



# Town of Northam

## Circus Program

### Background

The Town of Northam is situated 96 km from Perth with a population of approximately 10,600 people. The Town of Northam's Strategic Recreational Plan 2001-2011 commits to the continued development of new and innovative programs that meet the needs of the Northam community. Community consultation identified circus skills / acrobatics as something many young people were interested in trying. The Circus program aims to emulate the success of a range of physical activity initiatives run by the Town of Northam to offer young people not involved in mainstream physical activity with an opportunity to become physically active.

### Project Objectives

- Increase the number of young people aged 6-15 years involved in physical activity through training and participation in circus, gymnastic and acrobatic skills.
- Increase the confidence and self esteem of young people.
- Develop leadership skills of participants.
- Provide Recreation Centre staff with skills to continue the program beyond the funding period.
- Train a small number of young people as leaders to assist with the ongoing delivery of the program.

### Project Strategies

- Run weekly circus classes for school aged youth.
- Market and promote the program directly to young people who do not regularly engage in physical activity.
- Recruit local people with circus and gymnastic program experience to deliver the circus program.
- Work in collaboration with circus teachers and participants to ensure the program is varied and maintains the interest of the target group.
- Consult young people in planning the future direction of the circus and allow them to provide input into classes.
- Build confidence, self esteem and leadership skills of young people through classes and workshops.
- Conduct a survey at the beginning and end of the program to determine changes in physical activity levels.
- Provide training to recreation centre staff to develop skills in delivering the program, so that it can be delivered beyond the funding period.
- Seek support from Act Belong Commit program coordinator, recreation staff and Department of Sport and Recreation regional officer to continue the development of the program.



## Project Results

- The circus program was promoted in local media, school newsletters, the Act Belong Commit email list server and as part of the Town of Northam's monthly community news. The program was advertised five times in local print media and twice in local newsletters.
- An average of 150 participants participated in the classes each week. A total of 40 circus classes were held over the 12 month period. Five one hour classes were conducted during the school day with an advanced class after school at the Recreation Centre.
- The group now regularly performs for local groups and at community events. Four performances were conducted over the 12 month period.
- The young people involved in the after school program participated on a consistent basis and several strong leaders were identified. The leaders have been able to assist their peers with a variety of circus, acrobatic and dance skills.
- One young person has since used the program to complete the community service component of a school based program.
- Parents have reported that the program has increased their children's confidence and interest in being physically active.
- There was strong support for this program from schools, teachers and parents. Several schools reported positive outcomes for students including increased school attendance and improved behavior on days the circus classes were held.
- Partnerships were formed with the Act Belong Commit program, Department of Sport and Recreation, St Josephs School, Northam Senior High School and Northam Primary School.
- A total of five staff, as well as the young people involved in peer to peer teaching, have developed skills in delivering the program.

## Where to From Here

- The Town of Northam is now working with schools to continue the program beyond the funding period. Some of the local schools now visit the Recreation Centre to be part of the continuing circus program. The program will also be delivered to schools in Bakers Hill and Wundowie during 2008.
- New organisations are engaging and funding circus instructors to provide a class for their students (particularly disengaged and at risk youth). Since the start of the circus program Northam Senior High School and Directions Local Community Partnerships (LCP) Program have engaged the Northam Recreation Centre to deliver the Circus Program to their students.

## Lessons Learned

- Identify local volunteers/deliverers to ensure programs are sustainable and resource effective in regional areas.
- Provide non traditional activities for young people as an alternative to structured sports.
- Provide guidance and opportunities for young people to engage in peer to peer teaching.
- At risk young people thrived on the opportunity to showcase their new skills to the wider community.

**Total cost of project:** \$41,800 (including \$19,900 Local Activity Grant)

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