



MoreSports/YELL

FUNdamental Sports for All

June 2011

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MoreSports/YELL: FUNdamental Sports for All

It is a lovely Spring day in east Vancouver - a perfect day to kick around a soccer ball at the local park. A group of 8 to 13 year old inner city kids are out on the field with a father doing just that, the soccer ball old and well used. Everyone is laughing and having a great time. The year is 1998.



After watching for only a minute or so, a man walks up to the group and tells them that they have to stop playing and leave – they do not have a permit to use the field. They are told that only soccer clubs with permits, like the one the man coaches, are allowed to play there.

A group of very disappointed kids watch as cars drive up and other children pile out. The dad is told that these children belong to soccer teams from a more affluent area on the other side of town. The dad asks how his children and their friends from the neighbourhood can play in the league. He is told they would have to pay a \$125 league fee for each child and would travel to a different field each weekend to play. Parents would be expected to volunteer as well and of course, they would need to have equipment.

The dad is very upset. Neither he nor the families of the other children with him can afford such a huge amount of money. He is also angry. This is their local neighbourhood field. Why should they be told to leave? Why do the children who live here not have their own soccer team? Why should the kids be left out just because their parents are poor?

Creating Opportunity

What do you do when you live in a community where the majority of kids can't or don't participate in sports or other physical activities? A community in which there is limited ability to generate user fees to pay for opportunities? A community which has little if any of the leadership and volunteer capacity needed to run sport and activity programs?

If you are a group of parents in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, one of the most vulnerable communities in Canada, you begin by bringing together like-minded people and organizations in your neighbourhood to develop a plan. Our soccer playing dad did just that. Dad was a board member of an inner city community centre, and a few weeks later, he and four other parents brought the issue to their board meeting, explaining that the more economically advantaged west side sports teams were booking all the neighbourhood field space for their sports groups, while local families and others from the east side could not afford to compete, having neither the capacity nor ability to generate fees and form their own soccer teams. The parents asked the community centre to help them give their children a chance to play.

The centre's staff and board members were well positioned to support the parents in moving forward. The facility had been developed in the early 1970s as a cooperative centre to provide family programs as a result of the dedication, coordinated action and advocacy of a group of local mothers. This experience in community organizing had taught these residents about the importance of planning before acting – clarifying assumptions and values, determining who needed to be involved, and developing a 'road map' to follow in moving forward. 25 years later this new group of parents, supported by the board and other like-minded community organizations – local schools, neighbourhood houses, other community centres, and compatible nonprofits -- followed a similar path to bring opportunities for physical activity to all local children.

The obvious response was to develop a team sports process geared to the realities of inner-city children. They faced a number of challenges in doing so, even before they could undertake the necessary negotiation to get access to playing fields. Their first challenge was finding trainers – which they addressed by opting to train local youth to be coaches to younger children. Their second challenge was sorting out where and how to provide the training; working with local elementary schools provided an answer. Their third challenge was finding funding; this too was met when a project grant was approved by Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC). The result of their work was the development of East Van Soccer, setting up teams in three inner-city neighbourhoods: the Downtown Eastside, Strathcona, and Grandview Woodlands.

The specifics of the process followed in developing East Van Soccer lay the groundwork for what would become the *MoreSports* model: effectively building on existing community assets and fostering increased capacity for the individuals and neighbourhoods involved. Rather than creating a separate organization, the consortium opted to have administration of the contract taken on by an existing community organization. Twelve identified at-risk youth were then hired and trained as recreation sport leaders to coach soccer for inner-city children over a six month period. After the completion of their training, the youth leaders began offering 'School Days' program to a few inner city elementary school Physical Education classes, providing activities that worked on progressive skill development to teach soccer to the students. These 'School Days' programs continue to be offered today.

Assumptions which took root as the initiative evolved:

- All kids want to be involved in physical activities.
- This involvement benefits physical health and contributes to social and emotional well-being.
- All children have a right to be included and have these experiences.
- These children should not be singled out or segregated and labeled as poor, but linked to larger systems and neighborhood programs.
- The responsibility rests with more than one group or partner.
- Programs and activities should reflect local interests and capacity, but should also be linked within a city-wide framework of universal values, mutual support, and shared administration and planning (structure, decisions, risk management, safety practices, etc).
- Leadership should come from the communities and neighborhoods where children live.
- Facilities and resources exist and are sustained primarily within the municipal infrastructures of Schools and Parks & Recreation systems. Both need to be operating partners.
- Resources and mechanisms for coordination to support this work should be sustainable and imbedded in municipals structures, which are publicly funded and mandated to generate social capital and equity.

The response from local children and youth was enthusiastic and it quickly became apparent that additional programs were required to meet the demand, prompting East Van Soccer to expand activities to include sessions after school and on Saturdays.

The process ended up being one of evolution, rather than strictly planning/implementation. Initially, parents were simply looking to give their kids a chance to play soccer and did not plan beyond that aim. However it became clear over time that just developing a soccer team would not engage all local children. Local residents were enthusiastic about the idea but few had the time or skills to contribute in any practical way. Plus, better financed, organized sports clubs were not about to relinquish any field time without a battle. The classic model simply would not work. What was most crucial is that the planning group worked with and listened not just to the community parents but also to the children themselves, adjusting and ultimately expanding the strategy to more fully reflect their priorities and to fulfill the resulting goals.

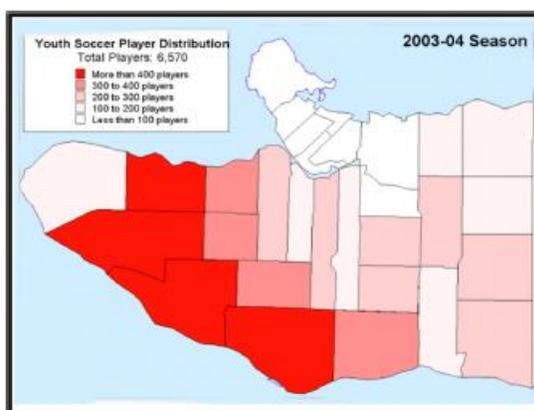
Based on a past funding relationship, Ray-Cam approached the McConnell Foundation. Although primarily focused on social issues, the Foundation recognized a philosophical fit with *MoreSports'* capacity building, inclusion model and awarded the program three years of funding to continue its efforts on a wider scale. The result was transformational. Stable guaranteed funding provided an opportunity to plan properly and move strategically – an opportunity that *MoreSports* organizations wisely embraced. They engaged the Strathcona Research Group to develop an analysis of the social context within which *MoreSports* operated, placing a particular emphasis of the role organized sports could play in addressing social inclusion.

A Different Approach

Most neighbourhoods Vancouver operate an extensive sport delivery system through '*minor leagues*' or '*sports clubs*', based on a large volunteer structure and supported by consumer fees. This system often utilizes community centres and Parks and Recreation facilities but operates largely as a series of independent leagues/clubs connected to the Provincial Sport Organizations, which are the governing bodies for sports in BC. As children register teams are formed. Parents are the backbone of this system as coaches and to provide transport for children to and from game and practice sites. In the more economically balanced communities where minor leagues thrive, the role of the community centre or the Vancouver Parks Board is often limited to providing facilities at reduced costs (no cost), or entering joint ventures with the minor league system to develop facilities such as ball diamonds or soccer fields.

Children involved in this system often become teenagers or adults/parents involved in sport either by playing or volunteering in the delivery as coaches, managers, coordinators, or officials. These activities give young people and young adults a place to connect and contribute to the larger community, and as importantly, provide networks for socialization, support, and future employment and mentoring.

A different picture emerges on the east side/inner-city of Vancouver. It should be noted that research indicates this picture is the same in most inner-city and low-income areas of this country. Despite housing proportionally more families than does Vancouver's west side, the east side finds participation in after-school/weekend organized sport and recreation leagues and skill development programs, particularly by low-income youth, to be non-existent in some areas.



It has proven very difficult to develop or operate the traditional youth sport league system or organized skill development activities such as swimming lessons in these communities, primarily because the user/registration fees that support and operate such sport leagues and development programs cannot be generated. In some east side and inner-city neighborhoods family incomes are 30-40% below the poverty line. Almost every child would require a significant subsidy to be able to participate.

Inner-city children by and large have few places to play. Parkland tends to be scarcer in such areas and what does exist can be rendered unusable by the presence of high-impact individuals and/or ongoing contamination by trash such as discarded needles or condoms. Unsupervised children are generally discouraged from going to parks on their own and children from families with fewer resources are more likely to be left on their own for some parts of the day. Inner-city children often live in apartment buildings and are less likely to have yards. Overall they possess fewer opportunities to enjoy unstructured play.

In essence, children and youth from poorer neighbourhoods not only deal with problems directly related to lack of income but also suffer from an inability to participate fully within their neighbourhood and in the community at large.

Barriers to participation in a regular sport system:

- Poverty
- Lack of access many parents have/had to educational opportunities.
- Lack of transportation.
- Inadequate unsafe shelter.
- Lack of trained coaches and volunteers
- Lack of space – fields, gyms, play spaces
- Language difficulties (ESL).
- Behavior issues of children growing up in high risk, high crime areas.
- Special needs of children with physically and emotional challenges lacking even the minimal of resources.
- Lack of time or resources of the high percentage of single parents in the East Van communities.
- Inability to charge league participation fees to cover equipment and uniforms, facility rentals.
- Difficulties in obtaining parental consent due to literacy difficulties or newness to Canada.

After a couple of false starts, it became very clear that the planning team would need to take a radically different approach to achieve their aims. Unless capacity building practices and social inclusion approaches became an integral part of the municipal recreation systems, sport institutions, and the community organizations' delivery structure, participation by low resource/low-income areas or families in sport, recreational and skill development programs would continue to be a dream for the majority of these communities' children and youth.

Approaches would need to change and the system would need to redesign the functions and focus of some paid staffing positions. Resources would need to be built into existing infrastructures to enable, facilitate, and mentor community parents and residents already faced with many survival challenges, supporting them to assume key roles as the volunteer leadership of a new system of sport participation.

The strategy would build on existing strengths in communities, developing the capacity to deliver a multitude of sport and skill development activities for local children and youth. Leadership development opportunities and encouragement would be key components of the work.

The ultimate result was the development of *MoreSports* and *YELL*.

The *MoreSports/YELL* Model

The model they developed was and remains quite simple: go where children are, provide structures and programming that fit with what children and families actually want, and build on what already exists.

MoreSports and *YELL* – are basically co-dependent, delivered symbiotically to achieve their individual and mutual outcomes. *MoreSports* provides sustainable sport and physical activity opportunities for children and families, with a special focus on people who typically do not participate in sports -- building on existing community resources to deliver programs and events in partnership with schools, local government, community groups, private businesses and non-profits. *YELL*, an acronym for *Youth Engage Learn Lead*, is a coordinated system of training that occurs within the *MoreSports* partnership model, utilizing existing community resources to train and develop youth volunteers and leadership in neighbourhoods and communities with few sports, physical recreation, arts and cultural programs for children -- particularly low-income neighbourhoods. The initial focus of *YELL* was on youth involved in secondary schools, community programs, personal planning, and leadership programs. The program has since expanded into two components – *YELL* and *Y2* - to include younger age groups. Youth are assigned as leaders to existing *MoreSports* programs in participating neighbourhoods.

The approach taken is unique in two regards:

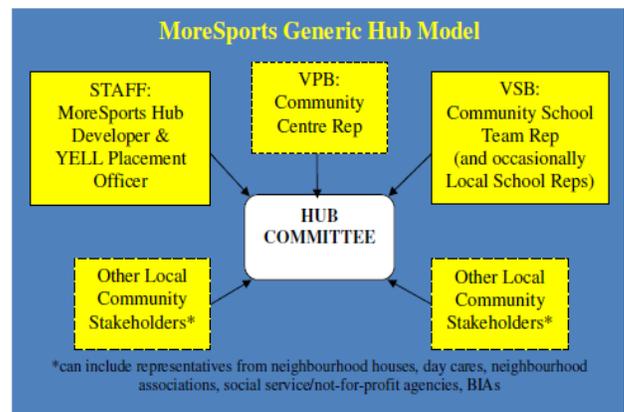
- First, barriers to participation are not only removed but are rendered invisible. All participants access activities and programs through a common, indistinguishable, pay-what-you-can entry process.
- Second, programs and activities are built on and integrated within existing community and school structures and systems, thus maximizing participation and minimizing costs while effectively reflecting neighbourhood capacities and priorities.

The strategy adopted to implement this model contained five key components:

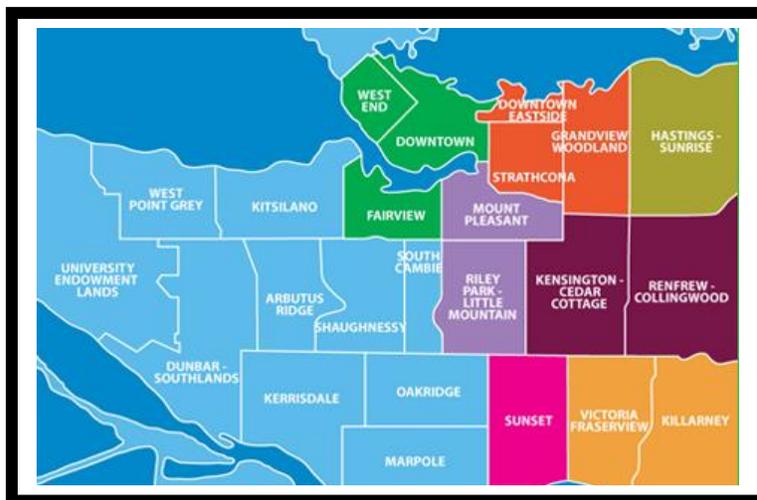
- Use existing resources more creatively
- Build capacity
 - Community leadership
 - Organizational change
- Bring in new partners
- Delivery - respect diversity
- Continuity and growth

Use Existing Resources More Creatively: The Hub System

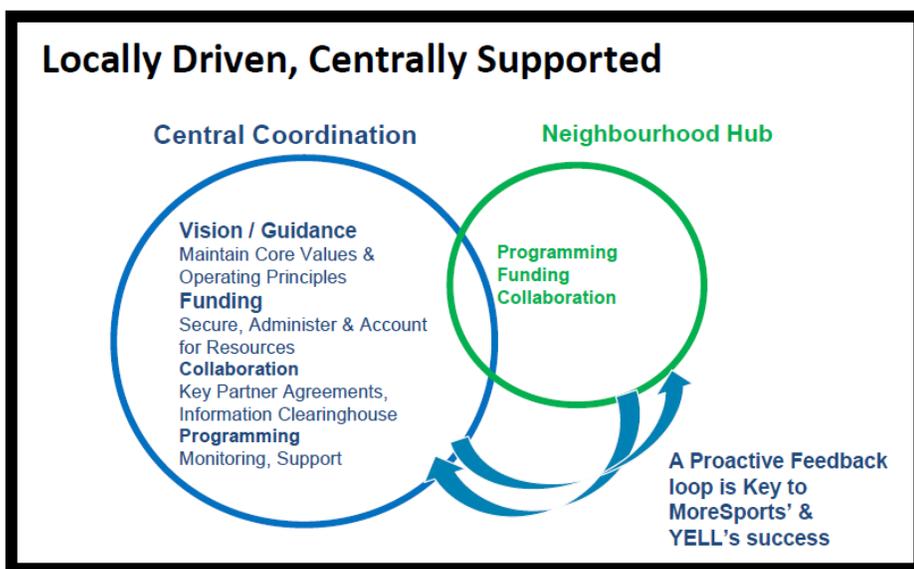
The concept employed, which emerged through social action research and evaluation into best practice, initially brought together three neighborhoods which shared common transportation systems, school catchments, etc. into a **Hub** model, delivered through a coordinated system, providing connections to local neighborhoods, issues, needs and priorities supported within the context of a unifying overall strategy. This arrangement provided for a larger resource base, including potential volunteers and other partners, while only requiring one coordination effort instead of the three needed in the previous neighbourhood-based site model.



Today, *MoreSports* involves 7 Hubs that encompass 17 Vancouver neighbourhoods, multiple partners, parents, volunteers and thousands of kids located primarily on Vancouver's east side. Each Hub relates to a population of approximately 20,000-25,000 people. Hubs are loosely based on City of Vancouver planning district areas and each Hub has a catchment area encompassing 3 to 4 neighborhoods.



The core idea behind the Hub system is that *MoreSports/YELL* activities are locally driven and centrally supported. Each neighbourhood Hub develops a lead site from which to coordinate, plan and implement sport/development opportunities for their catchment area of youth, in collaboration with other neighbourhood-based schools, local organizations, parents, and youth. Each Hub reflects its local network, allowing local youth leadership and adult partners to reflect community needs, have relevant information, and be more aware of resources and local capacity when developing and implementing their plans/programs. Organizing through Hubs allows greater penetration into each neighbourhood and builds relationships with partners for more efficient delivery of programs and events. In this manner the diversity of the neighborhoods is respected and the activities are based on building from the existing capacity of the participating neighborhoods.



Each Hub is responsible for and has decision-making power about its own operations, programming and delivery methods.

Central Coordination is responsible for maintaining:

- Vision - Core Values & Operating Principles;
- Funding - Security, Administer & Account for Resources;
- Collaboration - Key Partner Agreements, Information Clearinghouse;
- Programming Monitoring and Support.

Build Capacity: Community Leadership

YELL and Youth Leadership Development:

As *MoreSports* had evolved, participation increased dramatically, from a few hundred children in 1999 to approximately 3,800 children within four years. This rapid rise in participation had quickly turned focus to the need to address the shortage of trained leaders to provide the programming. *MoreSports* did not have the same access to parent volunteers as did many fee-for-service minor league sports organizations, as many parents were at work during the required times. The organization therefore quickly opted to develop the youth leadership aspect of its model by recruiting and training secondary school students to provide the necessary services. This new program now took on its own identity as *Youth Engage Learn Lead (YELL)*.

With this parallel development, the other key participants in the *MoreSports* system became the several hundred youth each year who registered to receive training as youth leaders and volunteer coaches. *YELL* served multiple purposes: it engaged community youth who might otherwise become marginalized; it provided these youth with volunteer opportunities, which were mandatory for secondary school graduation; it fulfilled the requirement of *MoreSports* for trained leaders; it built community capacity by training individuals from the community.

The process has been mutually beneficial to all involved. As of January, 2011, there were 3,498 youth trained and/or registered for training for at least one course (and often more), for a total of 178 courses completed. In 2009 alone 1,556 different youth participated in the *YELL* program. Youth are recruited through two streams: grades 8 to 12 in Vancouver high schools, and through a community stream that is based in community centres and targets youth who would not traditionally be targeted for leadership development. Some youth who join the *YELL* program are previous *MoreSports* participants.

All *MoreSports/YELL* coaching and leadership training is offered through a variety of standard, accepted courses at no cost, providing a further incentive for youth to gain valuable skills and experience. In turn, *MoreSports* gains a continually replenished workforce of trained coaches and leaders who are generally available in the after-school and weekend hours when programs are offered. All youth volunteer hours and activities are tracked on an individual basis through the *YELL* website in a format that enables participants to print out volunteer resumes for use in school transcripts, job applications, etc. as required. The *YELL* system and database tools are also increasingly being offered to outside (non-school or community centre) local community partners. First indicators of the success of this expansion are positive.

MoreSports and *YELL* concentrate on building life skills in community youth, working to train them as future leaders and champions within their neighbourhoods. Programs and volunteer opportunities provide youth with positive ways to contribute; give them networks through which to socialize, receive support and potentially find employment; and render them less vulnerable to involvement in crime and other self-destructive activities. For *MoreSports*, training youth volunteers to deliver programs enables all Hubs to maximize their resources. Instead of hiring one staff member to coach ten children, a program can have one staff member supervise ten volunteers who in turn can coach 100 children.



Youth leaders do not parachute into a local area without any context. Most youth leaders already reside in the areas in which they volunteer; residence and neighbourhood familiarity are key issues considered in determining appropriate placements. Youth leaders are also working increasingly closely with the Hub developers and *YELL* placement coordinators and taking on more responsibility and autonomy for various program areas.

All *YELL* graduates are automatically eligible to volunteer as coaches or mentors/leaders with *MoreSports* programs. However, much as *MoreSports* has adapted to include a wide range of recreational programs, leadership training within *YELL* has expanded over the years to sustain not just sports but also to support the youth themselves in providing volunteer hours to any activities or organizations in which they have interest. The *YELL* system is also attracting an increasing number of young women who are training as leaders, providing role models and mentors for younger girls and encouraging their participation in sports and recreation.

MoreSports and *YELL* have also capitalized on the enthusiasm and responsibility of these young people by developing Y2, which trains *YELL* youth leaders as facilitators to work in leadership roles with elementary school children. *YELL* Grad Facilitators are giving further training in leadership and facilitation and are taught how to deliver this material to Y2 Grade 6 and 7 trainees, and then how to mentor them as they begin their volunteer leadership roles working with Grades K-3 children in school and community programs. Y2 leadership includes activities such as leading and helping to organize playground games for peers during school breaks.



Community Support:

Community organizations – the majority of which are community centres and neighbourhood houses – are vital to the success of the *MoreSports* model. While their individual involvement differs greatly, many (primarily on Vancouver’s east side) provide a variety of resources and services such as coordinator staff time, junior staff time, volunteer time, accounting support, administrative assistance such as copying and access to space, phones computers etc., access to vans and busses, local contacts, some direct cash funding, equipment use and storage.

Community centres, primarily in the Inner City Hub, also provide key links to the Community Recruitment stream for *YELL*. This component reaches out to and engages youth who would not traditionally be selected for leadership development or actively engage in leadership development training -- aboriginal and minority youth and those in disadvantaged circumstances -- tailoring the training and development offered to the individual needs of the identified youth. Youth are recruited both from the schools system and through neighbourhood houses, community association youth workers, and other agencies. This stream is sensitive to cultural, environmental and social issues, and the special responses they require. It also addresses the more complex needs and provides a greater degree of in-depth support for a smaller number of youth. It is very much a longer term relationship-based system and hence has a higher cost per participant than the other stream. It is within this stream that changes in individual youth involved are more clearly evident to the mentors as they simply spend more time with the youth than in the broader-based stream.

Most community centres operate directly under the Vancouver Parks Board, although they generally have individual community-based boards which provide them with a certain level of autonomy over the use of non-core resources. Despite all having similar functions, the bylaws and practices of each can be quite different. In turn, their relationships with *MoreSports/YELL* are equally diverse. This can cause some confusion or outright frustration as staff working with *MoreSports* may be paid on a different basis or even different rates from one group to another. Organizational commitments also vary from one centre to another or can change due to personnel changes.

Neighbourhood houses and other community groups also provide certain supports, particularly through promotions of programs and by referring participants. However, their roles up to now have been less central to the overall model.

Build Capacity: Organizational Change

Organizations, institutions, and governments involved in low-income communities often use traditional models of service delivery. While volunteers may be involved, it is usually staff who maintain control of the activity or service. Instead of hiring an instructor or leader already fully qualified to lead a sport activity or coach a team, staff members are being asked to participate in identifying, recruiting and supporting the development of people in the community to assume these roles.

This involves a cultural shift from a service delivery focus where staff members deliver program activities to a capacity building focus where the staff role is instead to support the development of community members and volunteers to deliver the program activities. It becomes not doing for but doing with. The way staff work and the approaches taken need to change. This requires building organizational capacity to work differently through training, support, innovation, and experimentation. Changing organizational culture has proven to be a difficult transition for staff in some organizations and facilities.

“Incorporating capacity building into how staff/organizations work is the ground work for the real shift that needs to happen, particularly in low-income and challenged neighborhoods. In these neighborhoods it is staff operating service delivery models that control and often (in exclusion of community people) make decisions on resources, priorities and even what should be provided.

To create and successfully develop internal community strength, these staff must more successfully give and share access to these functions and be prepared to relinquish some of the power and authority to emerging community leaders; as well as making a commitment to work as part of a larger comprehensive approach to address community /neighborhood challenges.”

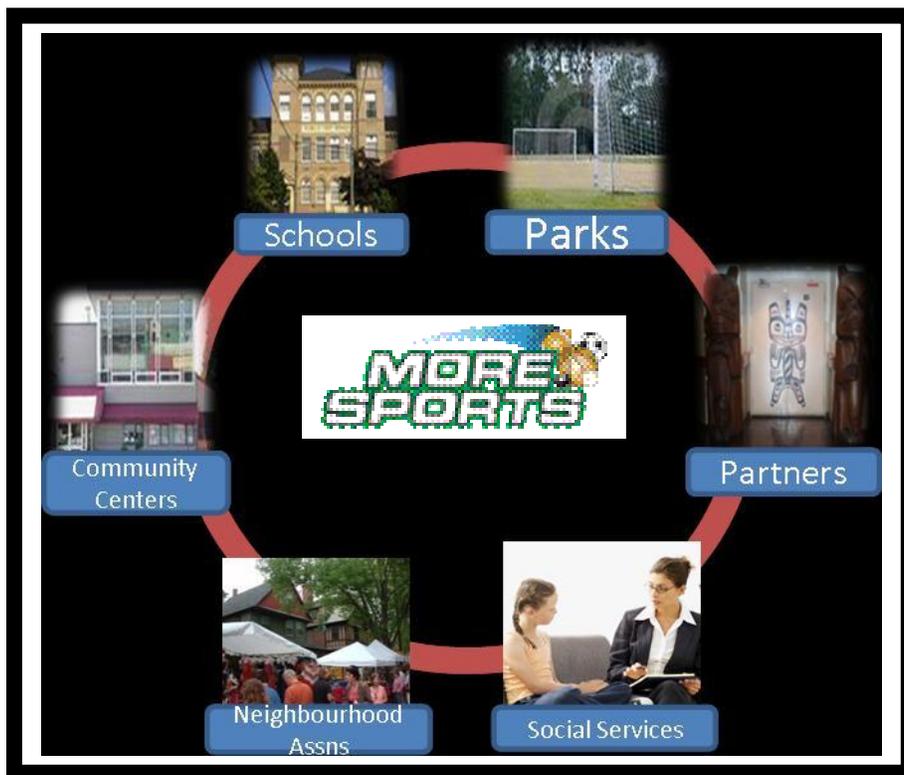
Carole Brown, Coordinator
Ray-Cam Community Centre

Organizational change also involves more than reforming staff roles; it means changing the way budgets are used, resources are deployed and areas of work are assigned. This paradigm shift has been successfully piloted in the Inner City Hub and is now being considered for broader implementation by the Parks Board. A more extensive reallocation or contribution of new resources is needed to address the exclusion issues related to community sport programs that still exist for low-income children and youth.

The other real issue for inner city communities is that the sport and recreation systems are largely based on a consumer model. When the population does not have the resources to consume, they become excluded. Too many inner city children and youth cannot participate. *MoreSports* prices all its programs at very reasonable rates and standard fees can vary from neighbourhood to neighbourhood based on general income level in the area. Each Hub sets its own fees. Beyond mandating an affordable fee structure, *MoreSports* has been set up to include an entirely flexible pay-what-you-can policy to ensure that no child is excluded due to lack of funds. All fees and registrations are collected in exactly the same manner, usually in a sealed envelope, and no extra forms or subsidy requests are ever required from families unable to afford full fees. Families can register all of their children for a single fee (or no fee if necessary). Some Hubs and sports groups also coordinate equipment recycling programs, providing inner city children with the gear they need to participate.

Bring in New Partners

The *MoreSports/YELL* initiative has been embraced enthusiastically, if somewhat inconsistently, by the various community partners targeted for Hub involvement. Overall, collaboration has been there from the start. However actual resource commitment and program delivery have varied from Hub to Hub and at times from school to school or organization to organization. Too often the level of involvement has been heavily dependent on the dedication of the particular staff person involved. While the work of an enormous number of individuals has provided the catalyst to fully develop the model, individual involvement has not been able to replace system-wide accountability and collaboration.



The two most necessary system-wide partners have been the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation and the Vancouver School Board. Each partner contributes a key element to the *MoreSports/YELL* model, with the Parks Board best positioned to provide the necessary infrastructure to support the initiative, while the School Board is best situated to provide coordinating mechanisms for and access to participants and youth leaders. Together, the two systems are also crucial to underwriting risk management for program activities, as the involvement of staff from either system automatically ensures coverage for participants in those activities. Receiving this in-kind support is critical to sustaining the initiative; otherwise, paying for insurance would become a crippling barrier against success.

There is a great deal of overlap between the missions and values of the Parks Board and *MoreSports/YELL* and the Parks Board has been a core partner virtually since the beginning. *MoreSports/YELL* has proven significantly more successful than any other program or approach in the city in expanding children/youth sport involvement, providing considerable assistance to the Parks Board in fulfilling its mandate. The Parks Board makes a huge contribution as it owns the community centres, fields and parks necessary to provide infrastructure for program activities.

Many Parks Board community centres are actively involved in running *MoreSports* programs. However participation from centres has been inconsistent and there are centres which have opted out or run competing programs. A number worry about the financial implications of the pay-what-you-can model. Beset by conflicting demands, many are reluctant to free up staff time for partnership and committee activities. Among participating centres, supports offered are widely inconsistent with some offering full staff supports to Hub developers plus full administrative support while others are providing only a fraction of that backing. After many years of providing more piecemeal support, the Parks Board has recently committed to providing ongoing core funding to support the initiative; further steps will be taken over the next year to better integrate *MoreSports/YELL* within the Parks Board system

The second core partner is the Vancouver School Board, which provides no direct funding but the supports the programs through in-kind resource allocation – primarily through the support of Community School Teams and by providing facility space. Schools are by far the best medium for reaching potential participants and leaders. *YELL* trains many support volunteers through high school programs, supplying coaches for *MoreSports* programs while also providing students with the volunteer hours needed for graduation. Y2 is proving enormously successful not only in training pre-teen youth leaders but also by providing mid-day physical activities to a significant number of primary students who would not otherwise have an opportunity to participate. There is as yet no formal understanding with the School Board, but discussions are taking place on how better to integrate *MoreSports/YELL* and other providers of physical activities for children within the Vancouver school system.

One major challenge to developing community partnerships is tied up with funding realities. As a partner in delivering sports and recreation activities for community children and youth, *MoreSports* can contribute a very successful model, training, a program to provide youth volunteers, and an infrastructure to support wider geographic activities. What *MoreSports* cannot provide to any great extent is funding for various Hubs and Hub members. If the funding climate itself were richer or more supportive of neighbourhood-based initiatives, this lack would be less of a problem; indeed there is value in having Hubs and their members raise funds for their own activities. However institutional funding now tends to be provided through processes that favour awarding fewer grants to generally larger service providers, a pattern which would more properly support the umbrella approach to fundraising. Hub members are often too busy to spend much time on fundraising activities, while *MoreSports* staff are already over-burdened with coordinating and training activities, leaving little time to write grant proposals or undertake fundraising.

Delivery - Respect Diversity

MoreSports' raison d'être is to involve as many children and youth as possible in local sports and recreation activities – particularly children/youth with low incomes and/or facing other barriers to participation. The model of service delivery, innovative as it is, has been developed as the most far-reaching and cost-effective means to achieve that goal. *MoreSports/YELL* is primarily about giving all kids a chance to play.

Barriers continue to exist. Research has demonstrated that there is a fairly large gap between those interested in being physically active and those who were actually participating in sport and physical activities across the Greater Vancouver (and not just in lower-income communities). The reasons children, youth and their families do not participate are varied – sometimes related to income but other factors can be involved as well:

The catchment areas of *MoreSports/YELL* encompass some of the lowest income neighbourhoods in Canada and represent a variety of cultures: First Nations, Asian, Indo-Canadian, Latin Americans, and most recently, refugees from war torn countries. In addition to poverty, the families in these communities experience high levels of criminal, illegal, violent activities, and substance abuse. Many live in highly dense social housing complexes, shelters, and hotels with little, if any, outdoor space.

The serious social conditions and nature of the parts of the community, and the pockets of extreme poverty, create unfair challenges for many neighbourhood children and youth. Those from disadvantaged areas often do not have the same opportunities to develop their skills and talents as children/youth from other parts of the city. Lack of financial resources often means they are left unsupervised during out-of-school time, which can translate into unproductive and negative activities.

In essence, children and youth from poorer neighbourhoods not only deal with problems directly related to lack of income but also suffer from an inability to participate fully within their neighbourhood and in the community at large.

More than Sports:

Some children do not engage in sports due to lack of exposure, cultural differences, or gender assumptions. *MoreSports* tackles these barriers by providing initial exposure to activities through school physical education classes and by then offering a wide variety of sports and other physical activity programming suited to each Hub's specific neighbourhoods. Cultural barriers are addressed not just through offering attractive activities but also by ensuring that all *MoreSports/YELL* materials, including brochures and websites, reflect the multicultural diversity of program participants. Language translation has proven a distinct challenge because of cost implications.

Alternatives to Competition:

Some children and families avoid mainstream sports clubs due to the competitive nature of their activities. *MoreSports* deliberately offers a non-competitive environment that encourages and facilitates the involvement of all children. Programs provide sports skill development, much like those of many minor league sports organizations, but at the beginner level to promote sport as fun. Programs do not focus on winning or losing. The focus remains on having fun and playing as a team. Rather than coordinating tournaments, *MoreSports* hosts festivals which feature not just playing sports but also family entertainment.

Moving into Competitive Sports:

Some *MoreSports* participants do become inspired and develop the skills and desire to move into the competitive sports stream. The program helps facilitate such moves, working with families to obtain any required equipment and to qualify for fee subsidies if necessary. These 'graduations' count as definite successes for *MoreSports*, validating the efficacy of the program and freeing up space for new participants. Local sports clubs equally benefit by obtaining experienced, dedicated new players.



Continuity and Growth

MoreSports and *YELL* have proven extraordinarily successful at involving local children and youth in sports, physical activities, and leadership training. 8,704 children participated in *MoreSports* activities in 2010, supported by 1,332 primarily volunteer coaches. Overall, *MoreSports* ran 272 distinct programs at 33 sites in 24 different sports and physical activities. Particularly given recent increased support by the Vancouver Parks Board and the Vancouver School Board, the initiative's continuity and growth would seem to be assured. Nonetheless, the programs have faced significant challenges.

Structure

Despite certain pressures to adopt a more conventional structure, *MoreSports* has opted to avoid formal status and to have its organizational structure mirror the Hub model, with various stakeholders taking responsibility for different aspects of funding administration and strategic planning activities. Duties can include serving on a committee, providing staff time devoted to *MoreSports*, supplying facility space for programs, applying for funding on *MoreSports*' behalf, and performing administrative tasks such as promotions or bookkeeping. *MoreSports* and *YELL* often rely on the nonprofit stakeholders within the partnership to provide the full benefits of charitable status.

By design and general agreement, *MoreSports* only employs a limited number of administrative staff and contractors and thus relies greatly on the efforts and resources of its many partners. The organizational focus is on collaboration and cooperation. This cooperative form of program delivery is not all that unusual in the nonprofit world but it has caused some confusion for those more used to dealing with hierarchal, centralized structures.

Although not incorporated, *MoreSports* acts with an operational design and policy structure similar to that of an incorporated society. This allows for clear and appropriate reporting protocols, as well as, being transparent and accountable to members and partners of the organization. Each Hub is represented on the *MoreSports* Advisory Board; although the election model is not yet fully operational, plans are for each Hub to ultimately elect two representatives via a community process. Representatives attend monthly *MoreSports* meetings and report back to their Hub membership.

The Advisory Board focuses primarily on governance and policy issues. It oversees the organization's direction and is responsible for ensuring that operations stay true to *MoreSports*' vision, mission, and values. The board is also responsible to seek out new opportunities to connect stakeholders, preventing them from working in narrow silo-based systems. Members are encouraged to challenge ineffectual and exclusionary practices within their own institutions and organizations. Lastly, the board is responsible for the overall budget and consolidated financials of the *MoreSports* Hubs, including deciding how to approach and coordinate collaborative fundraising activities. As necessary, the board appoints ad-hoc committees to oversee specific functions and developments.

Staffing

MoreSports and *YELL* are seriously understaffed, both within the core organization and in the various Hubs. Despite the exponential growth of the program, the *MoreSports* Coordinator position remains that of a part-time contractor. There have simply never been sufficient funds for it to evolve into a full-time staff position. The *YELL* Coordinator works closer to full-time hours, providing both organizing and hands-on youth training services. It should also be acknowledged that the *MoreSports* coordinator regularly volunteers time to ensure program continuance.

To further complicate the staffing picture, *MoreSports* itself employs neither Hub Developers nor Placement Officers although both positions work on behalf of *MoreSports* initiatives and programming. These positions are funded and employed by the Vancouver School Board or by community centres, depending on the Hub and neighbourhood involved. While having staff coordinating *MoreSports* activities employed through various partner organizations fits well within the cooperative model, the situation does render these positions vulnerable to budget cuts or financial changes and has a tendency to lead to higher staff turnover. Training new people does have the advantage of educating more individuals about the program's vision and values; however, the process takes time and can lead to a lag in program delivery.

The recent commitment by the Parks Board to providing core funding for *MoreSports* coordination will go a long way to resolving this problem. The expression of interest by both the Parks Board and the School Board to collaborate with *MoreSports* in adopting the program's model throughout Vancouver is also

extremely positive. Details are now being finalized. One of the most encouraging elements of this potential is that system-wide policy directives to work with *MoreSports* and support that model to encourage the participation of children and youth in sports and recreation activities has the potential to substantially ease the current vulnerability of resource and personnel allocation.

Funding

MoreSports and *YELL* have been fortunate to receive a significant level of community, foundation and corporate support since their inceptions. It is clear that this innovative model for providing community sports has strong resonance at many levels. However the issue of funding remains a crucial challenge for *MoreSports/YELL* if the initiative is to grow or even to maintain ground. The model by its very nature is dependent on the active engagement of community partners.

The main funding issue has been the lack of stable core support for the initiatives. *MoreSports/YELL* by design did not fit within the normal model of centralized service delivery, a programming strength which proved a fundraising weakness with institutional partners for many years. The program has been mainly supported through project and start-up grants, and through in-kind support from a core group of community centres and school programs. There has been little financial flexibility. The initiative has done remarkably well due in no small part to the dedication of the *MoreSports* and *YELL* coordinators.

Lessons Learned

MoreSports was initially developed within the specific context of providing opportunities for the children and youth in disadvantaged neighbourhoods to participate in sports. By any measure, the initiative has achieved spectacular success. It has also become clear over time that the *MoreSports/YELL* model can deliver value in any community.

Along the way, organizers have met many challenges and have learned a great deal. Ultimately the organizers were successful in meeting goals that fulfilled all of the initiative's assumptions:

All kids want to be involved in physical activities.

The numbers tell the tale. During the first year of providing a single program as East Van Soccer, only a few hundred children from three neighbourhoods were involved. During 2010, *MoreSports* involved 8,704 children in 272 distinct programs at 33 sites in 24 different sports and physical activities. This exponential growth is even more telling when one realizes that over half of the involvement comes through two particularly active Hubs and involves children at all grade levels.



MoreSports and *YELL* are also successfully reaching out to children who would not normally participate in sports programs. The initiative doesn't track cultural identifiers but the gender breakdown is telling: 40.3% of 2010 participants were female, inspired by the impressive 53% of under-19 youth coaches who were young women.

This involvement benefits physical health and contributes to social and emotional well-being.

It is well known that sports participation is not only valuable to foster children's health but also as a prime vehicle to foster social inclusion and community involvement in children as they mature. While there is little argument that participation in sports and other activities is beneficial for all children and youth, the case can be made that fostering such participation is particularly valuable for those from less advantaged neighbourhoods – those least likely to take advantage of structured sports opportunities.

Many of the benefits accrued to local children have to be inferred from research data which overwhelmingly supports the benefits of physical involvement for children. However comments received from youth leaders as part of a 2009/10 evaluation of YELL support the level of social inclusion and involvement experienced by those involved.

Youth spoke of gaining:

- *“Being patient and learning to cope with children”*
- *“I have learnt the skills to be a leader, which means that you need to take charge of what you do, be organized and be fair.”*
- *“Manner, Respect, and to have fun.”*
- *“Patience”*
- *“Social Skills”*
- *“We've learned how to work in group situations and how to react to various situations, specifically with kids.”*
- *“I think it's a great program to get both the leaders and the participants involved. It helps kids learn about sports they generally wouldn't be playing and it helps the leaders build valuable skills”*
- *“It is an easy-going program that absolutely enriches a person well-being in relation to their status, abilities, activeness in the community, and confidence.”*
- *“It was great! I finally had a chance to put my soccer coaching certificate to good use! And because of YELL, my love for sports came back to me :) Continue doing a good job at YELL, and continue to inspire other youth that with their help, sports can create a whole new different meaning.”*

All children have a right to be included and have these experiences.

The *MoreSports/YELL* model primarily centres on fostering social inclusion by removing barriers to participation. As the initiative grew, it became apparent that this meant addressing a number of personal barriers beyond cost: ease of access; availability of coaches; offering activities that children wanted; providing a non-competitive model; providing a welcoming atmosphere for children from various cultures or with special needs.

Structural barriers that were addressed integrating, rather than competing with the organized sports system. This has been accomplished through focusing on basic skill development, giving interested children and youth skills needed to join the more structured process. To get around the barrier of having to compete for available space, *MoreSports* has worked to develop and encourage sport participation during Non-Prime use times for current fields and gyms; this has also led to greater success in acquiring in-kind or free use of facilities.

These children should not be singled out or segregated and labeled as poor, but linked to larger systems and neighborhood programs.

This goal has been met in two ways. By utilizing a pay-what-you-can system delivered through a mechanism that in no way identifies the participant's financial status (usually by submitting registration in a sealed envelope), the distinction of poverty or not was removed. Crucially, those needing support were treated in exactly the same way as those paying full cost; there was no need to take special steps to gain a financial subsidy. Linking these children to larger systems occurred through using the Hub model to extend the reach of *MoreSports/YELL* across neighbourhoods and by involving participants from various Hubs in system-wide activities such as Soccer Jam, basketball, and trips to Canucks games.

The responsibility rests with more than one group or partner.

Programs and activities should reflect local interests and capacity, but should also be linked within a city-wide framework of universal values, mutual support, and shared administration and planning (structure, decisions, risk management, safety practices, etc).

Achieving this goal was accomplished through the establishment of the Hub model, geographically based within neighbourhoods and involving as many community partners as possible. While each Hub works within a single overall framework and set of principles, it delivers services based on local interests and capacities. The inconsistency of monetary and coordinating support at the Hub level has at times presented challenges to enabling Hubs to have the capacity to fully participate, a problem compounded at times by the decision of potential Hub partners to deliver programs outside of the *MoreSports/YELL* umbrella. Nonetheless, the model works and will be increasingly effective as it is more fully adopted.

Leadership should come from the communities and neighborhoods where children live.

The issue of securing sufficient coaches and leadership to support *MoreSports* initially proved to be a challenge. However it was recognized from the beginning that inner-city and low-income youth, as well as those facing cultural barriers or with special needs, would be far more likely to join in with activities led by individuals who understood and did not judge their circumstances. All needs were met through the evolution of the *YELL* program, which trained local youth as leaders and volunteers to work through their schools or community centres within their own communities.

This model of having local leaders providing local supports has proven beneficial for participants and leaders alike. Participants do feel more comfortable and supported, forming working relationships with youth leaders who become role models for their local charges. The leaders themselves have demonstrated their increasing community involvement through not only volunteering in programs beyond *MoreSports* but also by undertaking individual and group initiatives to provide further supports for neighbourhood children.

Facilities and resources exist and are sustained primarily within the municipal infrastructures of Schools and Parks & Recreation systems. Both need to be operating partners.

Resources and mechanisms for coordination to support this work should be sustainable and imbedded in municipals structures, which are publicly funded and mandated to generate social capital and equity.

The Vancouver Parks Board and the Vancouver School Board have been involved with and supportive of the *MoreSports/YELL* initiative from the start. Neighbourhood-based community centres, partner schools, and youth facilities are key locations in each Hub. Access to needed large facilities on a neighbourhood/cross-neighbourhood basis is coordinated between community centres and schools, with staff from both systems are working through their respective Hubs -- taking part in planning; assigning their staff and resources to support both in-school introduction programs and to develop and refer children to after-school sport opportunities; and working together to develop youth leadership and volunteer opportunities. The provision of risk management strategies and insurance coverage through both systems has proven to be a critical factor in sustaining the initiative.

Until recently, support from both systems was ad hoc and very dependent on the community centre or community school team involved. This situation is in the process of changing. The Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation has agreed to provide annual core funding to the initiative and steps are underway to more formally integrate the initiative within the Parks Board system. The School Board has also expressed interest in working more closely with the initiative and with the Parks Board.

Both systems, funded as they are by public dollars, can and should play key roles in applying common principles across the city to ensure the inclusion of all children and youth in sports participation, physical activities, and access to leadership and volunteer opportunities. The strength of the model lies in its partners – any partner, such as a neighborhood house, can apply for funds to achieve a joint goal of their Hub. However the model works best and will be most sustainable by operating under an overall city-wide plan, with core support and clear direction given to facilities within the system to work cooperatively within their local Hubs.

Sustainable Development

MoreSports/YELL has evolved into a very successful model, one that can be widely applied across the country to foster physical activities and sports for children through using inclusionary, capacity building practices. The principles can be universally applied: Go where children are; Provide what they want; Build on what exists. The practice will vary from community to community and neighbourhood to neighbourhood. Children have a FUNdamental right to play. It is up to all of us to give them that chance.

