

FHL: Football Hockey Link

2011 Report on Developments and Outcomes

FHL: Football Hockey Link Society is a non-profit organization that supports the successful integration of culturally diverse children and youth by introducing them to Canadian football and hockey and linking them to mainstream sports associations. This program started in 2009 as a pilot project.

In our 3rd summer of offering the introductory, barrier free program, we engaged 45 children and youth between the ages of 8 and 15 to participate in the program. These participants came from the following cultural backgrounds: South Sudanese, Sudanese, Pakistani, Lebanese, Chinese, Congolese, Filipino, and Korean.

Community partners continue to play a vital role in FHL's ability to give kids from diverse backgrounds a chance to try these sports free of charge. 2011 was a year for solidifying our partnerships through Partnership Agreements, to insure ongoing support for the program.

As a result of the partnerships, FHL was able to provide:

- 2 sessions of foundational football training with the U of C Dinos Football team.
- Calgary Stampeders involvement, where they hosted:
 - An outing to a Stamps football practice at McMahon Stadium and a tour of the locker/training rooms.
 - Our attendance at a CFL game by providing 100+ tickets to a football game for all of our registrants and their families.
 - 10 of our kids at the CFL Hall of Fame Gala event (FHL participants who have gone on to play football).
- 9 ice-times/skill development hockey training sessions at Max Bell and other neighbouring arenas through Hockey Calgary.
- Tickets to a World Juniors Hockey Game, thanks to tickets donated by Hockey Calgary
- Transportation to all summer program events through 1st Student Transportation that donates a school bus, driver and gas.

Other community support came from:

- The Stamps Store, which provided football mementos for each of our participants.
- Ramsay Community Centre, Dover Community Centre and Marlborough Park Community Association each donated hall space for the purpose of holding an equipment fitting event, a wrap up party and a volunteer training session.
- Calgary Public Library, Forest Lawn Branch provided a venue for registration.
- Tuxedo Sports gave us a location to hold an equipment drive.

The partnerships and community support demonstrates a perception of the benefit of the FHL program/organization. Fostering and building relationships with key stake holders is fundamental to FHL's work towards sustainability.

One new component of the program in 2011 was the introduction of a volunteer/mentorship program for kids that have previously been in the FHL program. This component gives former, older (11+) participants, an opportunity to build leadership skills by coming back as volunteer mentors. These youth leaders are trained to support program facilitators and coaches in a variety of ways as well as to encourage/guide new participants. 9 youth volunteers were involved in the 2011 season, where they demonstrated commitment through out the program.

Another area of development in 2011 was related to hockey equipment. Being able to provide full hockey gear to participants has always been an important part of the FHL program, in offering a genuine hockey experience and fostering continuation in the sport. Acquiring this equipment has included applying for subsidies and utilizing equipment donations. However, there were uncertainties in this approach and therefore, FHL looked at ways to be self-sufficient in this regard. Therefore, FHL outreached various groups in order to secure used hockey equipment each year. Securing full hockey equipment for each participant, every season is quite a process, but worth it to enable children the opportunity to safely participate in hockey now and in the future.

This process involves: getting the word out through various means that hockey equipment is needed; finding the resources to pick up the equipment from around the city; sorting and ensuring that the condition of the equipment is usable, safe and for the right age groups; and finally, finding space to store the equipment until it is needed. The FHL is working to secure funding/donations to help in storing and cleaning equipment and is grateful for all the generous donations which have come its way.

The FHL has had other learnings along with the above noted challenges regarding equipment. Subsidies are essential for so many families in order to have their children participate in sports. The FHL works to help its families connect to these when their children go on in football or hockey. However, the FHL has learnt of some difficulties regarding the subsidy program that could hamper accessibility. After the initial year of subsidy, every year a family applies, despite meeting the income criteria, the subsidy is reduced by 25%. This could impact the participation by our families in subsequent years. Therefore, the FHL is committed to incorporating this learning into orientations and if necessary, seeking ways to address barriers experienced because of such conditions, so that more families can share in the benefits of sports.

The FHL will continue to connect families to subsidies when/if they register in a hockey association.

Outcomes of the 2011 FHL program are noteworthy. Following the introductory summer sessions, FHL supported the interested children and families in connecting to their community sports associations. 10 children registered in community hockey, while 2 registered in community football. In addition, several participants indicated their interest in the 2012 FHL volunteer/mentorship program.

Participants spoke about their interest in the program because they wanted to try something new as well as to meet others: [I joined] *"Because I wanted to experience the sports that are my favourite"* and *"To make new friends, meet new people and respect other people."* They spoke of their enjoyment of each aspect of the program as one participant noted: *"For football, it was when the Dinos came and played with us. I thought it was really cool that [they] could come; for hockey, it was the first day we went on the ice because I remember when I stepped on the ice I fell and I kept falling the whole time after that"*

Even though about 25% of participants went on to the associations, 90% indicated that they wanted to continue, but some cited continued barriers including: *“I did not join hockey or football association because it isn’t easy for us to get there”* and parents cited *“tight schedules”* as reasons for joining despite an interest to do so.

Parents also shared their thoughts about the FHL program – they indicated that FHL engrained a love for the 2 sports, built their children’s confidence in sports and provided opportunities to meet others and make friends: *“It’s great in increasing their confidence and meeting new people and getting knowledge about hockey and football;”* *“My children’s confidence in sports is raised to a level we never thought of before. In our house, hockey appears to take lead. Everything that the boys do/play is hockey. We loved how they met friends they would not have had if not for FHL. Thank you!”*