

Aboriginal community sport development grant creates new opportunities



Sask Sport is helping to make the hoop dreams of children in central Saskatchewan come true.

Over a dozen schools in Saskatoon and North Battleford with a high First Nations and Metis-student base have been using the Sask Sport Aboriginal Community Sport Development Grant Program to increase levels of physical activity among their students.

The grant program, which is funded by Sport Canada Bilateral Program and the Saskatchewan Lotteries Trust Fund for Sport, Culture and Recreation, is designed to support the development and implementation of community sport programs. Using the grant funds, these schools have been able to partner with Wild Youth Sports Management to organize basketball programs in their schools and communities.

Josh Reis, coordinator of Wild Youth, said Sask Sport Inc.'s Aboriginal Community Sport Development Grant Program has played a very important role in allowing communities to access sporting programs.

"This grant has been crucial," said Reis. "In North Battleford, for example, many of the funding programs only cover programs for children who live in First Nation communities. The Aboriginal Community Sport Development Grant Program allows schools qualify as well."

Reis said his organization has been honoured to work with the communities, as the process has helped Wild Youth work toward its goal of "maintaining the purity of youth sport that removes the barriers for participation such as money and geography, by not only offering camps at affordable prices, but also by bringing high calibre athletes to a variety of cities around the province."

When a school partners with Wild Youth, the process begins when Wild Youth visits the school for a day and works basketball into the physical education schedule. After school, they also offer a basketball

program for kids who would like to spend their free time being psychically active. The students are then invited to join the weekend basketball league.

Wild Youth has experienced coaches that led each basketball session. Many of these coaches are First Nations and Metis, such as University of Saskatchewan Huskies volleyball player Emory Wells and Huskies soccer player Carson MacDonald, and serve as role models for the children. In addition, Basketball Saskatchewan partnered with Wild Youth and the communities to offer specialized training in the Steve Nash Youth Basketball Program which helped to build the capacity of the communities to continue with basketball development.

Reis noted that the basketball programs are quite literally helping youth get off the couch and into the game.

“The kids we work with in various Tribal Councils and First Nations communities need quality opportunities to participate in sport. We’ve had very great attendance. The kids are pretty stoked about it and it’s a huge benefit to have that level of engagement from them,” said Reis.

So far, Wild Youth has worked with 15 schools involving 2,000 kids. The organization has also been working with the Saskatoon Tribal Council and hopes that another seven schools will be joining the program in the New Year.

