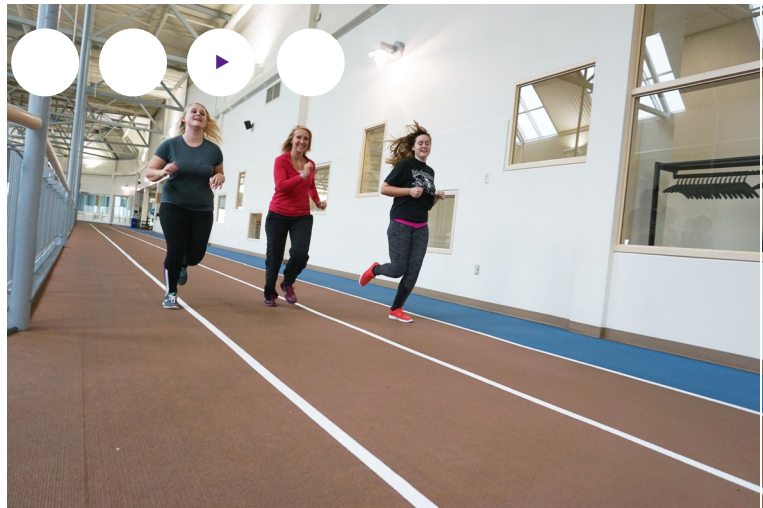
*The Alberta Health Services' Move Your Mood program is one of our Saputo Signature Grant recipients, six incredible organizations from across Canada who exemplify how physical activity helps #MeYouUs.*

*ParticipACTION is proud to partner with Saputo for the Community Better Challenge. Together, we are working towards building healthy communities, one active Canadian at a time.*

The incredibly damaging effects of the pandemic on our mental



health have been well documented. Luckily, [research](#) also shows that regular physical activity is essential for our mental health and can help reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety, decrease daily stress and boost moods. That's why so many public health experts recommended daily activity, especially outdoors, throughout the pandemic.



The link between physical activity and mental health is behind an innovative initiative from [Alberta Health Services \(AHS\)](#) called [Move Your Mood](#). This research-based program teaches people living in Red Deer and other central Alberta communities how physical activity and leading a healthy lifestyle can improve mental and physical well-being. They do this through education and by engaging participants in physical activity and healthy lifestyle practices. "Our main goal is to shift people's perspective on physical activity and show them how it enhances mental health first followed by physical health, especially if you can stick with it," said [Denise Fredeen](#), health promotion facilitator and Move Your Mood program coordinator at AHS.



Move Your Mood has specific initiatives for children and youth, post-partum mothers, families, schools and communities. "I needed support because I was having some mental health and anxiety issues," said Jodi-Ann Richards, a mother of two who immigrated to Canada from Jamaica four years ago. "The program taught me different ways to manage my

anxiety and get active with my seven-month-old baby and 10-year-old son."

AHS offers an eight-week-long Move Your Mood family challenge in February where they distribute weekly emails sharing tips and ideas on how to lead a healthy lifestyle. "The family challenge has had great success in promoting ways that families can get active, eat healthy and develop positive relationships," said Denise. "Many participants have said they loved the time to just step back and connect with their families and communities through movement, because life can be busy."



Every year during the first week of May (Mental Health Awareness Week), AHS offers a Move Your Mood school challenge, where tips on how to get active are shared on the morning announcements each day that week. Thanks to a Saputo Signature Grant, students at several schools participated in weekly programming to promote physical activity and mental health, as part of the [ParticipACTION Community Better Challenge](#) in June.

Move Your Mood, in partnership with [SPARC Red Deer](#), also funded spray-painted games in local parks and schools in Red Deer. “These fun and interactive games are an active draw for people in the community,” said Denise. “I’ve seen children, teenagers and even grown adults bouncing and hopping together!” The Saputo Signature Grant also funded two new spray-painted game locations this year.

In collaboration with her addiction and mental health promotion colleagues, Denise is expanding the Move Your Mood program across central Alberta by providing training to others in the community so they can reach even more people with the program’s impactful messaging.

“Our main dream is to have children, youth and their families hear the Move Your Mood messaging wherever they’re accessing support, whether it’s at the children’s psychiatric unit, in addiction and mental health departments, at school, at home or in the community,” said Denise. “The more times you hear that physical activity improves mental health, the more it will just become second nature.”

## Join the ParticipACTION Community Better Challenge





Physical activity helps me, you, us! Getting active provides benefits for your community and you, like improved mood, ... sense of connection with others. From June 1-30, get active to help your community be crowned Canada's Most Active Community and win \$100,000!



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EVERYTHING BETTER

# Empowering Indigenous children & youth through physical activity

WRITTEN BY: PARTICIPACTION

2022-06-21



*The Recreation & Parks Association of Nunavut (RPAN)'s Get HAPPY Summer Day Camp is one of our Saputo Signature Grant recipients, six incredible organizations from across Canada who exemplify how physical activity helps #MeYouUs.*

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June 21 is [National Indigenous Peoples Day](#) – a time to recognize the history, heritage and diversity of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples in Canada. For Indigenous children and youth living in remote, northern communities, it can often be challenging for them to find opportunities to keep busy and be physically active.

“Recreation and sport contribute to a better lifestyle, so if we can get kids playing and having fun from a younger age, then there’s a greater chance that they’ll grow up to be active and fun-loving adults,” said Dawn Currie MacKinnon, head of the [Recreation & Parks Association of Nunavut \(RPAN\)](#).

To help improve the lives of children and youth living in remote Nunavut communities, RPAN offers a six- to eight-week-long program called [Get HAPPY Summer Day Camp](#). Participants engage in arts and crafts as well as physical activities and sports, including Inuit games, lacrosse, floor hockey, dodgeball and soccer. Since 2015, more than 10,000 children and 500 youth leaders (most of whom are Indigenous) have participated in this unique program.



RPAN provides the financial support, training, resources, equipment and supplies needed to implement the day camps in each community. A major part of the program is the annual four-day training session in Iqaluit where youth leaders from each



Participating community learn how to deliver their own day camps within their communities. From the training, the youth leaders gain and develop many important skills, including teamwork, networking and effective communication.

“While these skills are meant to help the youth leaders

successfully run day camps, they’re also needed in many other parts of their lives, whether it’s in school, at other jobs or with their families,” said Dawn.

Joanne Weedmark, a recreation coordinator in Kinngait, Nunavut, found the training session very helpful. “It was great to engage with other youth leaders and learn about teamwork, ethics, planning and budgeting to help us successfully run the day camps here in Kinngait.”

This is the first year that Joanne’s community is participating in the Get HAPPY Summer Day Camp program. “Having organized activities going on throughout the day keeps kids in a routine of staying active and engaging with each other, so I decided that having my community take part in the program would be really beneficial to our children and youth,” said Joanne. “I look forward to seeing their happy faces!”



Another major part of the program is the Summer Day Camp Challenge. Throughout June, as part of the [ParticipACTION Community Better Challenge](#) and with the support of a Saputo Signature Grant, each participating community has been engaging in various physical activities on a weekly basis and earning points towards a final total. The top three communities will win a cash prize that will be reinvested into physical activity within their communities. The challenge also includes an Arctic sports day where the communities participate in Inuit games such as one-foot high kick and arm pull.

“It’s absolutely essential for these kids to see their culture represented through the sports and activities they do,” said Dawn.



The Get HAPPY Summer Day Camp program underscores the incredible ability of physical activity and sport to bring together a community of people, children and youth living in remote communities.



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