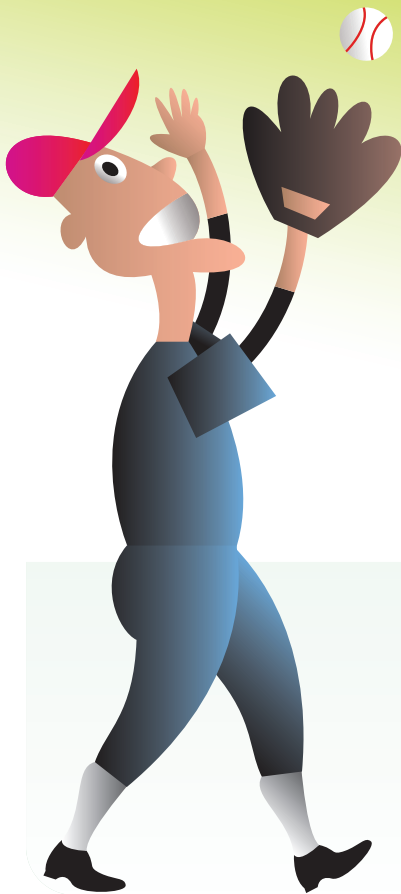


Advocacy Update: *Promoting a Summer of PLAY*

*Play is the remedy
for what's ailing
Americans.*

**By Monica Hobbs Vinluan, J.D.,
Katie Clarke Adamson and
Charlene Burgeson**



Many Americans know about the obesity epidemic, but few think of simple solutions to address it. Simply put, we need to get America's youth moving more and eating better. Today, key players in the recreation field have recognized that providing engaging, fun and interesting activities through play is one way to get children motivated.

Park and recreation professionals know that the benefits of play are endless. Unstructured "free" play provides children an opportunity to explore their surroundings while establishing connections with their peers releasing bottled-up energy. Organized play, like that found through playing ball in the park or learning the rules of the game in physical education class, provides kids with an opportunity to build skills necessary for teamwork and to identify potential leadership traits.

About a year ago, NRPA discussed with the YMCA of the USA about how the two organizations could align their strategies to help make America healthier. YMCA is the largest non-profit provider of youth sports, after-school programming and child care. Collectively, park and recreation departments are the largest public providers of youth sports, after-school activity and child care. Yet, these two entities have often operated with separate policies at the national level and in competing environments on the local level.

YMCA and NRPA began discussing the overlap in their YMCA's Activate

ACTION ALERT

Support Play in Your Community

Reach out to your local YMCA and school system's physical education coordinators to collaborate. Work together to implement 21st Century Learning Centers (www.ed.gov/programs/21stccclc), find a way to sustain a Carol M. White Physical Education Program (www.ed.gov/programs/whitephysed), support Steps to a Healthier U.S. (www.healthierus.gov), Step Into Action together (www.nrpa.org/content/default.aspx?documentId=5502) or even work together on a Pioneering Healthier Communities team (www.ymca.net).

Sponsor an end of the summer festivals that encourage physical activity—how about a playground clean-up day, a hula-hoop and jump-rope competition or a kick-off event for a walking school bus program?

Call your Congressperson and ask him or her to support the Play Every Day Act (H.R. 2045/S.651).

Read more about the Partnership for PLAY Every Day and gather ideas from the Stanford Report that you can implement on the local level at www.playeveryday.org.

America initiative and NRPA's Step Up to Health initiatives. In order to pull together their collective footprints in communities across the country, the

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two organizations realized they would have to provide their networks with shared tools and adequate resources to stimulate collaboration. Out of this desire, the Partnership for PLAY Every Day was born.

The Institute of Medicine, the U.S. Surgeon General and public health experts agree that children and youth need at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity daily. Most children do not come close to experiencing that amount of activity on a daily basis. Indeed, only a third of high school students fulfill the 60-minute daily requirement. In an era of increased academic testing, most schools don't provide 60 minutes during the day for physical activity.

Most elementary schools provide only one or two days of physical education a week, while many high schools require that students only take physical education for a year. To realistically accomplish the goal of 60 minutes of physical activity a day, we must find ways to provide children with at least 30 minutes of activity during the school day and at least 30 minutes before or after the school day.

Therefore, it was important to have a strong school-based perspective on physical activity to promote play every day through the partnership. Setting the standard for physical education curricula in schools, the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) is also the leading advocate for physical education.

It was the first time these national organizations partnered on an initiative, but at the community level, these three organizations have already been working together in towns such as Boulder, Colo., and Ft. Worth, Texas. In Boulder, the park and recreation department and the YMCA offers youth a number of opportunities to play, while the school system is working to estab-

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lish healthy habits for exercise that the students can carry with them. In Ft. Worth, the city has recently teamed with the YMCA to create a brand-new recreation facility for youth in underserved communities. The Ft. Worth schools are also involving the community, and hosted a KidsFest that saw thousands of participants.

Ensuring the quality of play is one of three main objectives of the Partnership for PLAY Every Day. The partnership also seeks to increase the number of spaces and places for kids to play and to lift up the large number of voices that promote play either through national organizations, grassroots advocacy or community partners.

Stanford University's School of Medicine compiled a list of local and national strategies in its report entitled "Building Generation Play: Addressing the Crisis of Inactivity Among America's Children." This report is a blueprint for action for the Partnership for PLAY Every Day.

One essential strategy of the partnership is to identify and engage corporate partners to help us sustain our efforts and diffuse our community footprints. NRPA, the YMCA and NASPE have shared a table with playground manufacturers, PepsiCo and Toyota since the beginning of the initiative. These companies are eager to engage other corporate partners and have offered critical insight on what corporate commitments should look be.

The partnership continues to invite corporations to join in its effort to promote play by committing to do one of three things. First, corporate partners should create, expand or improve upon their employee wellness initiatives. Second, these partners should think of ways in which they can compliment local efforts to promote play by becoming more involved within their own communities, such as sponsoring a 5K Fun Run with the local YMCA, supporting community festivals run by the local park and recreation departments or helping a school in their community to implement a Safe Routes to School Program. The final way a corporate partner could become involved with the initiative is to commit financial or in-kind resources to support the development and implementation of the partnership's strategies.

One of the partnership's first policy implementation strategies has been to work with members of Congress to introduce a piece of federal legislation to provide resources for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to create a Community Play Index. This index will be used by communities to assess their physical activity opportunities for children and to identify the gaps that exist in providing quality play experiences and adequate spaces and places for children to play. The bill, the Play Every Day Act (H.R. 2045, S.651) needs additional support to ensure its

successful passage. This bill was introduced in the U.S. Senate on the same day as NRPA's 2007 Legislative Forum day on Capitol Hill.

Partners have come a long way in the development, expansion and implementation of their objectives since they launched the initiative in February 2007. We have had a press conference in the U.S. Senate, helped to guide the creation of the Stanford report, hosted a Congressional briefing in June 2007 in the House of Representatives, and we have gained momentum and interest in the Play Every Day Act. However, we have a long way to go and need your help and expertise.

Rep. Mike McIntyre (D-N.C.) spoke about the bill, saying that youth sports provides an avenue where children can be physically active, and that the federal government now needs to support it. "We already have ways and opportunities to get children involved," he said. "We just need to respond and give kids an opportunity to play." With his full support for the bill, he said the partnership "stands together for a healthier, happier and stronger quality of life for all our children."

NRPA, the YMCA of the USA, and NASPE are joining together to reinvigorate, recharge and refuel the play movement in America. These organizations are redirecting their separate strategies to support play for kids. The stakes are high, as this generation could be the first in American history to have a shorter life expectancy than that of their parents. The Partnership for PLAY Every Day needs community advocates, corporations and national partners to join the commitment to children's play. Only by working together we can build "generation play."

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