The Canadian Active After School Partnership
Creating a Foundation for Working Together

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CAASP
Partnership Case Study

Introduction

In Canada, 26% of children ages 2-17 are currently overweight or obese. Child obesity is thus at epidemic proportions. According to Canada's federal-provincial-territorial (FPT) ministers of health, an obvious cause is the fact that only 7% of Canadian children and youth are sufficiently active to meet the new Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines of at least 60 minutes of MVPA (moderate to vigorous physical activity) per day. This is particularly true in the after school period between 3:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. when children are typically most active. To policy makers and health professionals, as well as community and child advocates the situation demands urgent intervention in order to avoid the high risk of illness and large social costs that will accompany these children as they mature and age.

As straightforward as this task may appear, it is a complex challenge involving behavioural changes among parents, children and youth; institutional changes among local agencies such as boards of education, municipal governments, health promotion authorities and not-for-profit community organizations; and coordinated policy changes among federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments.

The situation is made further complex by incomplete knowledge about what factors would present the greatest leverage to change behaviour in the right direction. Increasing the quality and availability of programs that support more vigorous physical activity for children and youth in the after school period is one possible strategy, but it is unclear whether that strategy would be sufficient in itself to change the needed behaviours. But even that strategy alone would require resources that are widely distributed across communities and sectors. Still further, there are multiple public authorities and community agencies involved that often compete with one another leading to the potential for fragmented, incomplete responses and jurisdictional battles.

Therefore, the issue of child obesity (with levels of physical inactivity being a significant causal factor), presents itself as a knowledge and innovation challenge to understand the drivers of physical activity among children and youth and how to influence those drivers; but also as a collaboration and partnership challenge to orchestrate the contributions of many societal actors to successfully implant those responses.

It is within this context that the Canadian Active After School Partnership was created.

History and Context

There has been growing awareness in both federal and provincial governments of the importance of physical activity among children and youth both as a curb on the current epidemic of childhood obesity and as a tool to reduce the long term health care costs on Canadian society. This was evident in the 2015 physical activity targets for children and youth set by the council of federal, provincial and territorial ministers responsible for sport and recreation in 2008 and their mutual recognition in 2011 of the importance the after

school time period. Research has identified[1] the "critical hours" period (after school and before supper) as the key time when most children and youth are not sufficiently active, presenting a potential focus for intervention.

In November 2009 the organizations, which would later become the CAASP partners[2], came to the Healthy Living Unit at PHAC to say that they could help contribute to the 2015 physical activity targets set by the FPT ministers. The organizations proposed that they all work together with PHAC to achieve that goal. Intrigued by the offer, PHAC agreed to work with the partners to develop a plan for a collaborative initiative that could shed light on how to intervene most effectively in this space.

While the organizations were all known to one another and all had compatible goals in the physical activity area, they had never worked together as a group on projects. In fact, several had been competitors for the decreasing amounts of public money[3] that were available for physical activity programs. "In this sector, we tend to be very competitive with one another – for funds and for influence," said one informant. Yet over the ensuing twelve months, the partners decided to set aside that competitiveness and engage with PHAC in a partnership building exercise that included aligning their common interests; building a shared basis of trust; and understanding their respective competencies and capabilities.

PHAC had already set aside funding in its Health Living Fund to support physical activity programs during the after school period, and was eager to see how the partners could work together to advance its policy agenda. Yet from PHAC's perspective, there was also a desire to help some of the organizations move away from what they perceived as a dependence on PHAC funding. PHAC pointed out that over the past fifteen years, governments of all stripes had been shifting their focus away from core funding of not-for-profits to project-based funding. In PHAC's eyes, project funding in this sector often amounted to "disguised core funding", and they believed that by working in concert some of the smaller organizations could begin to overcome this dependence. On the other hand, while PHAC funding did comprise a significant proportion of the budgets of some of the smaller organizations, all the organizations reported that they had already been diversifying their funding sources in recent years and were no longer dependent on PHAC for their organizational survival.

At the follow-up meeting in December 2009, these types of differing perspectives contributed to a tense dynamic due to a misreading of each other's motivations. PHAC observed that many of the organizations – particularly the smaller ones – seemed to be concerned with how potential funding might be divided. On the other hand, the partners sought to ensure that everyone remained included and the process was perceived as fair.

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[1] A.J. Atkin, T. Gorely, S.J. Biddle, S.J. Marshall and N. Cameron. "Critical hours: physical activity and sedentary behavior of adolescents after school", *Pediatric Exercise Science,* vol. 20(4), Nov. 2008:446-56
[2] Active Healthy Kids Canada, the Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability, Active and Safe Routes to Schools, The Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada, The Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women in Sport and Physical Activity, The Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association and Physical and Health Education Canada, and the YMCA.
[3] According to one informant, the overall pool of funding from the federal government for physical activity related programs had dwindled over several years from a recent higho f $15 million to $1million in 2011.

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PHAC offered a fixed amount of possible funding, and then asked the organizations to come up with a project proposal between them. In essence, the participants were asked to divide up a fixed pie with organizations whom they had little or no working relationship. Instead of fostering cooperation, it had the initial effect of encouraging the competition that PHAC had indicated that they sought to discourage. The organizations perceived that they were being coerced into a "partnership" in which they didn't feel complete ownership and for which there was no clear rationale beyond an overarching desire to help kids become healthier and more physically active. This contributed to a decline in confidence in PHAC itself.

A further complication was added when PHAC expressed their need for the group to identify a "lead organization" with which it could contract through its Grants and Contributions Branch in order to flow the money to the partners. "Right off it was challenging to have 12 organizations thrown in a room and be told 'choose a leader,'" said one informant. "Some offered to lead," said PHAC, "but didn't have the administrative capacity to handle the task. Others had the capacity but were reticent about appearing to dominate the process." The leadership question was made thornier by the fact that "in the sector itself there was very little shared leadership". What PHAC inadvertently instigated was a leadership contest when what was required was a process to create shared ownership among a group of potential partners and the selection of an administrative trustee to act on their behalf.

After a seven-month delay by PHAC in shaping an RFP document, the organizations came forward with a draft of a project proposal in the summer of 2010. The initial document "did a good job at making sure everyone got some funding" but in PHAC's eyes did not go far enough in articulating a coherent after school strategy. Given the short turnaround time demanded by PHAC for finalization of a proposal, the partners were opportunistic in their approach - assembling elements from work that was either ongoing or already planned. However, according to PHAC the result reflected gaps in key areas. "The proposal had money for an online portal but little in the way of actual interventions. The whole notion of active transportation was absent. What we were looking for was something that would experiment with new ideas and test things out."

In retrospect, PHAC's expectations for collaboration may have been over-inflated given the rush to submit a proposal and the inattention given many of the start-up steps typical of community-based collaborations[4]. The ideas that were put forward would allow the organizations to quickly move to an implementation phase by leveraging their existing knowledge and assets. Yet that quick implementation focus would come at the expense of a full discussion of how all the elements might fit together, or how the partners, including PHAC, would learn from the experience. In the end, the result was more an aggregation of independent, unconnected efforts than an effort to consolidate and build on their collective understanding. Nonetheless, despite the rough start, the parties found sufficient agreement to move forward and PHE Canada volunteered to assume a leadership role in preparing the proposal, based on further input from the participants.

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[4] Christopher Wilson, *Attention To Place: An International Comparative Review Of National Community-Based Policies For Social And Economic Development*, Prepared For Policy Research Directorate, HRSDC, Ottawa, June 30, 2007

The final *Active Healthy Living After-School Initiative* proposal included twenty pilots - ten from BGCC that focused on active transportation; five from CAAWS that focused on aboriginal girls and young women; and five from CPRA that were based on the *Stone Soup* approach and covered a mix of audiences from urban to rural, low income, aboriginal to new immigrants. In addition, Green Communities provided support and advice to BGCC on active transportation. ALACD provided support and advice to all the partners on people with disabilities. Both AHKC and CFLRI agreed to expand their existing research protocols to include after school components. The YMCA agreed to share their after school experience and explore potential barriers. And in addition to its assumed administrative role to manage the partnership, PHE Canada undertook to help revise the training manual for *High Five[5]* with Parks and Recreation Ontario to reflect a greater focus on healthy eating and moderate to vigorous physical activity in the after school period.

PHAC and PHE Canada, on behalf of the partners, negotiated the final terms of the agreement during the fall of 2010. A formal notice of funding for the After School Initiative (ASI) was received in late November. But it was not until January 2011 that the partners convened for the first time to discuss how they would guide themselves and work together over the remaining months. Adding to the 'newly wed' awkwardness, was the awareness that what had been originally discussed as a two-year effort from April 2010 to March 2012 had become compressed into 15 months – just barely enough time to put some programs in place but affording little opportunity to consider how all the pieces fit together, or to assess their impacts.

Finally, an evaluation approach had to be found which made sense for the ASI. As the Initiative was not seeking to implement a well-defined, consistent program approach with clear links between program inputs and specific outcomes, it was decided that a formative or summative evaluation would be inappropriate. Rather, the ASI was very much about learning while doing – learning from the experience of working together as partners; testing small interventions with diverse audiences; sharing knowledge with diverse stakeholders. This being the case, PHAC and PHE Canada agreed to pursue a developmental evaluation approach. This evaluation process began in January 2011 with the first partners' meeting with an attempt by the evaluators to solicit the partners in co-designing an evaluation strategy. The evaluators sought to create a feedback process that would be doable within the timeframe of the project and still meet the accountability needs of both the funder and the partners.

Purpose, Goals and "Working Together"

As described in the final proposal, "the aim of the initiative was to support the delivery of quality after-school programs that involve increased access and opportunity to engage in physical activity and healthy living and nutrition practices, with the ultimate goal of increasing physical activity levels and healthy eating practices of Canada's children and youth, and achieving success at reaching or exceeding the 2015 Physical Activity Targets."

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[5] Canada's comprehensive quality standard for the provision of recreation and sport programs to children aged 6 to 12 that was developed by Parks and Recreation Ontario.

This overall goal didn't explain why a partnership was necessary or the unique value it would add, especially given that all the partners had been contributing to this goal on an individual basis – some for as long as Canada has been around. As alluded to earlier, it would appear that the collaboration began largely as means to access funding. At first blush the collaboration seems to have been more of an aggregation of interests than a single collective approach to address a common interest. What initially seemed to organize the work of the partners was not shared purpose, but shared funding for parallel purposes.

PHAC recognized that although the ASI was not a large initiative, they hoped that the collaborative ASI approach and potential range of learnings would catalyze progress elsewhere, creating echo effects both regionally and provincially. Ideally, PHAC hoped the partnership would:
- Obtain community feedback on the AS issue by experimenting with the engagement of various communities and with diverse community implementations;
- Provide concrete advice that would improve the supporting policy landscape for after school programming; and
- Demonstrate how good collaborative process could be achieved, and how to best reach out to other organizations across the country working in the same space.

More realistically, PHAC felt ASI success would consist of:
- A modest translation of results;
- An examination of policy;
- Evidence of a dissemination of learning;
- Some connection with regional and provincial/territorial after school streams; and
- An effective evaluation of both the pilots and the partnership.

Against this backdrop, when the partners finally met in January 2011 to identify their shared objectives and to consider how they would work together, they articulated their own list of success measures, including:
- Having some good examples of program success that could be highlighted and used to motivate additional success;
- Demonstrating that pilot interventions could increase physical activity levels;.
- Engaging other federal partners to become involved and to provide funding;
- Increasing partner knowledge about the policy arena with respect to encouraging children and youth to become more physically active after school;
- Developing a knowledge and program capacity to address unique C&Y needs;
- Developing increased understanding of what constitutes quality AS programming with agreed upon measures, definitions and policies;
- Identifying potential AS barriers and experimenting with solutions to overcome them;
- Identifying the parameters of successful collaboration and fostering a better functioning network; and
- Generating enthusiasm about AS sufficient to engage other organizations beyond the members of this collaborative, and creating awareness in the sector of a coordinated approach.

As one can see, the objectives of PHAC and the partners were quite reconcilable. But what is not apparent and what was not included in these lists is the relatively high importance all the partners ultimately attached to the relationship factor in mitigating their mutual cautions; in learning together; and in fostering a level of collective confidence in their ability to move forward together.

These were no small concerns given that the initially guarded behaviour partners seemed to exhibit after being "coerced" into working together. In fact, early in the January meeting one partner was quite blunt, wanting to know just what it was that they were supposed to do together that they couldn't have accomplished under the old independently funded arrangements with PHAC. The partners were hesitant about whether the collaborative approach would actually work, and whether the benefits of collaboration would actually exceed its costs. While they struggled in the beginning to find their shared purpose, their professional respect for each other and their shared commitment to get kids more active guided their continued engagement with one another - even when they were unsure where that might lead them.

The range of partner organizations was quite diverse in terms of their individual size, mandates and resources. Two of the organizations (the YMCA and the Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada) were large, well-established, Canadian icons in fact, with clear AS program delivery mandates. Said one, "We're in the business of after-school programming." Many of the others were smaller organizations (CAAWS, ALACD, Green Communities, AHKC, CFLRI) and had well-defined content expertise (such as physical activity for girls/young women; disabled persons; and research). Some brought to the table their connections with national networks (e.g. Canadian Parks and Recreation Association and PHE Canada).

In addition, the design of the ASI would lead some partners to implement pilots and others would serve in a more advisory or staff support role. At the outset, most partners perceived that their counterparts had only limited knowledge of their expertise and knowledge, and only partially understood the total "package" of skills and resources necessary to effect 'quality after school programs'.

Fortunately there were a couple of factors that helped the partners to take the risk of working together. Almost all had worked at one time or another with the facilitator (Steve Grundy) who had been hired by PHE Canada to support the partnership process. All the partners had a high regard for and trust in him and, largely because of that, believed that the process involving him was an authentic one. And even though they lacked a pre-existing relationship, there was also considerable goodwill and mutual respect among the partners, which allowed them to explore this new way of working together.

While the January meeting established a basis of trust among the partners, the lack of an integrated design hampered the partners from developing a common learning agenda. This was in spite of the fact that learning together was recognized by all to be an important outcome of the project, indeed one of the key values of partnering. These potential learnings included the identification and sharing of:
• the interests and needs of a particular stakeholder group;
• any "prior learnings" which the partners may already possess;
• evidence of effectiveness regarding specific target approaches;

- practices which facilitate "how to work together" as a means to expand the scope and influence of the partnership;
- policy issues and dialogues;
- actual stories of how partners successfully engaged kids, parents and communities; and
- practices which might assist the group to continuously improve the quality and impact of what they do.

Although this learning was positioned as a desire to engage in a 'community of practice', in practice, however, the discussions between the partners focused largely on the administrative and implementation issues surrounding the PHAC-funded projects. Beginning in January 2011 the partners met either in Ottawa or Toronto on a bi-monthly basis for one or two days to hold these discussions. The very tight timeline for the project's implementation, however, left very little time for discussions of other, more fundamental but less pragmatic issues. There were staff to find and train; local delivery partnerships and facilities to negotiate; a series of consultations and focus groups to conduct; and the design of the developmental evaluation had to be finalized. Not to mention the fact that the ASI project was only one of many things that occupied their time.

As a result, many of the partners were dealing with implementation issues well into the summer of 2011 such that the learning and sharing outcomes did not start to emerge in priority until late in 2011 and early in 2012 towards the end of the first phase of the ASI project. For example, until the fall of 2011 it was unclear where all the pilot programs would be implemented; nor was it clear to everyone how the AS program delivered in each pilot would differ from one another. If asked for specific information the partners would naturally provide it, but they had not developed a culture of sharing amongst themselves to provide it proactively. The pressure to meet shortened timelines around deliverables forced partners to focus their attention to meeting their contractual obligations: if it wasn't in the contract there was no time to consider it.

In summary, the partners faced three main collaborative challenges:
- First, they did not have a coherent sense of how their individual actions contributed to the creation of a bigger whole, or addressing common questions;
- Second, throughout the first half of the project they were still developing the relational and trust capital that they needed to work together effectively; and
- Third, it was frequently assumed that because the partners shared a broad interest in physical activity and child/youth development, they also shared the same assumptions around their work – an assumption that later proved to be unwarranted.

In fact, several partners identified that they seemed to have very different assumptions about key concepts. One such concept was approaches to"inclusion" – there were different perspectives around the merits of a "segregated" vs. "integrated" approach to providing programs to children and youth with disabilities, for example. The word itself might refer to inclusion of people with disabilities or the inclusion of local stakeholders or the inclusion of different policy groups.

There was never time at the bi-monthly meetings, however, to delve more deeply into these differences (which could potentially have profound implications on the work the partners did together). This does not at all imply that PHE Canada did not try to make room for such discussions. Their goal was in fact to make these meetings as valuable as possible for the

partners. But, in the opinion of the evaluators, such discussions did not happen at that time because the partners did not feel as yet sufficient ownership of the process; in other words, they assumed to a certain degree that they were largely sub-contractors in a process run by others. As a result it was 12 months, for instance, before the partners learned of what was going on in one group of pilot projects. Part of this problem was not having the right people at the table, but part of it was that no one was asking for this information because the partners did not have a good overall perspective on the various projects.

Over the course of the initiative, the evolution of the relationships among the partners and the supportive behaviour of PHE Canada have both continuously re-affirmed the notion of shared ownership among the partners. The result has been increasingly more frank and authentic conversations among the partners. The process of designing Phase II as a joint undertaking and the revisions of the HUB design both illustrate a heightened degree of attentiveness and frankness to make sure the perspectives of each partner were included. The collaborative challenges among the partners, therefore, have proved quite manageable.

On the other hand, developing a more collaborative, working relationship with PHAC has been another matter. After facilitating and funding the partnership and then acting as a successful "midwife" as the partnership began to take shape in early 2011, the partners felt that PHAC "went dark", seemed to lose interest and became "largely absent from our conversations altogether." Given statements by PHAC representatives that they had viewed the ASI as a vehicle for their own learning and knowledge sharing, this behaviour seemed incongruous.   PHAC representatives explained that they were unable to participate more actively because of bureaucratic constraints imposed on their involvement in projects funded through federal grants and contributions. The withdrawal was generally regarded by the partners, however, as demonstrating a lack of commitment on the part of senior PHAC executives and a lack of basic partnership skills.

For instance, PHAC originally committed to facilitating connections between CAASP partners and the various bilateral AS initiatives supported by regional PHAC offices and various provincial governments, but this never happened.. Although each of the partners has picked up some of this responsibility, particularly PHE Canada, much less progress has been seen here than originally expected and PHAC's goal of regional amplification of CAASP's learning became largely attenuated. PHAC's absence from the bi-monthly meetings for over a year has meant little or no transfer of knowledge to PHAC as well as limited evolution of the somewhat tenuous relationship it had with CAASP partners. It is hard to imagine how this advanced the agenda of the Agency.

PHAC appears to be short-changing itself in five principal areas where it could reap real benefits from the partnership, in terms of:
- advancing the AS policy agenda in an area deemed a clear priority by all levels of government across the country (i.e. the reduction of child obesity through physical activity in the after school time period);
- extending its overall learning on an important issue of health promotion;
- supporting mechanisms for local collaboration of program delivery;
- exercising real accountability for the efficient and effective delivery of programs; and
- enhancing the Agency's legitimacy as an important national actor in the sector.

It should be underscored that this has been the Agency's choice - the partners themselves would welcome more active participation. PHAC has important national content knowledge that could be potentially shared in dialogue with the participants. Given its participation in many policy and practitioner networks, it could also act as a conduit for knowledge exchange on the issue. It also has authority to convene larger forums of knowledge development and exchange. As many have commented, "if they want to be a partner, then they should act like a partner". As further evidence of this detachment from the process, present day representatives of PHAC declined to be interviewed for this case study.

Progress and Accomplishments

Over the last year the partners have made steady progress to overcome any legacies of "coerced partnership" and siloed behaviour that seemed to accompany its origins. The partners share the belief that they have been able to generate continued interest and willingness to work together and that is beginning to have an impact on their goal of influencing other organizations towards embracing the possibility of concerted learning and action in the sector.

As some shared learnings have begun to emerge, and inter-organizational relationships have started to develop through their experience of working together in CAASP, the partners are developing a collective sense of what they might achieve together that they would not have been able to accomplish individually.

For example, the partners pointed to the consultation process to identify challenges, barriers and promising practices as a major initiative they would not have undertaken on their own. During the focus groups, the importance of a public policy approach to address barriers was consistently highlighted. The partners learned that some of them had more knowledge and experience in the process of policy change advocacy than others – capacities that could be of real benefit to all of the partnership members. They also learned that they needed to do more to capture the attention of parents and this ultimately impacted the design of the online 'HUB'. But most importantly, they learned to appreciate and trust the different perspectives of their partners and how, by sharing and working together, they were better positioned to address the issues being raised.

Without exception, the partners identified that improved relationships, particularly on a one-to-one basis, have been the most valued outcome of the project. But strong relationships do not exist merely because of over-lapping interests among organizations. Said one informant, "When you partner with another organization you don't just do it because you feel there is some "synergy" – you have to feel you can trust each other and work together." As a result of their work together, the partners reported that they were more inclined to take advantage of the expertise brought to the table by the other partners; they felt they could more easily contact the other organizations to ask for their advice and help. For example, this openness was demonstrated on several occasions with respect to the development of training resources.

The strengthening of partner relationships has increased both the appetite for and instances of collaboration within CAASP. The following are a few examples:

- the BGCC funded work by Green Communities, and both BGCC and PHE Canada actively promoted the work by Green Communities on active transportation;
- CFLRI is now partnering with ALACD to expand its national CanPlay survey to include questions relevant to children and youth with disabilities;
- the BGCC and PHE Canada used their networks to help Green Communities disseminate posters and stickers across the country for *iWalk,* the annual International Walk to School initiative that took place in October 2011;
- PHE Canada also helped Green Communities with $5000 to promote **Walk to School** day;
- PHE Canada has been working with other collaborations like the Canadian Sport for Life group, the Working Together Initiative, and the Interprovincial Sport and Recreation Council to share some of the CAASP experiences and to act as an exchange conduit between these external networks and the CAASP partners.

One of the primary goals of the partnership has been to collect and analyze data from the project so as to inform better programming and evidence-based policy. This has proven to be a bit of an elusive goal given the diversity of projects, the small scale on which these interventions have been conducted and the diversity of local contexts and program approaches – even within the same program "stream". The assumption here has been that effective local collaboration leads to increased awareness, accessibility and quality of AS programs in the short term which leads to greater participation by children and youth and increased levels of physical activity in the medium term and then reduced childhood obesity in the longer term. Thus, the evaluation has tended to focus on short term outcomes and the degree of cooperation, broadly speaking, that underpins it in the local environment.

The partners responsible for the pilot projects (CAAWS project focusing on aboriginal girls/young women; CPRA project focusing on the blended 'Stone Soup' approach; and BGCC project focusing on Active Transportation) have been learning from their respective experiences with their pilots, although understandably much more of their time was devoted during the first year to helping their own communities deal with implementation issues. Some of the main areas of learning from the pilots included the development and testing of:
- data collection tools to track progress of individual participants (CPRA);
- a model to support PA that integrated a cultural component (CAAWS); and
- a model to support the introduction of an Active Transportation component in different community settings (BGCC).

Beyond the areas mentioned above, the partners felt the partnership had great potential to add even more value in a number of other areas. They were, however, unable to judge the actual contribution of the partnership in these areas because the projects were being realized only very late in Phase 1 (and many of the partners did not yet have a chance to evaluate the "products"). Nevertheless these added outcomes included:
- the development of a number of resource materials (e.g. High Five Training, a CPRA resource manual, a CAAWS manual, etc.), but have not yet been widely shared among the partners;
- the development of the online 'HUB' as a way to share resources more widely across a broader audience. Many partners felt the HUB also had great potential to become a visible brand for the work of the CAASP partnership;

- the development of a policy framework to support the creation and implementation of after school programs. Many partners felt this was an important area of work in order to help all levels of government to better understand and support these programs by providing them with a holistic context and range of support options and recommendations.

In summary, the CAASP partnership has evolved appreciably over the last year from being an arrangement seen by some as based largely on accessing funding to one in which there is a clear level of shared leadership and ownership; and from a affiliation of independent organizations with limited knowledge exchange capacity to a partnership relationship with a growing appetite for shared learning and working together. "It's no longer about just doing your own thing. We've become less siloed and more integrated and this evolution of the group has been great."

This shift is most clearly evident when comparing the experience of developing the initial proposal to PHAC in 2010 with the process of developing the Phase II proposal in the fall of 2011. Although the partners would readily acknowledge there is more to be done to improve their relationship, they have already identified in their Phase II plans key areas where they feel their work together as a partnership adds collective value over what might be accomplished if they worked separately. There is, therefore, a strong desire on the part of the partners to continue to work together and develop the relationship further. This was underscored further as the partners made specific mutual commitments to continue their work should Phase II funding be delayed for some reason. This implies that the partnership work is now being viewed by them, not just as a cost of doing business associated with a contract, but as extension of their own work that is in and of itself sufficiently valuable for them to continue it.

Reflections and Learnings

Collaboration:

There are at least three potential levels of collaboration between partners such as those involved in CAASP. The most basic level is *informative*, where the organizations agree to share their finished products (manuals, policy documents, evaluation, case studies, etc.) with each other (and with broader audiences) after the fact.. *Co-ordination* is a higher level of collaboration where the organizations co-design their activities and products (e.g. by circulating drafts for discussion and accepting input from each other) so as to ensure alignment in their separate task implementations. The highest level is *strategic* where the partners work together to define the questions they wish to address through their activities, and the process by which those questions will be investigated. They are willing to be challenged by each other on the merits of different approaches; they then co-design, share resources and jointly execute their projects. From this process they share in any tangible and intangible rewards, such as future funding or enhanced reputation. Phase I saw collaboration begin mainly at the *informative* level, with a few examples at the *co-ordination* level, whereas Phase 2 consciously seeks to increase the level of collaboration.

Reporting and Administration:

The cost of PHAC reporting process was perceived by all the partners to be extremely heavy in terms of time and resources with next to no value in return. The time spent on this reporting did not help the partners capture or contribute to their learning, and worse, diverted considerable program resources away from supporting the project activities. When asked about its value one respondent simply shrugged saying it was just "the cost of doing business with PHAC" with no other usefulness to the organization or its AS activities. It was not, however, that participants felt they should be immune from reporting requirements, but rather that the data collected for the reporting should be done in such a way as to assist in project learning.

On the one hand, partners commented that they were happy with the bi-monthly meetings and yet, on the other hand, partners expressed the desire to spend time discussing more fundamental topics that could impact their work together.. To date much of the meeting time has been geared to administration and future planning rather than learning due to the focus on project deliverables. The partners' collective focus has been much more on "doing stuff" rather than on "learning stuff" or in co-designing mechanisms by which they could more effectively learn together. This implementation focus has also limited the opportunities for potential policy discussions that were originally viewed as a key element of value in the partnership. They have not been pursued as a central element of meeting discussions among CAASP partners.

Evaluation and Learning:

The evaluation strategy for the ASI was developed "after the fact", which led to significant challenges around developing buy-in on a coherent evaluation strategy, accessing data, identifying assumptions, and identifying what could be assessed with any certainty. In future it would be better to integrate the evaluation design with the program design and obtain both understanding and commitment from the partners to the elements of evaluation.

Nevertheless, the decision to pursue a developmental style of evaluation proved inspired given that the individual projects were developed in isolation, without relation to one another, and sometimes without obvious goals. This made it challenging to develop a single evaluation strategy that would meet the different needs of both the funder and the individual partners and then to integrate that evaluative output into a common learning agenda. The developmental approach offered a way of 'learning while doing' and using that feedback to help manage the separate ongoing activities of the partnership.

For example, in some cases the partners had already established evaluative components within their own implementation agreements with local pilot partners. Attempts to generate a uniform evaluation framework across the ASI proved unworkable as these were seen as "additional" requests for data to be imposed on the pilots. The developmental approach helped the evaluators to adapt to such challenges with 'workarounds' that produced similar qualitative data.

Because of the limited scope and depth and duration of this initiative, none of the partners were under the illusion that the ASI would result in long-term changes to the behaviour of kids, parents, or program deliverers. In addition, the varied nature of the audiences, their

scope and scale, their geographic location, the participating local partners and implementation timelines meant that any learning from the project could not be based on statistical outcomes derived from summative-type evaluations. Yet this diversity offered a rich background of both qualitative and case-style reporting. It offered the opportunity to ask why different approaches were being pursued and what the programs might have in common despite this diversity.

Supporting a Learning Culture:

The main strategy to support learning and knowledge dissemination across the PA sector was seen as the "HUB", which was originally conceived of as an online repository of resources that would be accessible to anyone in the sector (e.g. program staff, program managers, eventually parents and others). The advantage of the HUB was that it would use the combined resources of the partners to collect the best resources in one easily accessible, searchable online location. Due to the program implementation emphasis early on, a focus on the HUB didn't materialize until late in the project.

The HUB was also seen as the vehicle by which the CAASP partners would share their learnings with each other. However, the nature of this sharing was assumed to take the form of exchanging of finished products from the various AS initiatives. There was no real consideration in the proposal about how the partners could learn together and from each other as the projects unfolded. There was limited opportunity to discuss learnings during the CAASP meetings for the reasons described above. The evaluators suggested that the CAASP partners could use a temporary wiki to begin exchanging information and building the habit of online discussions, but in the early part of the initiative the idea of learning together was not a key objective and the added effort of working in a wiki environment was perceived as an added cost. Possibly this was because the partners felt they were a) too busy implementing; b) they were not sufficiently familiar with each other to engage in learning; c) they were unfamiliar with the technology; or, d) they were unwilling to invest themselves in something that wasn't quite perfect. Interestingly, a several partners remarked at the end that some form of online sharing tool would have been helpful.

Over the course of Phase 1 the idea of the HUB evolved somewhat. It emerged as a priority in the fall of 2011 and, while the original "one-stop-shop" functionality was still seen as important, there were additional discussions about how to add a more active and interactive component to support discussion and sharing of learnings and questions between people in the sector. These discussions, in fact, were remarked on as evidence of a new found confidence among the partners in their ability to co-create. The HUB design is now being revised and implemented to support this functionality, and it is scheduled to become operational shortly after the end of March, 2012.

The notion of developing CAASP as an umbrella for a variety of communities of practice was essentially postponed until the HUB was created. Despite this, a few partners have engaged in discussions on issues related to policy, disability, women and girls, and aboriginals. These discussions have helped fuel the design of Phase II. There was an unrealistic expectation that all who want to be engaged on the AS issue would do so through the single window of the HUB. A more realistic perspective might be that people or organizations could choose to

be involved to different degrees (and that this could change over time). Some might want to be involved with core CAASP group; others might want to participate on specific projects or initiatives; still others might want to limit their involvement to intermittent workshops or knowledge sharing events; and some might only want to be involved through newsletters, blogs or other forms of regular communication.

Sustainability:

Partners have acknowledged that sustainability of community programs is a significant issue, especially in the current fiscal environment. Sustainability, however, is viewed in two different ways. The first is seen in terms of the current pilot programs and how they will continue to operate beyond March 2012. Along with this is the idea that there are other target groups – newcomers, disabled, youth etc. – where a great deal could be learned from piloting new approaches.. One of the considerations in the Phase II proposal has been to sustain existing programs to get a better handle on the impacts of these interventions and to extend the AS work to these new groups.

The second perspective on sustainability has to do with CAASP itself and how the collective interactions and learning that have been developed can be maintained and extended. This latter perspective also has associated with it the question of what is the unique and valuable contribution that the partnership can make to the sector, something the partners are still working out amongst themselves.

Structure and membership:

CAASP has been led by a steering committee comprised of the partners participating in the PHAC funded initiative. Given the independence associated with the various pilots and activities in Phase 1, the work of this steering committee has principally involved coordination related to meeting the reporting needs of the funder involved; reflecting on the feedback from the barrier consultations and prioritizing the list of barriers that emerged from them; and co-designing the parameters for Phase II of their work together. As a group the participants have been respectful and appreciative of each other's contributions. Decisions were made by consensus making this group more than just an advisory body.

Many of the CAASP partners represent groups who are typically underserved by the current approach to providing after school programming – low income, girls, the disabled, and aboriginals. Green Communities differs in that it is a specific approach to increase physical activity levels through the use of active transportation strategies such as the "walking school bus". By modelling this approach it is also hoped that young people will be less dependent on cars.

According to researchers specializing in collaboration and partnership,[6] when one initially considers forming a partnership there are some useful criteria for who to invite - those who can support you in implementing what needs doing; those who can potentially stop you from doing what you want to do; those who have relevant knowledge; and those who are

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[6] David Straus, How to Make Collaboration Work, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, San Francisco, 2002; Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, San Francisco, 2008; and Jo Ann Romero, *The Art of Collaboration,* iUniverse, Bloomington, IN, 2008

directly impacted. In applying this lens to the CAASP partnership, it is evident that the core group may be somewhat incomplete. Most glaring is the lack of participation of parents or youth (as stakeholders who are directly impacted); those who represent the perspective of newcomers to Canada; those who represent the healthy eating or mental health aspects of CAASP's work; and of those who could potentially resist or limit the group's work such as school authorities, private daycare providers, policy makers, or even producers of video games. The absence of direct representation from aboriginal groups has been recently remedied with participation from the National Association of Friendship Centres but a broader inclusion strategy is warranted.

While individually the partners have made reference in discussion to other AS initiatives across North America, there was no discussion of what could be learned from these efforts. Three specific examples included *Quebec en forme*, *Active Living by Design* in the US and the *Stone Soup* initiative in Alberta.

CAASP has not yet finalized a strategy for how it might engage others beyond the core group. The partners are free to develop their own external relationships but there is no formal understanding of when or how to include others in CAASP itself. The core group is currently limited to PHAC funded partners only. There was a suggestion by some that this might be related to the fear that the inclusion of others would further dilute the funding available for projects. Many recognize, however, that any perceived sense of CAASP being a closed club could limit its capacity to work with all stakeholder groups in the after school sector.

Besides which, there are many different ways in which one might be included aside from direct, ongoing participation in the steering committee. Sub-groups of CAASP partners or combinations of CAASP partners with other external organizations could work together on something akin to task forces that feed into the purpose and collective learning of the partnership. CAASP could choose to hold periodic workshops or public meetings to share their experience and knowledge with interested stakeholders. Lastly, the online HUB tool and combinations of newsletters, polling, and social media could help to inform and engage those who can't participate on a face-to-face basis. While no formal engagement strategy exists, these elements of taskforces, workshops and online engagement are clearly present in the Phase II proposal.

Comparisons With Other Collaborative Experiences

Having nine major national groups around the table has been regarded as "exciting" or "very exciting" for most of the partners. Generally, the partners' CAASP experience has been viewed quite favourably in comparison with other collaborative experiences in which they have been involved. Said one participant, "I like the regular bi-monthly meetings where we have the opportunity to build relationships with each other, especially during that informal time around meals and coffee. There's lots of good energy in CAASP, lots of constructive conversations. There's also lots of history among the various people involved. There's a good fit among everyone."

A key factor in helping the partnership to 'gel' has been the facilitator, Steve Grundy. The partners all knew him, had worked with him and he was viewed as "one of them" rather than as a separate or new person. This experience stands in contrast to their initial experience with the unfamiliar facilitator used by PHAC in the early rounds of the project's inception. Grundy helped to reinforce the overlapping mutual connections among the partners so that their relationships have become strengthened. Nonetheless, "we've learned to recognize that although you might already know someone, when you work with them in a partnership environment there is still a need for patience and to continue investing the time needed to develop a solid working relationship."

Ontario After School Collaborative Comparison

CAASP was not the only after school collaboration supported by PHAC. In Ontario, the regional arm of PHAC, together with the Ontario Ministry of Health Promotion and Sport (MHPS), created another collaborative to support agencies that were delivering after-school programs in Ontario by: 1) Creating a framework to identify needs, coordinate strategies and specify the roles and responsibilities of the collaborative with other stakeholders and partners; and 2) Collecting and sharing training and programming resources, and tools. While the choice of the partners belonged to MHPS and Ontario PHAC, several of the participating agencies were also involved in CAASP including, CPRA, BGCC, and the YMCA.

Unlike CAASP, the Ontario collaborative did not deliver programs but provided a forum for dialogue to assess the experiences and potential 'best practices' being used by participating partners. They then created a document that compiled these practices for use by others. In contrast with CAASP, the Ontario collaborative was set up to be much more focused on discussion and process. Lacking an effective collaborative process, however, the partners spent a lot of time trying to reach consensus on every small decision to the extent that they risked missing deliverables. They collected comprehensive data on programs, training, and progress indicators, but failed to synthesize it. "It was the worst case scenario of direct democracy," everyone was responsible and therefore no one was responsible for meeting the objectives of the initiative.

Contrary to the CAASP experience where PHAC withdrew from active participation in the partnership, Ontario PHAC and the MHPS actively stepped in to fill a perceived lack of leadership and direction. For instance, the partners had produced an aggregated list of training resources. The funder wanted a short list for broad dissemination because they perceived a shortage of these types of resources across Ontario. The partners had wanted to select resources based on what might be most valued by end users and then have those resources accompanied by local adaptation strategies. Instead the funder ultimately chose resources from the aggregated list based on their need to get something out the door as quickly as possible.

Furthermore, PHAC and MHPS had different priorities leading to multiple evaluation and reporting requirements and a sense of "too many chiefs". While both funders offered encouraging rhetoric around the need for collaborative capacity building among after school delivery agents, both PHAC and MHPS wanted to rush to results by dictating a delivery schedule that did not account for the development of that capacity.

In comparing these two after school collaboratives there is a sense of that old African proverb, "If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."[7] In the Ontario case, the funder's need to produce quick results so as to be seen to be responsive to the issue of child obesity seemed paramount, to the extent that the investment in developing the capacity for shared decision making and leadership was forgone in favour of quick results. Unfortunately, as has been discovered by many action-oriented decision makers, willing and effective collaboration cannot simply be *made* to happen. Collaboration takes its own time.

In the case of CAASP, the partners have chosen to invest in developing relationships amongst each other, in understanding how they might work together, and what might be achieved together that would be different from their going it alone. Although there are clear and positive anecdotal results from the pilots, a sense of the added value from the collaborative process is less clear. However, as the efforts around the Phase II proposal suggest, the partners have developed a much clearer sense of their collaborative potential, how they might contribute to each other's work, and what new avenues they might explore together. They are more confident in, and excited by, the prospect of working together. That progress has been slower, sometimes frustratingly slow, but it is real nonetheless.

Looking to the Future - Considerations for Phase II

To date, the main impact of CAASP has been the positive working relationships and trust developed between the partners. That capacity affords an opportunity to build a common learning agenda and a knowledge platform that could potentially influence after school programs across the country.

CAASP is evolving to place greater emphasis on the development, translation, and transference of knowledge and expertise related to increasing the levels of physical activity and healthy living across Canada. It is developing a series of strategic priorities and it is creating a cooperative communication platform for use among all three levels of government, community agencies, youth and youth workers, and families.

CAASP is creating an opportunity to respond to the challenges of a society that is increasingly sedentary and unhealthy through a strategy that supports community-based approaches through increased collaboration and use of local resources. It is also an opportunity to build an expert and practitioner knowledge base that is beyond that which government agencies can offer by themselves.

The Phase II proposal demonstrates this shift in the role of the partnership from being a collection of independent program delivery agents to becoming a vehicle for knowledge development and dissemination.

Focus and Goals:

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[7] African proverb quoted by Al Gore in his Nobel Lecture, Oslo, Norway, 10 December 2007

Phase II of CAASP continues to focus on further refinements in quality programming and barrier reductions strategies, but it also emphasizes the communication of this knowledge to wider national audiences, to policy makers and to other practitioners. This focus is encapsulated in the following three major goals for Phase II:

1. Develop national capacity to enable the delivery of effective quality programs for both general and specific populations (priority populations). This would be accomplished by engaging with stakeholders and designing promising 'action research' to understand best practices.

2. Create broader public and institutional support for After School programs. This would be accomplished by conducting research on this complex issue and engaging with community leaders as well as policy makers and decision makers at all levels of government

3. Developing and nurturing a national community of practice (*knowledge exchange*) that is open to interested stakeholders and provides them with a means to link together, communicate, share knowledge and experiences, learn and collaborate.

Collaboration:

Phase I was dominated by a sense of what might be called a "vendor relationship" mindset between the partners and PHAC. Partners were contracted to undertake certain activities and to coordinate those activities amongst themselves. Activities that weren't contracted generally weren't done.

In that context activities associated with learning and knowledge development – including knowledge and experience sharing; co-learning; and developing a community of practice – were not built into the project from the start. Learning was an added cost. This gave rise to a passive, *informative* style of collaboration for CAASP. This "vendor" mentality was also initially encouraged by the way in which the initiative was assembled, the limited amount of partner trust and the lack of shared working relationships.

As the partners have developed their relationships, built trust, and developed a positive history of working together this vendor mentality has been giving way to a sense of shared ownership in CAASP and a greater willingness to assume joint leadership and responsibility for its collective outcomes. During the process to develop a Phase II proposal, for instance, there has been an attempt to move the nature of partner collaboration towards the *strategic* level. In the end, however, the time constraints applied to producing the proposal also served to limit the degree of collaboration so far.

In future, better collaboration and learning might be achieved throughout if, prior to the start of implementation of Phase II, the organizations went through a process of identifying and aligning their common learning goals and ensuring that their evaluation and feedback mechanisms were capable of providing the information they would need to achieve them. This is important because partners have identified that the "learning together" aspect of CAASP is valuable to each of them in and of itself - regardless of future funding.

Learning and Evaluation

The CAASP partners have the potential to learn an enormous amount through their work together: What does high quality after school programming look like? What are the motivators or triggers that could encourage children and youth to participate in after school programs? How do broader factors (beyond after school programs), such as culture and built environment, support or hinder greater physical activity and decreased childhood obesity?

Phase II of CAASP would benefit from a more integrated evaluation and learning plan from the outset, one that was based on clear outcome measures from the projects, and shared data collection strategies that are agreed to prior to program implementation. This implies a need to develop evaluation indicators and strategies that can capture changes in physical activity levels among participants, as well as partner learning strategies that permit ongoing reflection on the value and benefits of the programs and practices being utilized. The absence of this in Phase I has already been flagged by some of the partners.

Such strategies should help partners to clarify assumptions around basic concepts that are being used to guide their work such as "diversity", "disability", "inclusion" or "whole child". Since partner interviews suggest that the partners may have different understandings and assumptions about these terms, this step would likely result in useful shared learning. Even the term "after school program" can mean many different things to different people, according to researchers with the Peel Child and Youth Initiative who are providing evaluation support to the CPRA-ARPA pilots. Other than the standardized HIGHFive training for sport and physical activity, the partners have yet to discuss the basics of a "common approach". Phase II should provide the opportunity for the partners to have a comparative, empirically based dialogue, one that would no doubt be beneficial for community groups across the country.

Finally, there remains no clear idea of how CAASP-related learnings will actually be applied in the field. The assumption is that after school stakeholders will 1) go to the HUB; 2) find the information or resource they want; 3) be able to apply it to their work; and 4) benefit from its application. These assumptions are untested as yet. Given that different user groups may respond in different ways to online tools and resources[8], understanding the intangible incentives that may be embedded among the cultures of different organizations and communities of users will be a significant challenge to making the HUB and its online system of knowledge exchange and mobilization[9] truly effective.

Reporting and Administration:

Phase II would benefit from a negotiated arrangement with PHAC based on mutual learning goals that are relevant to the project and that it consider the outcomes expected. As PHAC has readily agreed, the current PERT reporting regime has not been designed with CAASP in mind and therefore it fosters neither learning nor accountability. It is unhelpful and overly

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[8] W.J. Orlikowski, "Learning from NOTES: Organizational issues in groupware implementation", in Turner, J. & Kraut, R.E. (eds.): *CSCW'92: Proceedings of the ACM Conference on Computer-Supported Cooperative Work, Toronto, Canada, 31 October-4 November 1992,* ACM Press, New York, 1992:362-369
[9] C. Wilson & D. Urquhart, *Best Practices in Community Knowledge Mobilization*, Social Planning Council of Ottawa, Ottawa, February, 2008

burdensome to have two separate and disconnected information gathering processes. Further "*ex post facto*" accountability serves neither the interests of the partners nor the funder.

In Phase II, reporting and accountability could become a more integral part of evaluation and learning. To do so would require PHAC to lay out its information needs together with those of the partners as the developmental evaluation plan is finalized at the outset of Phase II. Reporting and accountability could, in this way, become better aligned, and thus more amenable to better governance.

Facilitation and process design:

In Phase I group facilitation has been expertly used to build relationships, to keep partners informed, to expedite administrative requirements, and to reach collective decisions. This has enabled all the partners to do their work in implementing the pilots. As noted earlier, the partners have been very appreciative of this support.

If CAASP is to evolve into a knowledge-based strategy that maximizes the development, translation, and transference of after school knowledge, however, then group facilitation must create more space for the partners to learn and reflect from their respective experiences. They need time to discuss the big questions, their successes and, maybe more importantly, their failures. For instance, considering some of the partners have been operating successfully for generations, why have they unable to influence physical activity trends among children and youth?

Facilitation is this context should help the participants move through phases of dialogue that first validate differences of perspective among the partners, and then use these differences to generate new possibilities. This implies more time allocated to the sharing of ongoing experiences in a facilitated environment of trust and respect and on the joint governance of entire project, and less time on administrative concerns.

Decision-making:

Because of the aggregated nature of the CAASP initiative, few collective decisions have actually been required. One was the design of the online HUB and the other was the development of a Phase II plan. In both cases, decisions were made by consensus. The partners seem quite comfortable with this approach and it is well suited to the distributed ownership of the partnership.

Therefore it would be prudent for the partners to formalize their consensus-based approach to decision making and consider the rights and obligations that go along with that. They should also consider alternative processes for times where consensus cannot be reached. For instance, if they are presented with a funding envelope, then how would they allocate funding? Would they permit PHE Canada to choose for them, according to what criteria and with what priorities?

Supporting a Learning Culture:

If CAASP is to achieve its aspiration in Phase II to become a knowledge-based strategy to support after school learning nationally, then it will be important to do a two things:
a) create a learning agenda for the core partners, and b) determine how to open that agenda to external networks and stakeholders.
To realize that agenda, the HUB will play an important role. The partners should actively experiment with the HUB to learn more about its potential first hand, and promote the HUB through their networks and beyond. If the CAASP partners won't use the HUB, why should anyone else?

The partners should also proactively facilitate interactions among their networks of community stakeholders around questions of interest (e.g. how to design and deliver programs effectively to different cultural groups? How to keep tweens and teens engaged?), using the technology as a way of supporting this engagement.

Structure and membership:

Looking ahead, CAASP anticipates bringing into the partnership the National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC), and representation from healthy eating and newcomer organizations.

There are other voices that are only indirectly represented in CAASP, however, including: youth, parents, municipal governments, boards of education, provincial governments, ISRC, regional health authorities, provincial ministries of health and public health. CAASP should consider expanding the CAASP concept beyond funded partners to include important and influential groups that have a serious stake in increasing physical activity levels among children and youth and reducing child obesity. This would also entail re-balancing the work of CAASP to provide sufficient value (beyond the receipt of funding) to these stakeholders to warrant their participation.

Sustainability:

The issue of who to include is also tied to the issue of sustainability. The partners recognize this as an important concern, noting that the future of their work is currently subject to the vagaries of political whims. Expanding the pool of potential funders is one solution to this, something which could be addressed by expanding the network of interested stakeholders and communicating the value of the learning produced by CAASP activities. But sustainability might also be partially addressed by the value CAASP brings to the partners. If partners see sufficient value in CAASP's work, they will find ways to sustain it.

In the current economic climate, it is unreasonable to see government as the sole source of funding for after school programming like the provision of education or health care. This is why the partners have emphasized a community development approach to help operating and promising after school programs build on existing local assets, including volunteers, facilities, training, and social capital.

In order to access these assets effectively, CAASP partners have seen the need to develop advocacy strategies as integral parts of the Phase II work that will, hopefully, increase the likelihood of program growth and sustainability.

In the end, CAASP is an organization with much promise. Given it's start, CAASP's resilience has surprised many of its participants. This is due mainly to their shared passion and commitment to providing Canada's children and youth with more opportunities to engage in physical activity and healthy living behaviours as well as their mutual respect for each other's professionalism and integrity. They have created a solid foundation for working together. We anticipate that they will find the means to continue building on this foundations to the betterment of all Canadians.

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