

# A Look at Leisure

Results of the 1981 Public Opinion Survey on Recreation conducted by Alberta Recreation and Parks

No. 6

## A LOOK AT ISSUES

This is the sixth bulletin in a series published by Alberta Recreation and Parks that looks at the leisure of Albertans. The series is designed to describe the responses from the 1981 Public Opinion Survey on Recreation. This bulletin will focus on some of the issues in recreation which are of concern to all recreation agencies, including Alberta Recreation and Parks. An analysis of the results may provide some direction to recreation practitioners for future program planning and service delivery.



# Alberta

RECREATION AND PARKS



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The first section of the bulletin will look at opinions on five issues in recreation:

- i) the importance of amateur athletes winning medals;
- ii) the amount of competition in children's sports;
- iii) the number of family recreation opportunities;
- iv) the use of schools by the community;
- v) the provision by employers of recreation opportunities for their employees.

Profiles of people who expressed various opinions will be examined in relation to the following types of factors: economic (eg. income, employment status), social (eg. age, sex, education), and household situation (eg. size, length of time in present dwelling).

The second section will look at the GET UP ALBERTA campaign and its effects on the awareness and recreational behaviour of people who encountered it. This Provincial 75th Anniversary campaign consisted of two award programs: a running award, primarily for school children and a fitness award, primarily for adults. This was supplemented by television and radio advertisements. The program was conducted province wide from September to December 1980 and over 20,000 fitness and running award crests were distributed.

The final section will discuss some implications of the findings for the recreation practitioner.



The responses to the following questions are examined in this bulletin:

### SECTION 3

**We would like to know your opinions on and answers to the following questions that relate to the programs and services offered by Alberta Recreation and Parks.**

1. Some people feel it is **important** that **Alberta's amateur** athletes win medals in interprovincial and national **competitions** and others don't feel this way. What is your opinion?

**Not important      Somewhat important      Important      No opinion**

2. Some people feel it is **important** that **Canada's amateur** athletes win medals in international competitions and others **don't** feel this way. What is your opinion?

**Not important      Somewhat important      Important      No opinion**

3. Some people feel there are enough opportunities for families to participate together in organized recreational activities and others don't feel there are enough opportunities. What is your opinion?

**Not enough opportunities      Enough opportunities      Too many opportunities      No opinion**

4. Some people feel there is too much emphasis on competition in organized sports for children and others feel there isn't **enough** emphasis. What is your opinion?

**Not enough emphasis      Enough emphasis      Too much emphasis      No opinion**

5. Some people agree that schools should be used for public-recreation purposes outside of school hours and others disagree. What is your opinion?

**Disagree      Agree      No opinion**

6. Some people agree that employers should help provide recreational activities for their employees and others disagree. What is your opinion?

**Disagree      Agree      No opinion**

10 (a) Did you see, hear or read about the **GET UP ALBERTA** campaign?

Yes \_\_\_ No (Go to Section 41)

(b) What effects has it had on you? (Check all that apply.)

I am more aware of the benefits of participating in recreation

I have Taken up a new recreational activity

The advertisement is have had no effect on me

The advertisements have reduced my interest in participating in

Other (please specify).....

Some of the major findings, based upon the views of those Albertans who responded to the survey are:

- over three quarters believed it is "important" or "somewhat important" that athletes win medals at competitions.



- almost half felt there was too much emphasis on competition in children's sport.
- just over half felt there were enough recreation opportunities for families.
- a large majority felt that schools should be available for community use after school hours.
- just over half felt that employers should help provide recreational opportunities for their employees.
- just under half were aware of the GET UP ALBERTA campaign.

EXCELLENCE IN  
COMPETITION

The relative frequencies of responses to questions one and two of the 1981 public Opinion Survey on Recreation are indicated in Table 1. Although the responses are similar, slightly more people felt it was important that athletes win medals at the international level than at the interprovincial and national levels.

TABLE I IMPORTANCE OF ATHLETES WINNING MEDALS IN COMPETITION

	Alberta Athletes in Competition (%)	Canadian Athletes in National International Competition (%)
Not Important	13	12
Somewhat Important	37	34
Important	41	47
No Opinion	7	6
Multiple Response	1	1

Those who felt that winning medals was not important tended to be university educated, professional males. There were no particular characteristics that defined individuals who felt winning was important.

The popularity of sports is evident in books, magazines and newspapers. In addition, television coverage has increased to the point that certain time periods are dominated by sports (eg. weekends, during the Olympics). This popularity can be explained partially by the personal satisfaction felt by spectators who identify with the successes of athletes (1).



## CHILDREN AND COMPETITION

The survey results showed that almost half of the respondents (49%) felt there was too much emphasis on competition in children's sports while a second large group (36%) felt there was enough emphasis. Only a few (7%) felt there was not enough emphasis. The presence of children in the household had no apparent effect on these opinions.

TABLE 2 COMPETITION IN CHILDREN'S SPORT

	Percent of Respondents
Not Enough Emphasis	7
Enough Emphasis	36
Too Much Emphasis	49
No Opinion	7
Multiple Response	2

A. good deal of attention has been given to the issue of competition in children's sports. In his review of the literature, Wankel (2) summarized the work of several researchers: Martens found that although children were able to test their limits in response to the challenge of sport and feel satisfaction and achievement, overemphasis on winning resulted in other factors such as fun becoming secondary in importance; Rarick found that heavy emphasis on winning created negative stress for the participant, though participation in sport helped maintain good physical fitness. Other negative effects experienced by the participant were loss of sleep, dissatisfaction with performance and aggressive responses.

Several studies reviewed by Wankel indicated that intrinsic factors such as fun, satisfaction, improving skills and excitement were the most important reasons why children participate. However, winning and scoring were also considered important. Wankel reported that when young sports participants were asked to rank four values: winning the game, playing fair, having fun, and playing well, they ranked "playing well" first, and "winning" as fourth.



The emphasis on competition and the necessity of being "good" in order to play have been cited as two main reasons that children drop out of organized sports (2). In contrast Gould and Horn (3) found that the major reason for dropping out of sports was conflicting interests, though many have quit because of such things as getting little playing time, overemphasis on competition, not having fun, and disliking the coach.

It can be seen that there are many factors in sport that affect children and that in many situations an overemphasis on competition can be detrimental. This may contribute to the concern of many respondents that there is too much emphasis on competition in children's sport.

#### OPPORTUNITIES FOR FAMILY RECREATION

The 1981 Public Opinion Survey on Recreation showed that although just over half (53%) of those surveyed were satisfied with the number of opportunities for families to participate in recreation activities, 36% felt there were not enough opportunities. There were no strong defining characteristics of either group; the presence of children in the household appeared to have no effect on satisfaction.

TABLE 3 FAMILY RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

	<u>Percent of Respondents</u>
Not Enough	36
Enough	53
Too Many	2
No Opinion	8
Multiple Response	2

In a review of the literature dealing with recreation and the family, Orthner and Mancini (4) found the experience of shared leisure to be very important for the family. Close contact with family members provides an opportunity for interaction, which may result in greater family cohesion and vitality.



Orthner and Mancini's review showed that the majority of recreational activities are participated in with other family members. However, the effects are not always positive. For example, increased contact can create more opportunities for conflict within the family if there are differences of interest. A balance of family members' needs and expectations for participation together can produce a satisfactory family leisure lifestyle.

COMMUNITY USE  
OF SCHOOLS

The majority of respondents (89%) agreed that schools should be used for public recreation after school hours, while a few (5%) disagreed. There were no characteristics that strongly defined these groups.

TABLE 4 COMMUNITY USE OF SCHOOLS

	<u>Percent of Respondents</u>
Disagree	5
Agree	89.5
No Opinion	1
Multiple Response	

A previous study completed in 1975 by the Alberta Interdepartmental Community School Committee (6) indicated that 96% of educational jurisdictions supported the principle of community use of schools. However, the majority of schools were not being used to their potential by either schools or the community.

Barriers to full utilization of schools are cited in the literature: funding shortages; reluctance of school administration; and administrative difficulties (ie. coordination of bookings, fees and charges, formulation of agreements, and legalities) (6), (7).

Stevens (5) has written, "Schools are far too expensive to build and maintain to be sitting idle up to fifty percent of the time". There are two common ways that schools can be used by the community. One is through the development



of a joint-use agreement, which formally provides for use of the school by community groups at agreed upon times. The other is through the establishment of a "community school", which is available for community use at all times during the day. As well, the school can make use of community resources: for example, an adult "English As A Second Language" course might be taught during the morning while senior citizens were in another classroom teaching butterchurning and breadmaking to school children. A community school may make use of an existing facility or may be built cooperatively by the school board and municipality, in which case it will often incorporate a public library, swimming pool, and similar facilities as well as the traditional classrooms and gymnasium.

There is a need for cooperation between the school board and municipality when negotiating the issues. A joint decision-making body is needed to define all roles and responsibilities of those involved in community use of schools and to educate both the general public and partners in the agreement about school use(6).

EMPLOYEE  
RECREATION

When the 1981 Public Opinion Survey on Recreation asked whether or not employers should help provide recreation activities for their employees, over half the respondents (55%) felt they should, while one quarter (26%) felt they should not. The former tended to be young adults who had lived in Alberta for less than eleven years. The latter were married, aged 45-64 years, and were longer term residents of Alberta. The respondents who had no opinion composed a fairly large percentage of the sample (17%).

TABLE 5 PROVISION OF RECREATION BY EMPLOYERS

	Percent of Respondents
Disagree	26
Agree	55
No Opinion	17
Multiple Response	2



In a survey of an Edmonton company, Wanzel (8) found that 81% of the employees felt the company should provide some form of physical activity program. In a similar cross-Canada survey (9), 65.5% of white collar workers felt the same.

Many industrial recreation programs focus on physical fitness. A 1977-78 Fitness Canada study (10) cites the benefits of employee fitness programs, including improvements in physical fitness and general attitude towards work. As well, employee turnover and absenteeism decreased, though no difference was seen in productivity. In spite of the lack of increase in productivity, the savings due to decreases in absenteeism and turnover could be substantial (10).

Many employers have doubts as to whether the benefits of employee recreation compensate for the costs to the company. Wanzel (9) found that managers wanted more conclusive evidence on this issue. Managers also felt that monetary compensation, such as tax incentives, could encourage companies to implement programs.

"NO OPINION"

An examination of the characteristics of individuals who expressed "no opinion" in response to the six questions showed that they tended to be female, over sixty-five years of age, lived alone, and had low levels of income and less than grade ten education. These respondents may be less aware of or less interested in the issues addressed in this study than other respondents.

There were also some issue specific findings. Those who lived in households with one or more unrelated single adults and households with no children often chose "no opinion" on the issues of family recreation opportunities and children's sport.

GET UP ALBERTA

There was an almost even split between those who had and those who had not seen, heard, or read about the GET UP ALBERTA fitness promotion campaign. Socio-economic factors did not define who was aware of the campaign and who was not.



An examination of the effects of the campaign showed that almost two thirds (63%) of those who had knowledge of the program (or 28% of the sample) were made "more aware of the benefits of recreation".

The reported effect on behaviour showed that 15.8% of the respondents who were aware of the campaign began a new recreational activity. If this figure is applied to a city of 50,000 people, it would imply that almost 4,000 people began new activities. However, this number may be somewhat inflated as it is based on two assumptions: that activities were in fact "new", and that behavior change was due to the GET UP ALBERTA campaign and not other factors such as the general trend toward better fitness or the Participation campaign. There was also no indication of the duration of participation in the activities.

Of those who were familiar with the campaign, 37.2% were not affected by the advertisements and 2.5% had their interest in participating in recreation reduced.

There are few similar promotional programs whose effects have been studied and can be compared to the effects of the GET UP ALBERTA campaign. Jackson (11) examined the Participation campaign and its effect in a neighborhood of Victoria, B.C. The study was done in 1978, seven years after Participation was established. Seventy-two percent of the respondents had heard of Participation and 10% became more physically active as a result of it.

Relative to Participation, the GET UP ALBERTA campaign created less general awareness, but appeared to have more effect on the behaviors of those who encountered it. This may be explained by the fact that the Participation campaign is of a larger magnitude, but that GET UP ALBERTA gave more direction to participants and offered crests as an initial goal to work towards.

## IMPLICATIONS

The knowledge of public opinion should better equip the recreation practitioner to meet the expectations of the community. In addition, the practitioner has an important role in educating the public, so that opinions can be



based on accurate information. Although those who expressed "no opinion" may have no personal interest in an issue, many may in fact have no information about the issue. People may be more willing to respond to new ideas, such as employee recreation, if they understand the principles upon which they are based.

A large majority of those surveyed felt it was important or somewhat important that amateur athletes win medals. In contrast half felt there was too much emphasis on competition in children's sport. Is it possible to satisfy both groups by offering programs with different goals? Opportunities should be available to all levels of participant, from the casual to the competitor. A broad base of participation can provide an avenue where skills can be learned and from which excellence can emerge. Can the municipal recreation department work with Provincial sport associations to provide a support structure for sporting events in the community (administrative support, volunteers, training for coaches and officials)? Perhaps the business community can be approached to become more involved in sponsoring local teams and events. Those involved in sport - coaches, officials, and parents, can be educated about the philosophy of children's sport, perhaps through the basic levels of the National Coaching Certification Program. Are children in your community dropping out of sports? If so, why is this happening? Maybe there is a need for non-competitive recreation opportunities, or games adapted to the age and skill level of the participant (eg. t-ball, mini-soccer).

Over a third of the respondents felt there were not enough opportunities for families to participate together in organized recreational activities. Consider the programs in your community. Can activities be undertaken by an entire family? Are programs scheduled at times that encourage family participation? Consider the single parent family and its special needs. Are some programs offered that develop life-long skills such as pet care, cycling, golf, curling, fishing and gardening? Perhaps people feel that there is a shortage of organized opportunities because they are unaware of what is available. Special events similar to the family-oriented CPRA Fitness Program, could be promoted in the community.



There are also many informal recreation opportunities, such as picnics or trips to the museum, that can be publicized to families.

What is happening in your community with regard to community schools or community use of schools? Is there a joint use agreement? How is the recreation department involved in the agreement? Are the schools allowed use of municipal facilities?

Are community groups aware of school resources? There is a role for the recreation practitioner to encourage community use of schools through public relations programs. The study findings suggest that the public does support the principle that schools be used for public recreation outside of school hours.

Over half of those surveyed felt that employers should provide recreation opportunities, while forty-three percent did not support the statement (17% had no opinion, 26% felt employers should not provide recreation opportunities). Employee recreation is a relatively new concept to many people. Perhaps an educational program directed to employers and potential participants would be beneficial. What is being done within your own workplace? Can you offer fitness club memberships or plan an employee picnic? Would companies be more receptive to the idea if they were aware of resources available to them (eg. from Alberta Recreation and Parks)? The concept of employee recreation encompasses more than just physical fitness: family activities, sports tournaments, educational classes, etc. Perhaps expansion into these other areas could be encouraged where appropriate.

The GET UP ALBERTA campaign reached almost half of the respondents - people from all social and economic backgrounds and from all household situations. The response to this campaign has implications for similar programs at the local level. There is a great potential for both creating awareness and changing behavior, though the cost must be considered in light of potential effects. The success of awareness campaigns can be increased by a number of methods: the medium should be attractive and eye-catching; the message should be clear, easily understood, and reinforced by repetition.



Although the actual number who began a new recreational activity as a result of the GET UP ALBERTA campaign could not be determined, a substantial number of respondents did relate their participation in a new recreation activity to the program. A campaign that provides suggestions on how to change behavior may have more effect than one that simply passes on a message. There are many techniques that a similar campaign could use to further encourage behavior change.

Are there small gifts (eg. buttons or keychains) that can act as permanent reminders of the benefits of participation? Special events or introductory programs could help to expose people to new activities. Could more use be made of television and radio? Challenges between towns could initiate action. There is a need to be creative and look beyond the standard means of providing information about recreation opportunities.

The questions discussed in this bulletin are particularly relevant to the programs and services of recreation agencies. For example, Alberta Recreation and Parks has developed a sports policy and is currently developing a strategy that deals with issues of competition and support of developing athletes. There is ongoing support of community use of schools through involvement in such projects as the Interdepartmental Community School Committee and Project Cooperation grants. Family recreation is a secondary aim of many department projects such as the Leisure Bug Campaign currently underway in Red Deer, which promotes the awareness of recreation benefits and opportunities in the community and makes specific reference to family participation.

Sensitivity to the issues in the recreation field and public feeling towards them is necessary for both the local and provincial practitioner to ensure that the services provided reflect the needs and interests of the public.



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#### FUTURE ISSUES

VOLUNTEERISM - What are the attitudes of Albertans towards volunteers and volunteerism?

SOCIAL SETTING - Who do people participate with and how important is the social setting in recreation?

LIFESTYLES - Lifestyle factors and attitudes towards recreation. Are people being educated for leisure?

#### INFORMATION

YOU require runner inormauon or would like a to change your mailing address, please

If you require further information or would like to change your mailing address contact:

G. Burn Evans Research  
 Coordinator Planning Support  
 Branch Recreation Development  
 Division Alberta Recreation and  
 Parks Standard Life Centre  
 10405 Jasper Avenue Edmonton,  
 Alberta T5J 3N4



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