

# Physical Activity, Play, Recreation or Sports – How can Leisure Centres bring it all together?

The recent National Health and Wellbeing Conference, organised and promoted by Smart Connection Company saw 16 leading peak bodies from health, education and leisure industries and key note speakers come together to explore the latest issues and trends within the industry. This 'joined-up agenda' emphasised how everyone can work together for the same outcome. That outcome being-to benefit the wellbeing of the community.

One of the key initiatives resulting from the conference was 'how could the local leisure center help with this 'joined-up agenda' and how could they afford to be involved'. The question should be 'how can they afford not to be involved.' As the community is becoming more cognisant of the importance of an active, healthy lifestyle, how can the leisure manager capitalise on this interest?

In a series of articles, Martin Sheppard will explore a number of themes aimed at informing leisure managers of how to maximise interest in the centres, use this 'new interest' to improve bottom line and increase their usage. The themes will focus on:

- Physical Activity and Recreation–Schools and Leisure Centres
- Health and Wellness–To complement traditional programs
- Latest products and approaches–An opportunity to grow your business

This article focuses on physical activity and in conjunction with Double Olympic Gold Medallists, Nick Green and Drew Ginn, from Bluearth Institute, provides an overview of how leisure managers can leverage school usage for their centres.

In our industry, we are all aware that the lack of physical activity is linked to most chronic diseases including heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, colon cancer, depression, obesity etc.

The cost of these ailments resulting from physical inactivity account for some 7% of Australia's \$75 billion health costs. With research showing that 63% of males and 47% of females are overweight or obese, while 43% of the population are insufficiently active to derive any form of health gain.

The Prime Minister launched the 'Building a Healthy Active Australia' in June by committing some \$116 million over 4 years to schools and specifically \$90 million on the Active After-Schools Communities. In addition each primary and junior high school has to provide a minimum of 2 hours physical activity per week. The result of these two initiatives alone is that there has been a plethora of organisations that have (seemingly overnight) developed the 'perfect program' for the schools to pay for and use. Many leisure centers are doing the same, but could leisure centers be more strategic?

It is probably not worth competing against the sports, private and not for profit organisations, so why not complement them by providing added value opportunities for the schools. With the Bluearth Institute we have developed an approach that will be a winner for all schools, children, council and the leisure centres. Firstly who is Bluearth?

Bluearth is a non-profit charitable organisation founded in 2000. It is operated with the express purpose of improving health and preventing disease of sedentary living, by providing programs and information for the development and integration of mind, body and spirit through participation in physical activity.

Physical activity and exploration through movement are essential to children's development. Movement experiences are the vehicle through which motor co-ordination is formed to support all action, from basic daily activities to optimal performance. We do not simply inhabit our bodies; we literally use them to think with.

The Bluearth Discovery Program recognises these developmental needs for all children. Through 'Discovery', we provide a breadth of experiences that encourages children to

explore using the domain of movement. This exploration develops children's confidence to be who they are, and to accept the challenges of living.

The Bluearth Discovery Program is a holistic physical activity education program that values the processes of what, how, and why, to achieve health and education outcomes. Immersing in this process helps an individual choose pathways into sport and other activity disciplines. Choosing the appropriate pathways allows those who wish to compete, to do so, but also creates alternative pathways for those who wish to explore their potential in other forms.

In creating a long term sustainable environment that nurtures the breadth of experiences offered, the Bluearth Teacher Development Program ensures the health benefits of 'Discovery' go beyond the session, the term and the year, and expand into the whole of the school community.

Traditionally, school exercise programs have emphasised the competitive nature of exercise and the forced compliance to these programs. The historical consequence of this has been for the competitive skilled individual to thrive, as long as competition was present to motivate them, whilst the unskilled, more passive individual becomes disillusioned and rejects the active living message.

The traditional program has failed to capture the essence of an active lifestyle. Incomplete attitudes and beliefs have been conveyed and have not captured, the majority of children. The Bluearth Discovery Program based on creating, activating, stimulating, providing and educating movement and movement challenges, in a co-operative way, has to be given a chance to live, and become the sustainable solution.

Since its inception in 2002, the Bluearth Discovery Program has been taught to approximately 25,000 primary school students. Feedback from principals, parents, teachers and students, clearly indicates that this program is making a significant difference.

So how does the program work? With the support of the local government, the Discovery Program is introduced to the schools where not only do children explore new ways of having fun from play and physical activity but teachers also receive formal professional development so that they can continue on with the program.

By linking the local sports, aquatics and leisure centre with the program the following benefits can occur.

1. The Discovery Program is delivered in the school for Term 1. At the end of Term 2 the children are introduced to the centre and its facilities.
2. Term 2, the children can do the program with both/either the school or the Centre.
3. The centre should, once the children are confident with the centre and the staff be offered the leisure centre program packages e.g. learn to swim; kids parties; holiday programs etc.
4. The centre staff also completes the Teachers Development Program so that they can assist the school with the program delivery.

In addition to the Discovery Program in the schools, the centre has the benefit of working with the school for other facility hire and usage, as well as the secondary spend opportunities.

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