

Getting active together

February 6, 2023



Public Health dietitian Shelley Cooper, left, and Health Promotion facilitator Rania Page promoted healthy activity and eating as part of Red Deer's bid in the ParticipACTION Community Better Challenge during an event at the Collicutt Centre. *Photo supplied.*

AHS' teamwork boosts ParticipACTION victory for Red Deer

Story by Gayleen Froese

RED DEER — What's the best way to help a community become more active? A team in Canada's Most Active Community can tell you the secret is to get your neighbours directly involved.

Last July, Red Deer was chosen from more than 1,700 participating communities across Canada to win the \$100,000 prize in the third annual ParticipACTION Community Better Challenge.

Denise Fredeen with Alberta Health Services (AHS) took part in the successful bid and, as she explains, the win came from a true community effort. Part of the work began with a ParticipACTION Saputo Signature grant to the AHS program, Move Your Mood, which encourages physical activity to improve everyone's mental and physical health.

"We created mini-grant opportunities through Addictions and Mental Health for programs that reached the community directly," says Fredeen. "We asked that participants track their activity for the City of Red Deer."

While the AHS Move Your Mood program made connections through Addiction and Mental Health, the Red Deer Wellness Alliance — a team made up of the City of Red Deer, the Primary Care Network, Red Deer Public Library, Red Deer Polytechnic, the YMCA and several AHS partners from Public Health and Nutrition Services and the community — helped promote the overall Community Better Challenge to the people of Red Deer.

Supporting and building capacity in local programs proved a winning approach, one that helped find and remove barriers to exercise and got people across Red Deer active in many different ways. In addition to this strategy, the link to how physical activity improves mental health through the Move Your Mood program was cited by ParticipACTION as a factor that distinguished Red Deer's entry.

Now that Red Deer has taken home the \$100,000 prize, how will the money be used to increase well-being in the community? Fredeen says the success of the past will guide the Community Better Advisory Committee in making good use of the funds.

"The same approach that worked during the challenge is the one the Community Better Advisory Committee is taking with the prize money — they're creating mini-grants that individuals and organizations can apply for and use to promote exercise in their community."

Fredeen happily shares the secret to her team's successful bid.

"Anyone can apply for a grant, so a community can have a lot of applications — but we succeeded when we found each other and worked together."