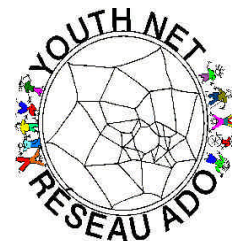
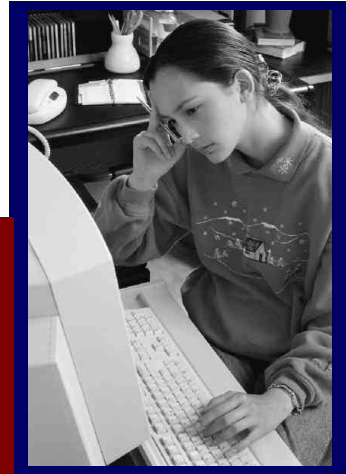


Youth s View on Physical Activity: Youth Consultation Report



Province of Nova Scotia October 2001

Report Prepared by Youth Net Halifax for the N.S. Sport and Recreation Commission;
Departments of Community Services, Education, Health, Justice; The Youth Secretariat;
and Recreation Nova Scotia.

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Executive Summary

As part of a government initiative launched in 1997 to decrease inactivity levels in our youth, the PACY working group commissioned a province-wide Youth Consultation in October 2001. P.A.C.Y. is a provincial government interdepartmental committee with the primary goal of reducing the inactivity levels of children and youth by 10 % by the year 2003. The members of P.A.C.Y. have committed to researching the views and needs of Nova Scotian's to ensure that the government assists in creating a fundamental shift over the next decade in how children, youth, and families are supported to lead more active, healthy lifestyles. The primary goals of the Youth Consultation were to talk to youth across the province from ages 8 to 18 years to learn why they are physically active or inactive and how they think adults in their lives and the government can help them lead more active lives.

A total of 234 youth ages 8-18¹ years balanced for age and gender (M = 114, F = 120, 13 and over = 147, 12 and under = 87) each participated in one of 15 focus groups in their community. There was one all male group (n = 16, R = 15-19 years) facilitated in the Valley region with youth in a community-based educational program run by the Nova Scotia Youth Center (Department of Justice) and one all female group (n = 15, R = 16 – 20 years) facilitated with a Halifax West high school Physically Active Living class. The majority of the groups (11) were held in rural communities in each of the six regions (i.e. Middle Musquodoboit was included in the Central region). The youth participating represented White, Black, Biracial, and Native Nova Scotians with a wide range of socioeconomic status in selected communities across the six regions of our province.

The focus group method and research questions were developed by the Youth Net Halifax youth facilitator team (ages 19-29) in consultation with Marcy Dalton, Ted Scrutton, and Michael Arthur of the PACY working group. The focus group optimal length was 2 hours with 15 to 20 youth participating with two youth co-facilitators. Many of the questions focused on youth perceptions of the benefits, barriers, motivation, and resources surrounding choosing to live actively. Each youth and contact person over the age 11 (due to reading level and content) was offered a folder called *A Healthy You Kit* that included youth-friendly resource information about the benefits of total health: mind, body, and spirit.

Overall being physically active is moderately to very important in youth's lives and the majority of youth participating engaged in some form of physical activity. The main physical activities identified were as follows: 1) team and individual sports such as basketball, soccer, swimming, and running; 2) outdoor and social activities (i.e. camping, hiking, biking, and dancing); and 3) active play activities (i.e. hide-and-seek, tag) were

¹ Given the target group for this research is 8-18 years, only three participants over the age of 18 were included due to the nature of the convenient sampling (i.e. a high school class, youth action team). The Dartmouth East Boys and Girls Club and the Indian Brook Elementary School focus groups included 6 and 7 year-old youth in the groups due to the age breakdown of these naturally occurring groups (i.e. mixed grades classrooms and after school groups).

popular with mainly youth under 14 years of age. A small number of youth in all but three groups commented on how being active is really not a priority in their life

The participating youth across ages groups were easily able to identify the benefits of physical activity as relates to physical, mental, and emotional (social) health. Youth in each focus group defined *being healthy* in a very balanced manner including nutritious eating, getting enough sleep, exercising to stay fit through sports and activity, avoiding substance abuse and smoking, having a positive peer relationships, and good mental health. Older youth also identified the importance of having the financial resources necessary for a healthy lifestyle. Responses to the word *physically inactive* highlighted negative values and behaviors such as lazy and couch potato.

Barriers to physically active living identified by youth were similar with some variations between gender, age, and community (rural or urban). The majority of youth shared that technology (i.e. computers, video games, and cable TV), poor eating (junk food), lack of gym class or open gym time in school, lack of personal motivation, unsupportive peers, jobs and homework, lack positive role models in their family and community, lack of facilities and equipment, and lack of accessible programs (including the issues of transportation and funding) were the main barriers to them being more physically active.

Youth responses to the topic of motivation highlighted the important role that encouragement and a sense of inclusion play in their decision to be physically active. Older youth, especially females stated that they are often embarrassed in gym class to participate and that they need more encouragement from adults and less focus in the media on perfect, “size two” women to increase their self-esteem and self-confidence. Younger children identified the importance of having their parents play with them actively not just with computer games, not smoking or being around second-hand smoke, and having facilities and equipment that are not broken and accessible (i.e. playgrounds with good slides and swings near their homes). The main difference between rural and urban youth is the access to better quality facilities and more choice in programs and activities, but youth overall stated they needed the self-confidence, skill, and money to participate in most of the activities being offered.

Youth involved in Boys and Girls Clubs and Girls on Move programs that focus on self-esteem building as well as recreation were very popular with the youth. Youth recommended that programs such as these should receive more government funding. Some youth expressed concern with the lack of parental involvement and support and the insensitive, unfair nature of coaches they have had. Youth recommended that education and awareness need to be the foundation of family-based recreation programs and coaching clinics so adults will realize how important self-esteem building is for youth to be regularly physically active.

This report will be distributed to all the participating groups and government departments through the PACY working groups in hopes that the findings will raise awareness regarding the support that youth require to live physically active lives.

Introduction

This report will present the results of the Youth Consultation component of the Physically Active Child and Youth (P.A.C.Y.) strategy. P.A.C.Y. is a provincial government interdepartmental committee with the primary goal is to reduce the inactivity levels of children and youth by 10 % by the year 2003². The N.S. Sport and Recreation Commission formed this committee in 1997 to also include representatives from the departments of Health, Education, Community Services, Justice, and the Youth Secretariat. The members of P.A.C.Y. have committed to researching the views and needs of Nova Scotian's to ensure that the government assists in creating a fundamental shift over the next decade in how children, youth, and families are supported to lead more active, healthy lifestyles. The primary goals of the Youth Consultation were to talk to youth across the province from ages 8 to 18 years to learn why they are physically active or inactive and how adults in their lives and the government can help them lead more active lives.

Sampling - The Youth Consultations were conducted in October 2001 by a team of youth researchers (ages 19-29 years) from Youth Net Halifax (refer to appendix A). Each of the six regions of the province was included in this focus group research. To ensure that there would be a private venue and that at least 15 youth would participate in each group, the research coordinator liaised with school principals, youth health center coordinators, department of recreation community developers, Boys and Girls Clubs executive directors, Heartwood Youth Action Team mentors, and other youth-serving professionals to organize youth attendance and meeting space.

Convenient sampling and time constraints limited the overall representative nature of the sample. For example, in the Cape Breton region the team met with youth over the age of 12 both in Membertou and Sydney mines from naturally occurring youth groups. Due to time constraints we were unable to include the views of children under the age of 12 in the school system or community groups in the Valley region. The Valley region reflects compromised gender balancing due to the all male group selected for this region (the 24-7 program).

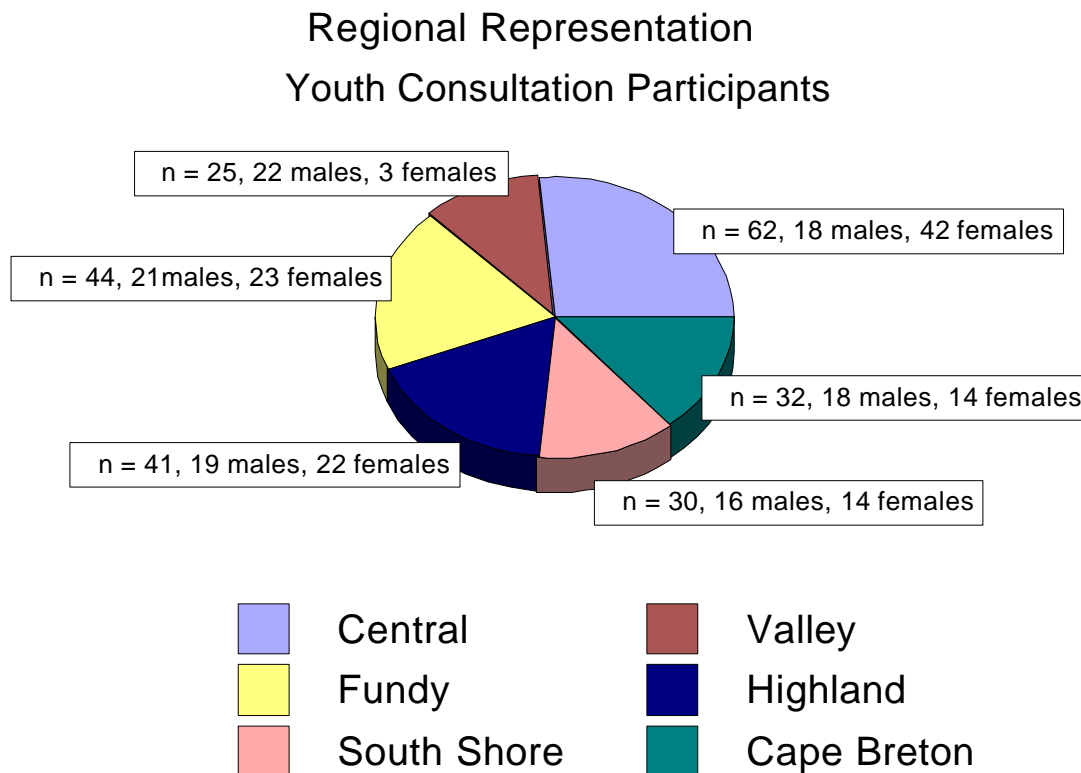
Profile of Participating Youth - A total of 234 youth ages 8-18³ years balanced for age and gender (M = 114, F = 120, 13 and over = 147, 12 and under = 87) each participated in one of 15 focus groups in their community. There was one all male group (n = 16, R = 15-19 years) facilitated in the Valley region with youth in a community-based

² Recent research has shown that only 43 % of children ages 5-12 years are active enough for optimal health benefits and this number decreases significantly as youth get older and in accordance with gender (Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, 1997).

³ Given the target group for this research is 8-18 years, only three participants over the age of 18 were included due to the nature of the convenient sampling (i.e. a high school class, youth action team). The Dartmouth East Boys and Girls Club and the Indian Brook Elementary School focus groups included 6 and 7 year-old youth in the groups due to the age breakdown of these naturally occurring groups (i.e. mixed grades classrooms and after school groups).

educational program run by the Nova Scotia Youth Centre (Department of Justice) and one all female group (n = 15, R = 16 – 20 years) facilitated with a Halifax West high school Physically Active **Living** class. The majority of the groups (11) were held in rural communities in each of the six regions (i.e. Middle Musquodoboit was included in the Central region). Please refer to appendix B for an overview of participants and recommendations by region.

Diagram One Youth Consultation October 2001 (PACY)



The youth participants represented socioeconomic backgrounds ranging from below the poverty line to upper socioeconomic status with the majority from low to middle income families. Questions pertaining to SES were not asked directly of the youth, but such information was discerned from the contact people who set-up the focus groups and work with the youth (i.e. Youth Action Team mentors and teachers). As well, information regarding socioeconomic status and varying levels of family support and stability was gathered from the youth's comments regarding barriers to engaging in physical activities (i.e. lack of funding and parental support). The youth participants include a range of youth from those at-risk to those who are currently functioning exceptionally across home, school, and social settings.

The youth participants were Caucasian (predominantly), Black, Biracial, and Native. Native youth views were included through two focus groups in Native communities on reserves (Indian Brook under 12 years and Membertou over 12 years). To ensure a more culturally representative voice, future youth consultations should include more youth from Black communities (i.e. East Preston, Weymouth Falls to identify a few) and youth from minority groups who are all such an important part of Nova Scotia's diversity.

Method: The focus group method for this youth consultation on physical activity/inactivity was designed with adaptability in mind to encompass varying time availability, attention spans, age levels, and settings. The group optimal length was 2 hours with 15 to 20 youth participating with two youth co-facilitators asking the group the following main questions:

- 1) What do you do to be physically active?**
- 2) What do the words physical activity , physical inactivity , being healthy mean to you (how do they relate)?**
- 3) How does being physically active benefit you and how important is it in your life?**
- 4) What motivates you to be physically active?**
- 5) What stands in the way of your being more physically active (barriers)?**
- 6) How are adults helpful/unhelpful in your being physically active?**
- 7) If you could send a message to the government on how they can help you or youth you know be more physically active what would you say (recommendations)?**

The main strength of the Youth Net approach to focus group research is the training and mentoring of experienced older youth (ages 19-19 years) to open up dialogue in limited time frames on pressing issues with younger youth. The youth research team provided pizza for youth who met over supper or lunch times and healthy snacks such as juice, yogurt, and cereal bars to class time and evening groups. Offering refreshments that youth can eat during the group, maintaining the guidelines of confidentiality, respect, and listening, and establishing an adult-free zone led to very open, candid dialogue for the purposes of this research. Each youth and contact person over the age 11 (due to reading level and content) was offered a folder called *A Healthy You Kit* that included youth-friendly resource information about the benefits of total health: mind, body, and spirit. More information can be obtained regarding this kit via email at: youthnethalifax@hotmail.com.

Due to the different dynamics that each group presented, the approach to the youth consultations required adaptability and focus. For example, most rural focus groups had to be held during school time in a 1 to 1.5 hour strict time frame due to class and bus schedules. Some questions were more personally meaningful and interesting to youth than others, but the co-facilitators endeavored to help each youth participate and share their views openly.

RESULTS: Youth Views on Physical Activity and Inactivity

The following results segment will provide an overview of the themes identified from youth responses and the notable trends in relation to age, gender, region, and rural vs. urban youth regarding their participation and views on physical activity and inactivity.

Overall being physically active is moderately to very important in youth's lives and the majority of youth participating engaged in some form of physical activity⁴. The main physical activities identified can be grouped as follows:

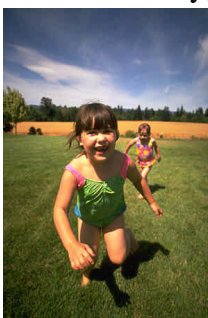


If you're not active as a kid you won't get good grades, education, or a future. Bridgewater youth, 9 years old.

Team and individual sports: Every group identified basketball, soccer, volleyball, hockey, swimming, and running as the most popular activities. The majority of the youth engaged in these activities on a recreational basis as opposed to on a competitive team. Both male and female youth shared that they would like to have more opportunities to play hockey, football, and soccer, as well as, other sports on teams. Boxing and Tae kwon do, Aikido, and golf were mentioned quite frequently by teenage male youth as activities they were presently involved or would like to be involved in.



Outdoor and social activities: Dancing (with friends and/or ballet, square, 'old-time fiddle', belly, jazz, hip-hop), outdoor activities such as camping and hiking were mentioned by older youth (ages 13-18) and youth from 12/15 of the groups talked about roller-blading, skateboarding, and scootering. Youth from both age groups stated that they would like to have more opportunities to dance and try outdoor/adventure sports such as white water rafting, rock-climbing, and kayaking, as well as, snow boarding or skiing. Youth across age groups from rural communities talked about the daily physical activity associated with living on a farm or in the country (i.e stacking wood and hay, shoveling the driveway).



Play activities such as tag, hide and seek, and capture the flag were listed by all the groups including youth under 14 years of age. As youth get older they said the social acceptance of such play activities decreases, but the majority agreed that they would participate if more fun, accessible youth-oriented programs were made available to them.

⁴ The frequency of such activities and the level of optimal health benefits were not surveyed in a quantitative manner for the purposes of the youth consultation component.

Youth unanimously agreed that living a physically active lifestyle has many physical, mental, and social benefits. Youth associated the word *physically active* with mainly sports-oriented activities and positive behavior such as healthy eating, increased energy, movement, and strength. Youth under 12 years also thought of having fun, playing, and friends. Some female youth over 15 thought of the word 'skinny' which will be discussed further in this report. Responses to the word *physically inactive* highlighted negative values and behaviors such as lazy, unmotivated, overweight and/or obese, unhealthy, oversleeping, spending too much time with the TV, computer, or phone, smoking, substance abuse, lack of positive role models (older youth), boredom, poor nutrition (i.e. not eating enough or eating too much was mentioned by the majority of groups across age groups), low self-esteem and poor mental health (older youth, especially females identified depression and burn-out), and the number one, unanimous answer: couch-potato. As one youth from Sydney mines stated, *You can get your groceries by computer. It s not coach potato anymore - it s computer potato.*

Inactive makes me think of magazines because they tell us to do bad stuff like smoking.- Stellarton youth, under 13 years old.

People can be overweight and still be in shape. Guysborough youth, over 13 years.

Youth in each focus group defined *being healthy* in a very balanced manner including nutritious eating, getting enough sleep, exercising to stay fit through sports and activity, avoiding substance abuse and smoking, having a positive peer relationships, and good mental health. Mainly older youth commented that being healthy includes not only physical health, but also having good self-esteem and feeling happy. Older youth also identified the importance of having the financial resources necessary for a healthy lifestyle.

Exercising makes you stronger and you grow better. Indian Brook youth, under 10 years old.

Being healthy means being happy healthy means physically, emotionally, and mentally healthy. Clare youth, over 13 years old.

The participating youth were easily able to identify the following main benefits of leading a physically active lifestyle:

- **Increased physical health, disease prevention, and longer life.** Youth from every group were able to identify the importance of being physically active with cardiovascular and skeletal disease prevention and the strengthening of muscles.

If you are inactive your blood pressure is bad and you get overweight and unhealthy. Amherst youth, under 13 years old.

Being healthy and physically active mean the same thing to me. Dartmouth youth, under 10 years.

➤ **Increased mental health, increased self-esteem and confidence, and better body image.** Youth from every older group and female youth from some of the under 12 age groups talked about how engaging in physically activity increases one's sense of confidence, self-esteem, accomplishment, and self-worth. Across age the majority of the groups talked about how physical activity elevates mood and increases feelings of happiness and mental health in general.

Physical activity benefits you because you can look in the mirror with a little pride. Sydney Mines male youth, over 12 years old.

Knowing you can do it is good for your self-esteem. Musquodoboit youth, over 12 years old

Playing hockey gives me confidence, it helps me out. Indian Brook female youth, under ten years

➤ **Fun, entertainment, and social benefits.** Youth under 13 years referred to the physical activity as a way of having fun, while older youth talked more about social benefits such as making friends and feeling socially accepted.

Sports are so good for being social and promoting self-esteem. You get to meet new people. Sydney Mines youth, over 12 years.

When you are in teams you get to be social and have a sense of belonging. Clare youth, over 14 years.

When you play with your sister it makes you feel good. It s really fun! Dartmouth youth, under 10 years.

➤ **Preventative benefits.** Older and younger youth were able to identify that in some cases being physically active can help youth choose more healthy, promising lifestyles (i.e. not smoking, not abusing substances, avoiding criminal activity...). The younger youth (under 12), especially those from the Native communities and those youth with parents who smoke were able to identify the important role physical activity has in not smoking and abusing substances.

Physical activity keeps you from doing drugs and keeps your mind off the bad things in life. North End Halifax youth, over 12 years old.

it keeps you out of trouble because your free time is used up and you don t want to do criminal activity because your happy with what you are doing. male youth, 24-7 program, over 14 years.

When I was younger I thought exercise was running around town drunk at night. Now I go to the gym and eat right. Sydney Mines youth, over 16 years.

• **Other:** Readiness for competition, employment, and school (learning) were mentioned by older and younger youth. Older youth talked about the concept of self-care how being physically active is something you do because you care about yourself.

Being active will help you achieve goals like getting in the army or doing better at the sports you do. Stellarton youth, under 13 years.

Not exercising is like not eating breakfast before school because you won't be able to focus on stuff and do your work. Truro youth, over 12 years.

A small number of youth in the all but three groups commented on how being active is really not a priority in their life. This low number does not accurately reflect the true number of youth who lead inactive lifestyles in the group due to the stigma attached to being inactive through the group process (i.e. if every group identified inactive people as lazy and couch potatoes this was probably not much incentive for inactive youth to share their views).

Being active takes too much energy and I don't really care about it. Truro youth, over 13 years.

It's (being active) not that important because I don't do it much. I stack wood for my allowance. Stellarton youth, under 13 years

Some barriers to participating in physical activity span all the groups, but some are specific to age, gender, and rural or urban youth. Youth views on being healthy in both mind and body and the benefits of physical activity were definitely interrelated. The identified barriers between what youth know they need to feel healthy and what they are able or choosing to do are listed in the following tables:

Table 1 Barriers identified by youth 12 years and under to participating regularly according to community (urban or rural)⁵.

Rural youth 12 years and under:	Urban youth 12 years and under:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ TV, video games, computers, books, and junk food ✚ Lack of facilities and programs ✚ Accessibility: programs and facilities too far away and lack of transportation ✚ Unsupportive peers and bullies ✚ Lack of encouragement and support (transportation, funds) from parents ✚ Homework and a lack of gym time in school (all youth said they would like daily gym class and open gym/playground time). ✚ Lack of personal motivation ✚ Not making the team ✚ Having to baby sit siblings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ Computers and video games are more fun. ✚ Own laziness ✚ Some parents don't play active games with them, just mostly board games and video games. Some adults are not supportive ✚ Playgrounds need improvements and need to be safer. ✚ Put downs from peers
<p><i>Sometimes I m too lazy and I watch TV.</i> Bridgewater youth, under 11 years</p>	<p><i>Sometimes when I watch TV I can t stop watching it. I play me game boy a lot too.</i> Dartmouth youth, under 10 years.</p>
<p><i>If my friends don t want to do something than I don t. If I like basketball, but I don t have any friends there, I don t want to go.</i> Amherst youth, under 13 years.</p>	<p><i>It s okay not to be active, so who cares.</i> Dartmouth youth, under 10 years.</p>
<p><i>Playing video games is easier than exercising.</i> Indian Brook youth, under 10 years.</p>	<p><i>Adults do not help kids be active. -</i> Dartmouth youth, under 10 years.</p>

⁵ For the purposes of this report urban communities include Halifax, Dartmouth, and Truro (near urban).

Table 2 Barriers identified by youth 13 years and over to participating regularly according to community (urban or rural).

Rural youth 13 years and over:	Urban youth 13 years and over:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ Lack of transportation and poor accessibility to programs and facilities ✘ Lack of funds for team and program registration and gear ✘ Peer pressure and unsupportive and/or inactive friends ✘ Lack of self-confidence or self-esteem ✘ Smoking and/or substance abuse ✘ Demanding homework and/or job schedules ✘ Do not enjoy competition ✘ Lack of encouragement and positive role modeling from significant adults ✘ Medical conditions and/or injuries <p><i>The expense of organized sport is too high and teams are competitive so there are limited opportunities. Sydney Mines youth, over 15 years.</i></p> <p><i>Lack of encouragement is a problem when your family is not active it is hard to break the cycle. - Musquodoboit youth, over 12 years.</i></p> <p><i>There s a lot of drugs floating around the schools and streets and a lot of teens rather do drugs than be active. Sydney Mines youth, over 15 years.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ Peer pressure and unsupportive and/or inactive friends ✘ Lack of funds ✘ Lack of programs and teams ✘ Drugs and alcohol ✘ Unsupportive adults (i.e. parents and coaches) and negative role models ✘ TV, computers, and car/bus ✘ Organized sports are too competitive and many cannot make the teams ✘ Lack of transportation <p><i>It s hard to be active when your friends want to do lazy things. North End Halifax youth, over 12 years</i></p> <p><i>When people say you suck you can t play it gets in the way of being active. Truro youth, over 12 years.</i></p> <p><i>If you have an alcohol problem you get violent and want to fight it doesn t make you want to be physically active. Truro youth, over 12 years old.</i></p>

Table 3 Gender-specific responses to participating in physical activity.

Issues Identified by Female Youth	Issues Identified by Male Youth
<p>☀ Youth of all ages were frustrated and some feel limited by gender stereotypes in physical activity.</p> <p><i>Girls can run just as fast as boys, and girls are afraid they (boys) will embarrass them I don t care what boys say I just do what I want to!</i> Bridgewater youth, both under 11years old.</p> <p><i>If you don t drive your screwed the football team gets the bus and we don t.</i> Halifax youth, over 15 years.</p> <p><i>Guys just think they are much better (at sports) than girls and it s annoying -</i> Truro youth, over 12 years.</p> <p><i>People don t watch girls sports like they do the guys we re just not a priority.</i> Guysborough youth, over 14 years.</p> <p><i>My dad says sports aren t lady-like.</i> Halifax youth, over 15 years.</p> <p>☀ PAL and gym class can be boring and/or embarrassing for some youth.</p> <p>☀ Body image, self-esteem, and self-confidence are critical issues related to female youth's activity levels.</p> <p><i>We had a weight-lifting class in gym and the girls were sensitive about lifting in front of the guys so our teacher let us go first separate from the guys and we really enjoyed it.</i> Truro youth, over 12 years.</p> <p><i>If you are obese you aren t going to feel like being around skinny people.</i> Halifax youth, over 15 years.</p> <p><i>If some one thinks they are fat, they will work themselves to death and it s not healthy. -</i> Halifax youth, over 15 years.</p> <p>☀ <i>I want to be more physically active having a baby really slowed me down because my priorities have changed.</i> Sydney Mines youth, over 14 years.</p>	<p>☀ Pressure from peers, coaches, and self-confidence regarding sports and activities were identified by male youth to be barriers to physical activity.</p> <p><i>It s hard to be active when you suck at it.</i> Membertou youth, over 12 years old.</p> <p><i>If you can t lift a lot of weight, you feel down on yourself.</i> 24-7 youth on going to the weight gym, over 14 years.</p> <p><i>A lot of people are scared of what people will think around here and peer pressure doesn t allow you to play sports.</i> Clare youth, over 14 years.</p> <p>☀ Some male youth agreed females are physical equals and stereotypes pose barriers, while many remained silent when the topic was raised.</p> <p><i>I think girls deserve to play in the NHL. I think in history there was only one girl (in the NHL) because boys have stronger bones.</i> Bridgewater male youth, 9 years old.</p> <p>☀ In the all-male group some youth stated that having an attractive body, being popular, and meeting girls were as important as staying healthy and were prime motivators for engaging in physical activity.</p> <p><i>Going to the gym and playing sports keeps you looking good at the beach.</i> 24-7 youth, over 14 years.</p> <p><i>If you don t like the way you look, you work harder, but it s hard not having self-esteem.</i> 24-7 youth, over 14 years.</p> <p>☀ Many youth talked about the expense associated with sports such as hockey and the level of competition that excluded many people who want to play on male, school teams.</p>

How many girls do you see playing hockey? They always show guy s hockey on TV. People think it s just a guy s sport and it s not. Football is the same. People think women are weak and we re not I drink at hockey games on the weekend. If I was playing hockey or had a sport to play I would n t get drunk on the weekend - Truro youth, over 12 years

The great majority of comments about weight and negative body image were made by female youth. The all female group with youth over 15 years of age revealed a perceived association between physical activity, weight, and body image, but none of the youth commented that they considered being ‘skinny’ to be healthy. Many youth brought forward in the all-female group that for the most part they lack encouragement, positive role models, self-confidence, and the money necessary to participate in physical activity. For those youth who did engage in regular physical activity, it was extremely important in the lives and some wished they could slow down and actually be less active.

Barriers to participating in organized sports that both male and female youth voiced concern regarding were unsupportive coaches, parents, and the overly competitive, exclusive nature of many team sports. One high school youth stated that she wished sports were more like they were in elementary – *everyone was doing every sport and it was less competitive*. The following segment will look more closely at the importance youth place on the need for motivation, encouragement, and inclusion.

If I didn t have sports I don t know what I would do it s all I have. Halifax youth, over 15 years.

What youth said about choosing to be active: motivation, encouragement, and inclusion. Themes that emerged across age group, gender, and region regarding motivation for building physically active lives focused on their need for adult and peer encouragement, positive role-modeling from people who care about them, and feelings of inclusion. The term inclusion was chosen to encompass comments that youth made about the benefits of acceptance, and feeling included in activities regardless of their skill level. Motivation can be a highly individualistic phenomenon, but the facilitators perceived from the youth’s responses to questions about barriers and motivation that those with active families and supportive relationships (whether family, teacher, coach, and/or peers) had the self-esteem and confidence necessary to be regularly physically active and take risks (i.e. try-out for teams, learn new sports). The majority of youth involved in physical activities on teams or requiring facilities stated that their parents were supportive and helpful regarding transportation and funding. Many youth who were struggling with being physically active shared that they had unsupportive, inactive parents who sometimes did not have the time and resources to support them to be active. It is important to note that there were some youth with unsupportive parents who demonstrated resilience and used physical activity as a means if coping and/or enjoying their lives.

Motivation is a problem it s hard (to be physically active) and we need more opportunities and encouragement. – Halifax youth, over 15 years.

Self-esteem, motivation, and physical activity are interrelated

I play basketball because I m good at it and it gets my self-esteem up. Truro youth, over 13 years.

Physical activity is good for your I.L.A.C. that means I am lovable and capable. Truro youth, over 13 years.

Family and parents encourage and motivate

Physical activity gets your family together It puts you in a better mood for friends and family. Shelburne youth, both over 12 years.

Parents tell you to be the best you can be and they send you to camps - Stellarton youth, under 13 years.

My brother, my sister, my mom, my Dad, and me all play hockey. Indian Brook youth, under 10

I didn t make the basketball team and it sucked, but I kept playing basketball with my Dad and I am going to try out every year until I make it. Stellarton youth, under 13 years.

So do teachers, coaches, adults, and peers

We look up to people we know as role models a lot easier than TV sports stars because they care about us and they are more accessible. Guysborough youth, over 12 years.

We learned a lot about teamwork and feeling included in the Youth Action Team. Clare youth, over 14 years.

I can play basketball my friends taught me how. Truro youth, over 15 years.

I had an excellent coach. He was fair and he played everyone. Sydney Mines youth, over 16 years.

Simon (youth recreation coordinator) puts together field trips and opens the gym for us. Membertou youth, over 12 years.

Others have area for improvement

I like camping and hunting, but my dad never takes me. Clare youth, over 16 years.

My brother would kick my butt if I didn't play football, but it doesn't make me enjoy it.
Truro youth, over 12 years.

I'm always picked last for teams this makes me feel like a loser. I don't feel encouraged enough to perform on teams. Clare youth, over 14 years.

My mom is not encouraging and doesn't care if I play or be physically active. My dad is really good though and brings me to air cadets. Stellarton youth, under 13 years.

The community stands in the way because our soccer field is _____ because our fields are not maintained. Adults are not dedicated and the teams don't last because they don't have coaches to help us out. Clare youth, over 15 years.

Strict coaches make us feel embarrassed and stupid. No matter what you do they will find something wrong with it. - Stellarton youth, under 13 years

They (adults) are poor role models and nag you. Adults on power trips are not helpful.
24-7 youth, over 14 years.

On Physical Education class and PAL

Youth according to age had differing views on the benefits of participating in physical education and physically active living (P.A.L.) class. Youth under 14 unanimously agreed they would really enjoy having daily gym class and open gym time. Older youth either really enjoyed PAL or gym class or found it unbeneficial. Some youth commented that they did not like the sports chosen by the teacher and that if they had more input in what activities were chosen they would want to take part more actively. Youth from Sydney Mines were frustrated with how they enjoyed the activities, but due to liability issues teachers could not transport them to the out of school activities (i.e. bowling). Therefore, the youth are responsible for finding their own transportation. Transportation barriers were a common issue, especially for rural youth who had hours of driving to get to facilities and the lack of school buses for even school sports events.

An Overview of Youth Recommendations for Decreasing Physical Inactivity

The recommendations made during this consultation represent a united voice among participating youth across the province on how they would like to see the government improve their ability to lead more active lives. It is noteworthy that these recommendations for improving youth's access to physical activity and motivating youth to be less inactive are similar to those outlined in the *Young and Active Roundtable* based on the views of youth and community members voiced at a forum held in September 1999 (N.S. Sport and Recreation Commission and P.A.C.Y.). Youth recommendations can be categorized as follows (please refer to appendix B for complete recommendation lists by focus group and region):

1) ***Listen to us*** youth would like the government and decision-makers to be more inclusive and empowering in their approach to providing resources.

- Older youth did not present ideas that reflect their view of the government as caring about youth – especially regarding what they need to be healthy.
- The government needs to give to us now so someday we can give back...so act interested, do some research, and get to know what the real issues are for youth (Sydney Mines).
- *Stop trying to take our rights away and help us stop breaking promises.* Membertou youth, over 12 years.
- The government has been targeting the wrong age group for a long time – teens need help, too. The government needs to show more understanding of what activities youth are interested in so the right funding and programs can be offered.
- The government needs to get involved in our community (Mulgrave Park) so they will know what youth and people need to be more active.
- *It seems like the government is more concerned about the image of their town than they are about making things better for kids and sports that needs to change Kids should organize rec programs for kids because we know what is fun.* 24-7 youth, both over age 14.
- If the government were more interested in recreational activities (preventative measures), instead of focusing on competitive sports then they would save a lot of money on health care for our generation (i.e. less cardiovascular disease).

2) Put an emphasis on funding public awareness and education regarding how important physical activity is and its relationship to self-esteem and the barriers youth face today.

- Youth stated the importance of providing training programs and incentives for older youth and adults who want to develop skills in coaching, leadership, and youth capacity-building (i.e. self-esteem).
- Youth in Clare especially were really concerned with the lack of adult interest in coaching teams that are not high school, competitive and the importance of providing younger youth with good, consistent coached who will help them build strong mental and physical foundations for life.
- Youth in North End Halifax think that offering younger children an after school mentorship program employing teens will encourage youth to develop skills and be more active.
- Youth from Musquodoboit highlighted the importance of the government supporting the recognition of youth in sports and recreation on an ongoing basis as an incentive to continue being active.

3) We need more funding for existing programs and help to develop new facilities and programs that are fun and affordable:

- Of primary importance to youth was the need for the government to make a commitment to provide the funding for registration, gear, and transportation to ensure that youth who cannot afford organized physical activity can have a fair opportunity. Some youth were aware of programs like KidSport, but they said it's just not enough and free programs are a priority. Some youth shared that they and almost every person they know is on assistance and if it is not free they get left out.

Money can be a problem because if you want to join sports it costs money. If people want us to be more physical it should be free. – Truro youth, over 12 years.

- Every focus group had youth who stated the need for a facility like a YMCA with a pool, gym, and youth-friendly programs in their community. Especially in rural communities, facilities are not accessible or some cases do not exist within a two-hour drive. Some youth on the swim team have to drive from Bridgewater to Dartmouth for training because their only indoor pool is at the Wandlyn Hotel. Youth were emphatic that if this type of facility was available and affordable (meaning for many youth and families: free) then they would be much more active and would try new activities (i.e. weight training, rock-climbing).

- Youth unanimously wanted adults at existing facilities (i.e. schools) to provide both more open gym and/or playground time and the required supervision so they can feel healthier at school. Many youth are not content with sitting so much in class and only having gym a few times each week. As aforementioned, the majority of youth under the age of 14 and all active older youth would like to have gym time and/or class on a daily basis.

Make physical activity more a part of the curriculum throughout the school years. We need more consideration stop ignoring us and take action!
Musquodoboit youth, over 12 years.

- Youth asked that better sporting equipment and gear be purchased for their school, recreation program, or Boys and Girls Club.
- Youth of all ages would like to have more coaches and teams or recreational programs so that if you do not make the competitive school team you can still be actively involved in something. For some youth, intramural sports does not meet this need because they have jobs after school or intramurals are offered early in the morning before classes.
- Youth agreed that if the government couldn't provide facilities closer to their communities, then bus transportation to activities would be very encouraging.
- Many older youth stated they would like a center to go for teens that had the classic pool tables and air hockey, but also offered recreational programs they could choose and afford (i.e. bowling, golfing, paintball).

4) **The government needs to sponsor and build stronger parental and community involvement in the lives of youth.**

- As one youth from Amherst simply stated, *If your parents are involved on sports than usually children are. My father coaches a baseball team so I play on the team.* Building opportunities for families that educate and actively involve parents in physical activity with their children and adolescents needs to be a priority given the insight that many of the youth shared regarding their need for positive role models who are *accessible and care about us.*

Adults help youth be active just by being involved. – North End Halifax youth, over 12 years.

- Female youth and youth at risk require special consideration in terms of the positive power that physical activity can have in their lives. Many youth from these groups stated that they lacked positive role models and

adult encouragement to be healthy. Coupled with the negative messages in the media and peer pressure youth from these groups asked for more support, understanding, and opportunities.

Adults, especially our parents, need to be more encouraging and care about our health more. The media needs to include more women who are normal. Brittany Spears and Janet Jackson are not normal. People get rewarded for looking like that because it is about image not talent and most people are not size 2. female youth, both over 15 years.

5) Younger children (under 12) would really like to see the government fix their broken playground equipment and build better playgrounds and sports fields near their schools and homes.

- Like their older counterparts they voiced the need for more care, upkeep, and the new development of playing fields and skateboard parks.
- Rollerblading, scootering, and skateboarding are very popular with youth of all ages and both genders, yet many youth from rural areas stated that their requests for a skate park were denied by their communities and that existing skate parks are too far away or not funded for maintenance (i.e. broken, dangerous ramps).
- Especially in the participating Native communities, there is a need for more paved play areas for the children and playground equipment, as well as more paid recreation staff.

6) Many youth identified smoking and substance abuse as barriers to physical activity and would like the government to focus on funding recreational activities as a means of prevention.

- One 12 year old girl from Stellarton stated, *Everyone in my family smokes and am not going to because it is bad for you and it smells.* She would like to ask the government to stop people from smoking.
- Youth from the 24-7 program in Waterville have benefited directly from therapeutic recreation and ask that the government further develop such programs and help youth at risk attend quality camps for free.

Conclusions

In summary, the needs identified by youth who would like to be more active (the majority) are consistent across the six regions of the province. Younger youth shared that they need their parents to provide more play opportunities for them that don't include video games and computer and that playgrounds and recreational facilities need improvement. Youth 11 years and over shared that they need parental and adult encouragement, resources, and opportunities to build active, healthy lives. The importance of play and non-competitive recreation centered on the principles of inclusion and confidence-building were highlighted by youth across age, gender, and region. Youth were able to identify that they are capable of designing and running programs and that they would like to get involved in helping the government plan and implement initiatives stemming from this research in their communities.

We have much to learn from youth and those who are already successfully incorporating physical activity into programs for youth (i.e. the 24-7 program of the Nova Scotia Youth Centre, Heartwood Youth Action Teams, Girls on the Move). Boys and Girls Clubs provide free programming to children and youth on the premise that every *kid has potential*, yet they consistently struggle with funding, which speaks volumes regarding the value that we place on youth. The youth facilitator team commented that they felt they were often “taking from” instead of giving back and helping youth during this youth consultation because the need for support was so great for some. The youth facilitator team encourages the P.A.C.Y. committee to help re-establish youth's belief that the provincial government cares about youth and their futures and follow-through whenever possible on the youth recommendations.

Question # 7 – If you could send a message to the government on how they can help you or youth you know to be more active what would you say?

Region: Central

Rural: **Musquodoboit Rural Highschool** (17 youth, ages 14-17, M-5, F-12)

Urban: **Needham Recreation Centre, Halifax** (18 youth, ages 8-17, M-7, F-9)

Dartmouth East Boys and Girls Club (12, ages 8-10, M-6, F - 6)

Halifax West High School, PAL class, Halifax (15, ages 16-20⁶, all female)

Total number of youth rural: 17

Total number of youth urban: 45

Age range: 8-18 (see footnote)

Gender: Males = 18 Females = 42

Total number of youth = 62

Rural: 12 and over

⁶ Given the target group for this research is 8-18 years, only two participants were over the age of 18, but due the nature of the convenient sampling (i.e. a high school class) were included in the focus group research.

- *Support rural areas by providing more funding and building facilities that are closer to our community*
- *Increase opportunities to us to use existing facilities by having school gyms open on the weekend and more open gym time at recreation centers*
- *Make activities more affordable*
- *The government should offer more recognition for youth who are active (i.e. sports awards, ceremonies)*
- *The government should show more understanding of what activities youth are interested in so the right funding and/or programs can be offered.*
- *Make physical activity more a part of school curriculum throughout the school years. We need more consideration stop ignoring youth and take action!*

Urban (12 and over):

- *Build basketball courts in our community*
- *Better advertising for what is available for recreation in the city*
- *More funding is needed for existing facilities like Needham Rec Centre*
- *We need more encouragement*
- *Make sports less costly (i.e. offer free camps) and offer more funding!*
- *Train coaches*
- *We need more and better equipment for Needham*
- *Help youth and people get more involved in the community (the government needs to get involved in the community too so they will know what we need!)*
- *We want a football team for girls and a basketball team, but we need the facilities and the equipment.*
- *Build more playgrounds and places for youth to go and offer better programs youth will like.*
- *Stop screwing up our curriculum in school and put more money into Mulgrave Park.*
- *To encourage younger youth to be more active, create a mentorship program at the after school program and employ teenagers*

Urban under 12:

- *There should be more money for kid s toys like balls, skipping ropes, and a trampoline for our Boys and Girls Club (East Dartmouth).*
- *I wish we had a slide in our playground by our house (Shannon Park Playground)*
- *Teenagers make our playground not so good because they have fires in there at night. It used to be a lot bigger, but the teenagers wrecked it a lot (Brookhouse Playground).*
- *Help Pakistan to be active so that they will stop the madness*

Urban (over 12, female):

- *We need a drop-in recreation center that is free that the government pays for a place where you just walk-in and do whatever activity you want.*
- *We need more recreational programs that are fun and affordable.*
- *Adults, especially our parents, need to be more encouraging and care about our health more.*
- **The media needs to include more women who are normal Brittany Spears and Janet Jackson are not normal. People get rewarded for looking like that because it is about image not talent and most people are not size 2.**

Region: Valley

Rural: 1) 24-7 NS Youth Centre (n=16) (all male 15-18 years)
2) Clare Youth Action Team (n= 9, F = 3, M = 6)

Age: 14-18 years (all over 12yrs)
Gender: Males = 14 Females = 3
Total youth: 25

- More resources needed, financial for those in need (i.e. more money for underprivileged, youth at-risk to go to camp)
- Bring down the prices for accessing gyms and sports activities (e.g. hockey registration)
- Open more facilities instead of closing them
- Priorities of government are questionable
- Advertise for younger kids
- More organized sports to teach people sports skills
- More positive role models – Sports stars
- Motivate kids in healthy way to engage in sports (i.e. encourage don't nag)

Region: South Shore

Rural: **Bridgewater Elementary School** (17 youth, ages 9-10, M-10, F-7)
Shelburne- Our House -teen wellness center (13 youth, ages 12-18, M-6, F-7)

Total number of youth rural: 30
Age range: 9-18
Gender: Males =16 Females = 14
Total youth: 30

Rural 12 and over:

- *We need football fields-24-7 tennis-rugby-squash courts*
- *Build a swimming pool*
- *YMCA-counseling, sports*
- *Our House -teen wellness clinic, needs to be somewhere to go (instead of hanging out on the street-pot)*

- *Arena sucks*
- *Targeting wrong age group for long time*
- *Sportsplex*
- *Like the Commons*
- *Pavilion-a place to dance*
- *More than Terry Fox marathon*
- *Hardcore mountain biking*
- *Climbing the wall*
- *School can't even transport us to Halifax for climbing wall or outside cliff*
- *White water rafting*
- *Pool, pinball*
- *Exercise place*
- *Instead of winning*

Rural: 12 and under

- *Outdoor skate park*
- *More money for bowling alley and outside jungle gym*
- *They should put better equipment for activity in our school playground*
-

**They hurt my hands because the monkey bars are chipped and old -
Bridgewater youth**

- *Football/soccer field that is grass not cement because when we fall down we get hurt too much when we fall down.*
- *Our playground is old rusty and hard to play on*
- *Our playground needs to be bigger and more swimming*
- *Indoor public pool because the only one we have is at the Wandlyn hotel*
- *We need a better community playground*
- *The YMCA is in bad shape and it needs to be fixed. The floor is rotting and the toys are all broken*
- *More money for kids who can't afford to join sports*
- *We need a Sportsplex like Dartmouth and Sackville*

Region: Highland

Rural: Guysborough teen health center (19 youth, ages 16 to 18 M:8, F:11)

W.A. Macleod Elementary School (22 youth, ages 11-12, M:11, F:11)

Total number of youth rural: 41

Age range: 11-18

Gender: Males = 19, Females = 22

Total Number: 41 youth

Rural: 12 and over

- *We need a YMCA with a personal trainer, courts, pool, and fitness room with punching bags.*

- *We need a teen center with pool tables, air hockey just a place to go after school and do stuff.*
- *I d like to be able to do skeet shooting, but there is nowhere to do it around here.*
- *We need an indoor pool, hockey rink, running track, and soccer field.*
- *Send us money and we ll make the community better*

Rural : 12 and under

- *Unanimous plea for more gym class time, outside playing time, and music classes at school were needed to be healthier.*
- *The East River Valley Recreation Center needs to be bigger and better for people to come.*
- *They take our playgrounds down and say they will replace them, but then don t.*
- *Get rid of smoking!*
- *Let the youth speak out to the world: let us give our opinions instead of just the government.*
- *The first of the year (in school) students should write down what we want for gym activities and sports.*
- *We need a fence around our soccer field and some better sports equipment.*

Region: Fundy

Rural: **Indian Brook School** (16 youth, ages 6-10, M-7, F-9)
Amherst Cumberland YMCA⁷ (14 youth, ages 8-13, M – 7, F – 7)
 Near Urban: **Truro Boys and Girls Club** (14 youth, ages 8-17, M-7, F-7)

Total number of youth rural: 30
 Total number of youth near urban: 14
 Age range: 6-17
 Gender: Males = 21 Females = 23
Total Number: 44 youth

Near-Urban: over 12

- *We really need a recreation center like a better YMCA that has indoor or sheltered basketball courts, a swimming pool, a weight room with cardio equipment, and racquetball courts. Our YMCA closed down and they didn t offer free programs for teens.*
- *We need some good dances with good DJ s not just school dances with radio tunes.*
- *We need more tennis courts because we only have one and it s too small*

⁷ Due to time constraints the Youth Net team provided Charlene MacDonald of the Cumberland YMCA with the focus group recording forms to allow the opportunity for some of the youth participating in the Friday night recreation group to participate in the youth consultation.

- *The Girls on the Move program (Truro Boys and Girls Club) has not money and Mary volunteers on Saturdays to do stuff with us, but a lot of us are broke and need money to pay for the activities like bowling.*

Rural: under 12 (Native)

- *The closest swimming pool is 15 minutes away and we would like one in the center on our reserve (Indian Brook).*
- *All the youth emphatically stated that they would like to have daily gym class or free time to play in the gym.*
- *Trails for biking, walking, and rollerblading.*
- *We do not have a playground our town and we really want one. There are only four swings and they are not close to the school. We want monkey bars, cement for rollerblading and skateboarding and a twisty slide*

Rural under 12:

- *There needs to be more for youth to do, like more programs and clubs with low prices.*
- *I like to skateboard, but it s illegal so I need a place to do it.*
- *Once a week should be walk to work/school day when no one is allowed to drive their car.*
- *We need more basketball nets/courts.*

Region: Cape Breton

Rural: Membertou (24youth, ages 9-17, M-14, F-10)

Sydney Mines Community Cares Youth Resource Center (8 youth, ages12 to 18 M:4, F:4)

Total number of youth rural: 32

Age range: 9-18

Gender: Males = 18 Females = 14

Total Number: 32 youth

Rural: 12 and over

- *Sport Nova Scotia and other organizations should provide gear and registration money to those who can t afford it. So many people are on assistance and really can t afford to be on teams or in programs.*
- *We need a skateboard park and no one will give us donations to build or improve ramps. We need one in Sydney Mines because we can t always get to the one in North Sydney.*
- *With everything closing down (i.e. mills, plants) in Sydney there is a weaker economy and more people on welfare. We still have a community and we still need resources for youth.*
- *Awareness needs to be raised regarding self-esteem and barriers for youth today.*
- *Transportation is a huge issue that needs to be improved.*

- *We need better programs and facilities for youth and more funding for existing centers like this one (Community Cares Resource Centre).*
- *The government needs to give to us now so someday we can give back so act interested, do some research, and get to know what the real issues are for youth.*

Rural 12 and over (Native):

- *Stop trying to take our rights away and help us stop breaking promises.*
- *All the youth agreed with a youth who commented that Simon Marshall, the youth recreation coordinator for Membertou needed more funding for programming and hiring staff to help him out.*
- *We need more fields, a football team, better equipment, jerseys, and a drugstore not just candy stores in our community.*
- *We need a place like the YMCA that has a pool and gym.*
- *Our gym needs to be fixed up.*
- *We want a skateboard park.*

YOUTH'S VIEW ON PHYSICAL ACTIVITY: YOUTH CONSULTATION REPORT