

IMPROVING ACCESS TO MUNICIPAL RECREATION PROGRAMS:
WHAT MOTHERS ON LOW INCOME HAVE TO SAY

by

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Abstract

Poor women and their families have been excluded from participating in many facets of civil society, including public recreation (Reid, 2004; Morris, 2002; Reid, Frisby & Ponio 2002). Research indicates that participating in physical activity and recreation programs is beneficial to social, physical and psychological health (Reid et al., 2002; Harvey, 2001; Reid & Dyck, 2000). Despite this knowledge, access to municipal recreation programs for low income families has been limited due to cultural, institutional and material forms of exclusion (Reid, 2004). It is important that women on low income be involved in public policy development to deal with inadequacies of current leisure access policies (Frisby, Alexander, Taylor, Tirone, Watson, Harvey & Laplante, 2005)).

The purpose of my study was to gather the views of mothers on low income (with children 12 years and under) regarding existing municipal recreation programs and policies. My research questions were: i) Do mothers on low income see benefits of their children participating in municipal recreation activities, ii) What are the barriers facing mothers on low income attempting to involve their children in recreation programs and services, iii) What is their assessment of the leisure access policy in their community?

The research methods included focus groups with mothers on low income who varied in ethnicity that were conducted in 3 cities including: Richmond (n=3), Winnipeg (n=7) and the York Region (n=4). Mothers on low income were chosen because lone parent families headed by women constitute the largest population living below the poverty line in Canada and their children are the least likely to participate in public recreation (Morris, 2002; Jackson, Roberts, & Harman, 2001). The documents analyzed incorporated program brochures, budget and program information from city web sites; written leisure access policies, and department information provided by recreation department staff. Field notes and transcripts were analyzed using Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis package.

The mothers on low income acknowledged the importance of their children's participation in recreation programs and how this could benefit them socially, physically and psychologically, which confirms research in this area (Donnelly & Coakley, 2002; Jackson, et al., 2001). They also identified program costs, inadequate transportation, and poor treatment by staff when applying for leisure access policies as barriers hindering their children's participation. Additional barriers included experiences with racism and violence, making the safety of their children a major concern. Mothers in two of the three cities were unaware of leisure access policies and all of them provided suggestions on how such policies could be improved.

Based on the results of the study, it is recommended that municipal recreation departments adopt a community development strategy that includes involving mothers on low income in public policy development to more effectively address the barriers to participation that they and their children face. Future research is required to determine if the patterns uncovered in this study are more extensive in the municipal recreation field.

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**Improving access to municipal recreation programs:
What mothers on low income have to say.**

Preface

For most of my paid working life, I was employed as a senior bureaucrat in a municipal parks and recreation department and believed in the importance of delivering recreation services to all citizens in the municipality. I thought I was offering meaningful recreation services and programs and that those citizens who wanted to participate, could.

As I progressed further in my career, I realized that certain segments of the population were unable to access recreation services and programs because of cost and other factors. At this point I introduced reduced fees for programs to those who could not afford to take part in the past. We worked with the local health unit and social service agencies who distributed fee reduction vouchers to their clients on our department's behalf. I considered this to be an excellent service, although in retrospect little effort was made to evaluate the service from the viewpoints of those it was designed to serve.

After retirement from the municipal recreation field, I became a consultant involved in developing policies and practices for various municipal recreation departments. While conducting work for Promotion Plus (the BC organization for girls and women in physical activity and sport) I decided to return to university in order to pursue graduate studies to researching barriers faced by girls and women who would like to participate in recreation and physical activity programs. Dr. Wendy Frisby, University of British Columbia, agreed to take me on as a

graduate student. She had been doing feminist participatory action research for the past several years with women on low income, focusing on their limited access to community recreation programs. Dr. Frisby introduced me to a research project known as WOAW (Women Organizing Activities for Women), which opened my eyes to the many barriers poor women faced. This project involved women on low income, several community partners, and University of British Columbia researchers who had been working together for five years in a tri-city area in the Lower Mainland, examining issues related to access as a health promotion strategy to alleviate social isolation. Initially, I wished to write my thesis on organizational change and girls and women accessing community recreation, however this shifted once I became a research assistant for the WOAW project. I became aware that as a recreation practitioner, I did not have a deep understanding of the lives of women living in poverty; and from that point onwards I changed my focus towards learning more about the barriers women on low income faced in accessing municipal recreation services for themselves and their children.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Context for the study

This research project emerged from my desire to enhance my knowledge and understanding of mothers on low income and their children by obtaining their perspectives on practices and policies of municipal recreation in their communities. It was important for me to listen first hand to the mothers' thoughts, opinions, and ideas because I saw municipal recreation programs having the potential to contribute to the women's health and well being.

I will begin to demonstrate, by listening to the voices of mothers, what it is like for them and their children not to be able to access public recreation services. While I recognize that I cannot speak for the mothers who I spoke with, I hope to report on what they described to me during a series of focus groups (Ristock & Pennell, 1996). The mothers had many insightful comments, experiences, and ideas about recreation for their children as well as recommendations for how to improved related practices and policies.

My thesis is situated within a larger research project that I participated in during 2004 as a research assistant, entitled "*Bridging the Recreation Gap: Listening to Youth and Parents from Low Income Families Across Canada*" that involved a collaboration between the University of British Columbia, the University of Ottawa, and Dalhousie University and was funded by the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (CPRA). Throughout that research I had many opportunities to hear from mothers on low income by participating as a focus

group facilitator in three different cities. The larger research project was conducted in five major municipalities across Canada and included conducting focus groups with parents on low income with children under twelve, female and male youth on low income aged thirteen to eighteen, and recreation service providers. The goal was to gather non-participant viewpoints about how to improve municipal recreation programs and policies.

My research questions were as follows:

1. Do mothers on low income see any benefits for their children participating in municipal recreation activities?
2. What are the barriers facing mothers on low income attempting to involve their children in recreation programs and services?
3. What is their assessment of the leisure access policy in their community?

My thesis research focused on the data from the mothers on low income (total n=14) in Richmond, BC; Winnipeg, Manitoba; and the York Region in Ontario who represented a number of different ethnicities. While four fathers participated in the CPRA project, I decided to focus on the mother's views because lone parent families headed by women represent the largest family type living below the poverty line in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2001).

The feminization of poverty

Single mothers, immigrant women, disabled women, Aboriginal women, older women and the working poor are those most affected by poverty in Canada (Morris, 2002; NAPO, 2003). Currently fifty six percent of families with children headed by single mothers are poor, an increase from approximately 50 % since 1984 (Townson, 2000; Morris, 2002). While there is considerable media and government policy attention paid towards child poverty, we have to remember

that the children are poor because their parents are poor (Townson, 2000; CRIAW, 2005; 2005 Report Card).

In the focus group that I did in Winnipeg, all of the mothers on low income self-identified their ethnicity as Aboriginal. McCracken (2004) reported that 42.7% of Aboriginal women (excluding those on reserves) lived in poverty compared to 35.1 % of Aboriginal men. A lack of money for childcare and racism makes it nearly impossible for Aboriginal women to find work that pays them a living wage (McCracken, 2004). Women of color (37 %) and immigrant women (32%) also live below the poverty line in Canada, indicating that intersections of race and gender are important to consider when analyzing issues around social class.

Liberal social policies were practiced in Canada prior to the 1990's, but during the 1990's the North American Free Trade Agreement and neo-liberal economic and social policies associated with globalization had harmful consequences on poor people, especially women and children. During this time there was an increase in low-paying jobs in the service sector and cutbacks in social housing, social assistance, and health care and there was a shift towards privatization of some government services (Day & Brodsky, 2000; Morris, 2002).

Not only have globalization trends meant that fewer jobs are available to poor and working-class people, but Canada's welfare state has also been affected (Reid, 2004, p. 2).

Women and their families who live in poverty are often socially excluded from participating in many aspects of civic life because they are separated from decision making activities in their community due to social, cultural, and material

factors (Raphael, 2001; Reid, 2004). Poverty also carries with it a sense of powerlessness, exclusion, and stigma (Evans, 1998, p. 51).

Frisby and Hoeber (2002) and Reid (2004) have shown how women on low income have been excluded from participating in community recreation programs due to costs, leisure access policies that are embarrassing to apply for, and a lack of childcare and transportation. This exclusion from participating in community life for the women on low income has meant that they have been isolated from civic society (Donnelly & Coakley 2002; Reid, 2004). Their work, however, did not address the related question of how women on low income view the role of public recreation in their children's lives.

Recreation and new public management

During the past several years recreation departments have been faced with financial constraints that have created pressures to adopt a more business like approach, known as new public management (Harvey, 2001; Thibault, Kikulis, & Frisby, 2004). This approach is closely tied to the rise of neo-liberalism, the development of public-private partnerships, and the privatization of public services (Harvey, 2001; Arai & Reid, 2003; Thibault et al., 2004).

The emphasis on revenue generation has become common place for municipal recreation departments and the bottom line is now the business of recreation, rather than the delivery of recreation services to all citizens in the community (Thibault, Frisby & Kikulis, 1999; Harvey, 2001; Thibault et al., 2004). The pressure to provide more with reduced budgets has come from a

combination of factors such as downloading from other levels of government, increased demand for services, and resistance to increased taxes.

These pressures include increased public demand for services with no concomitant tax increases, requirements for transparent and accountable tax-based spending, the offloading of responsibilities to local governments by other levels of government, and declining fiscal, human and infrastructure resources (Frisby, Thibault & Kikulis, 2004, p. 109).

With this new public management approach, questions arise as to whether all citizens can become involved in public recreation in meaningful ways (Harvey, 2001; Frisby et al., 2004).

Leisure access policies and access to recreation

It is well known that participating in physical recreation and other recreation programs contributes to a social, physical, and psychological health (Reid & Dyck, 2000; Harvey, 2001; Jackson, Roberts, & Harman, 2001). Research also indicates that women on low income see recreation as being an important factor in belonging to a community and maintaining good health for themselves and their children (Harvey, 2001; Frisby & Hoeber, 2002; Reid et al., 2002; Reid, 2004). However, there has been limited research examining the intersections of race, gender, and class for women on low income and their views on the participation of their children in community recreation (Harvey, 2001; Paraschak & Tirone, 2003). The recreation and sport agenda has been controlled by white, heterosexual, middle class males and has marginalized women of colour, Aboriginal women, women on low income, women with disabilities and older women (Donnelly & Harvey, 1996; Paraschak & Tirone, 2003). The concept of recreation and leisure is viewed differently within different ethnic cultures, as was reported in one research

project on the importance of family and extended family for Indo Canadian Women during their leisure time (Tirone & Shaw, 1997). It is also important to note that within groups there are many intersections and one should not assume sameness with the 'low income' label:

Traditional categories are used initially to name previously unstudied groups at various points of intersection, but the researcher is equally interested in revealing – and indeed cannot avoid – the range of diversity and difference *within* the group (McCall, 2005, p. 1782).

Historically, the Canadian municipal recreation profession has viewed its role as providing community recreation programming and facilities for the enjoyment of all citizens in a community (Harvey, 2001; Smale & Reid, 2002; Thibault, et al., 2004). The recreation field justifies itself by pointing to the health, social, and economic benefits gained through participation in recreation (Canadian Parks and Recreation Association, 1997). On the surface, recreation departments contend that their role is to be inclusive of all members of the community and that no citizen is to be denied access. However, in practice, those on low income rarely partake or benefit from municipal recreation programs because "those who participate in community recreation programs are largely either middle class or upper middle class (Frisby, Crawford & Dorer; 1997; Harvey, 2001). This has been linked to the shift from a welfare model to a market driven model that has accompanied the rise of neo-liberalism where municipalities now routinely charge for programs to raise revenues (Aria & Reid, 2003).

One strategy that has been adopted in many municipalities to encourage participation for those on low income is the development of a leisure access

policy that usually involves subsidized fees, fee waivers, a voucher program or some other method to reduce the costs incurred. However, in order to qualify for the leisure access policy, individuals usually must first prove that they are poor by producing tax or social assistance information. Unfortunately, such policies have proven to be ineffective and in many cases those living in poverty are unaware that such leisure access policies (Frisby et al., 1997; Frisby, Alexander, Taylor, Tirone, Watson, Harvey & Laplante, 2005). For those who have attempted to qualify, the process has proven to be both embarrassing and humiliating (Reid et al., 2002; Reid, 2004; Frisby et al., 2005). As a result, there have been calls for participatory leisure access policy development based on the participation of those that these policies are designed to serve.

Citizen participation in public policy development

The standard method of public consultation for municipal parks and recreation departments has been and continues to be an approach where government controls the agenda and the list of invitees. Information flows in one direction and the process of getting input from the public is done on a sporadic basis with no real plan in place (Phillips & Orsini, 2002; Sam, 2003).

From my personal experience as a manager and consultant, I have seen a few attempts by municipal parks and recreation departments to develop meaningful ways to engage citizens in a more effective manner through participatory public policy development. However, for the most part women on low income have not been consulted regarding their specific needs as they have

simply been ignored in the process (Reid et al., 2002; Frisby et al., 2005). Yet, there is some evidence that mothers on low income would like to be involved in policy development to improve access to municipal recreation programs for themselves and their families (Frisby et al., 2005). Some of the literature suggests that citizen involvement is important because it builds stronger communities and is therefore important to citizenship (Arai & Pedlar, 1997; Phillips & Orsini, 2002; Arai & Reid, 2003).

In order for leisure access policies to be effective, some argue that women on low income and their families have to be part of the policy development process (Arai & Reid, 2003; Paraschak & Tirone, 2003). Yet, even when marginalized citizens have input into policy development, there is no guarantee that such input will be considered by bureaucrats and politicians who have final decision making authority (Anderson, 2000). Paraschak and Tirone (2003) point out that because of the dominant white, male, heterosexual and able bodied culture that has historically dominated sport and recreation participation and policy, Aboriginal and immigrant women are the least likely to be heard or consulted when policy is being formulated. They and others argue for a community development as a strategy for citizen engagement that will result in more effective policies, programs and practices (Donnelly & Coakley, 2002; Frisby & Millar, 2002; Arai & Reid, 2003). While this study does not engage women in low income in policy development per se, it does consider their ideas for policy reform and this led to recommendations that will be shared with the municipal recreation departments who participated in the CPRA project.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In this literature review, I will further develop a number of areas that frame my research. First, I will briefly consider the effects of the shift to a global economy and the implications that this has for women living in poverty in Canada. I will then examine how community recreation programs can be important sites for citizen involvement and how it can promote inclusion for women on low income and their families. The move to a more business like approach in local government (known as new public management or NPM) is examined next because it shapes the context where community recreation programs are located. The final section considers the issue of engaging the public in the formation of public policy and the relevance of this for community recreation departments that have mandates to provide services for all citizens.

Globalization and the feminization of poverty

Poverty in Canada has been affected by the global economy and women in particular have been affected by the last two decades of globalization because social programs have been downsized or contracted out (Day & Brodsky, 2000).

Isabella Bakker from York University explains that:

The new global economy, we have been told, requires increased international competition between countries for investment and production, a greater emphasis on trade, and less government spending and regulation of the economy....Its presentation as a universal force

makes restructuring appear apolitical and, in conjunction with this, gender, race, and class neutral (cited in Day & Brodsky, 2000, p. 3).

Even though Canada is a wealthy country, it is now part of this shift towards globalization and citizens are being affected by many neo-liberal policies. We have seen cuts to social programs and services, reduced social assistance benefits, and tightened eligibility rules for social assistance and unemployment insurance (Morris, 2002). The federal government is restructuring and downloaded many of its social programs to the provinces and "no longer provides 50% of the real cost to provinces for welfare, legal aid for family and noncriminal matters and designated social services" (Day & Brodsky, 2000, p. 4). Morris (2000) provides a historical perspective on this when she writes that:

Globalization exerts a pressure on the Canadian government to be competitive. In the 1960s and 70s there seemed to be an equal emphasis on social and cultural development as there was on economic development. In the 1980s a view gained a hold of the economy as the cure for all ills and of globalization as some kind of all-powerful god, unstoppable, unchangeable, the giver of all good things (p. 3).

Neo-liberalism and its emphasis on fiscal responsibility has affected policies in areas such as health care, the environment, labour and human rights thus affecting the lives of Canadians and particularly women (Morris, 2000; Anderson, 2000; Phillips & Orsini, 2002). Through globalization countries have been forced to lower corporate taxes which also affect social programs:

Governments are then forced to reduce corporate taxes to make their countries and cities more competitive (to invite foreign investment), while taking necessary funds away from social programs. Having spent their money on corporations, governments can no longer afford to pay for essential services such as health and child care. Private for-profit companies are then allowed to come in as service providers (CRIAW 2005, p. 9).

Essential services which in the past had been provided for by the government are now being managed by other not-for-profit or commercial sector organizations and insufficient funds are provided for such basic needs such as childcare.

Again, women (particularly marginalized women) are much more adversely affected by these government actions than are men, in part because women are forced to shoulder greater responsibility for child rearing and because women occupy more precarious jobs. Women's high vulnerability to poverty also means that they rely on the social safety net more than men (CRIAW, 2005, p. 9).

In Canada women are more likely than men to be poor and as women age poverty increases (Lee, 2000). Among females, seniors aged 75 and older were the most likely to be poor (35.8 %), followed by young women aged 15 to 24 (32.9 %) (Lee, 2000, p. 27). Most single parent households are headed by women and most of them live below the poverty line, representing 56% of families compared to 24% which are headed by men (Morris, 2002). Furthermore, in many cases, "financial support agreements with the non-custodial parent (usually the father) are either not in place or in arrears" (Morris, 2002, p. 2).

New immigrants in Canada also face poverty partially due to the fact that many cannot find employment or their particular skill sets are not recognized (Lee, 2000). Immigrant women receive a double dose of being disadvantaged compared to immigrant men because they are more likely to be isolated in communities of poor and racialized people (Galabuzi, 2002). Visible minority immigrants are also discriminated against for jobs and other services for a

number of reasons and "it is no historical accident...that skin colour and poverty are related" (Kazemipur & Halli, 2001, p. 222). Kazemipur and Halli (2001) contend that those immigrants who arrived in Canada after the mid 1970's were more likely to be poorer than those prior to the mid 1970's.

Aboriginal women are more likely to be poorer than Aboriginal men due to the fact that women are typically in low paying jobs and "almost half (47%) of Aboriginal persons on reserves have an income of less than \$10,000 per year" (CRIAW, 2005, p. 2). Historically, the Indian Act created many barriers for Aboriginal persons and as Kendall (2001) notes, aboriginal people in Canada experience a very different kind of treatment and do not have the same opportunities as other Canadians.

Oikawa (2002) writes about how people who were moved from their homes to other geographic locations in Canada marginalized people of colour and Aboriginal people from the rest of the population:

The white supremacy of British Columbia and of the nation necessitated the continual creation of pathologized populations of Aboriginal people and people of colour who could be spatially segregated (p. 77).

The recent 2005 Report Card on Child poverty in Canada reports that those children who are Aboriginal, recent immigrants or children of visible minorities are twice as poor as other children. Children's poverty in Canada is worse today than it was in 1989 (2005 Report Card). While child poverty has risen drastically it is important to note that children are poor because their parents are poor, and most of the parents are single mothers (CRIAW, 2005).

Research indicates that children from families on low income are not able to participate in recreation and sport due to lack of money, transportation, and other barriers (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2001).

There is a clear link between women, poverty and poor health. Poor nutrition and a lack of access to adequate health care, housing, nutrition, transportation, childcare, and recreation are major concerns facing women on low income (Frisby & Hoeber, 2002; Reid, 2004). These conditions not only contribute to increased incidences of bio medical diseases, they are also linked to mental health issues like stress, low self esteem, and depression (Wilkinson, 1996; Morris, 2000; Reid, 2004).

The social exclusion of women on low income

According to Evans (1998), it has only been since the 1990's that women's poverty has been in the forefront and that is largely due to activism and advocacy on the part of women's and anti-poverty organizations. Poor women's exclusion involves a lack of participation in societal activities, alienation from decision-making and civic participation, and barriers to employment and material resources (Raphael, 2001).

Women on low income are often seen as a burden and as unproductive in society (Bannerji, 2000). While women on low income and their families face a number of challenges they are also extremely resilient and capable, as demonstrated in WOAW (Women Organizing Activities for Women), where they worked together and with community partners to provide recreation activities for

themselves and hundreds of other low income families (Reid et al., 2002; Reid, 2004).

In "The Five Faces of Oppression", Iris Marion Young (1990) discusses how institutional conditions such as decision making procedures and the division of labour, have created injustices as a result of oppression and domination. One of the concepts she describes is marginalization, where a social group or individuals are excluded from being able to participate in everyday life. By being marginalized, people can become reliant upon service providers who enforce rules to which this group must comply (Young, 1990). What is less clear is what is needed to shift the exclusion of women and their families from "other" and to include them in everyday life.

Parents who are not able to buy their children the right clothes or the right shoes means that the children then are treated as "other" (Lister, 2005). The "othering" of women on low income and their families has a negative implication in that they are no longer treated as citizens of a community, but rather as being different. The stigma of "othering" creates intolerance towards women on low income and increases the social distance between the poor and other social classes (Evans, 1998; Young, 1990). There is a blaming of poor women and their families for their own situations and a prevailing discourse that if they would just work harder they would be able to transcend the cycle of poverty.

Social exclusion focuses on "relational issues, in other words inadequate social participation, lack of social integration and lack of power" (Saloojee, 2003,

p. 2). Saloojee (2003) argues that there is a relationship between social exclusion and citizenship as the:

degree to which individuals from racialized and marginalized communities encounter structural and systemic barriers and are denied or restricted from participating in society (p. 2).

She further illustrates how gender, race and class are linked to social exclusion when she writes that:

in Canadian society, women, racialized individuals and communities, persons with disabilities and First Nations Aboriginal people who enter the labour market, enter the educational system, and seek goods and services (among other things) will face a structure of opportunities that are mediated by their race, gender, disability, etc (Saloojee, 2003, p. 4).

Reid's (2004) feminist action research project with women on low income illustrates how badly they were treated by social service agencies and made to feel that it was their fault for being poor; that they just did not have impetus to become self reliant because they "chose" instead to live off the state. This blaming the victim discourse has been pervasive since the 1980's (Harvey, 2001) and Reid (2004) found that the women sometimes internalized these discourses:

Authorities who controlled the women's lives cast them as reprehensible through stereotyping and surveying them. These exclusion processes led the women to evaluate themselves negatively - they were shameful and dependent clients of public charity (p. 236).

In contrast, Frisby, Reid and Ponc (in press) demonstrated the positive impact that participation in community recreation programs had for women on low income and that involvement gave them a sense of belonging. Their results show how they enjoyed being part of a community of women, participating in physical activities and other recreation program opportunities, and being included

in decision making. While some think that recreation is not a priority in poor women's lives, women involved in WOAW saw many benefits of participation:

They viewed recreation as a means toward improving their health, managing chronic pain, reducing stress, setting a positive example for their children, meeting other women, and connecting with community partners who had access to resources (Reid et al., 2002, p. 2).

In the larger CPRA study, mothers on low income spoke about the value of having their children participate in sports and community recreation programs and how this involvement had played an important part in their children's lives (Frisby et al., 2005).

However, Reid (2004) showed how their limited access to recreation programs prior to becoming involved in WOAW was due to restrictive practices and policies that created a form of institutional exclusion. The women on low income spoke of being stereotyped by public agencies and treated like second class citizens and how this contributed to feelings of shame and unworthiness (Reid, 2004). Their experiences reflect Saloojee's theorizing about social exclusion where.

The concept of social exclusion resonates with many including those who (i) are denied access to the valued goods and services in society because of their race, gender, religion, disability, etc.; (ii) lack adequate resources to be effective, contributing members of society; and (iii) are not recognized as full and equal participants in society (p. 3).

New public management and recreation services

A market driven approach to recreation services means that people have to pay a higher price for these services, making recreation programs inaccessible

for women on low income and their families (Reid et al., 2002; Frisby et al., 2004).

Currently, many local government departments operate from the new public management ideology where revenue generation and efficiency take priority. The ideology of individual and fiscal responsibility undermines the principle of universality in government services, whereby the poor, the sick, and young lone mothers are depicted as the principal authors of their own fate (Reid, et al., 2002, p. 4).

The exclusion that marginalized groups are experiencing is linked to new public management practices in government that have accompanied the rise of the neo-liberal ideology (Frisby et al., 2004).

Prior to the 1990's, recreation services were provided primarily for the social good of local citizens and participating in physical activities and recreation programs was seen as being important for the health of the community (Harvey, 2001; Smale & Reid, 2002). Participation in recreation programs is also seen to be important for children's health, self esteem, sense of self and sense of belonging (Jackson, Roberts, & Herman, 2001). These recreation services were often provided in conjunction with the local minor sport organization and other agencies such as schools and local health units.

The mission of sport and leisure departments in local government is therefore a social one, to provide sport and leisure opportunities to all citizens to improve quality of life (Thibault et al., 2004, p. 2).

However, this shift in fiscal responsibility and restraint started to emerge in the 1990's both at the federal, provincial, and local levels of government. At the federal level of government during the 1990's, there was a focus on debt reduction and streamlining of government in response to prevailing global ideologies that market forces need to be driving national agendas. This has

resulted in less funding to the provinces and municipalities for social services and public spending (Morris, 2000; Smale & Reid, 2002; Thibault et al., 2004). There has also been an emphasis on reducing government bureaucracy and outsourcing many services, which has been passed down to the provincial governments and in turn local governments have been affected. Emphasis has been placed on a more businesslike approach for local governments which in turn has forced recreation departments to put an emphasis on accountability through revenue production (Reid et al., 2002; Smale & Reid, 2002; Frisby et al., 2004). This in turn has led to the privatization of certain public services and more private public partnerships targeting middle and upper income earners (Arai & Reid, 2003).

Rather a business orientation in local government will intensify inequalities by focusing on "target markets" that are cost efficient or revenue generators at the expense of ensuring the provision of services that benefit all citizens (Thibault et al., 2004, p. 7).

Local recreation departments have in many situations lost sight of their mission to provide services for all citizens and have succumbed to the pressure of revenue generation and developing partnerships with commercial businesses:

the ability of local sport and leisure departments to achieve the principle of equal access for everyone to participate, in line with their social mission, is increasingly being compromised (Thibault et al., 2004, p. 17).

As Smale and Reid (2002) explain:

The combination of increased user fees and lower discretionary incomes may now be pricing many citizens out of the municipal recreation service (p. 180).

While tax increases have been non existent or minimal over the last number of years, the citizens are still demanding a high quality of recreation services. This demand for quality services has forced recreation departments to focus on alternate methods of delivering recreation. There has been an increase in the building of a number of recreation facilities such as aquatic centres and ice arenas by private companies who have been given free land by local governments. In turn, these companies also administer and run these facilities for local recreation departments for a profit (Thibault, et al., 2004).

Leisure access policies and citizen participation

One of the methods that recreation departments have undertaken to provide access to women on low income and their families is to develop leisure access policies that usually involve subsidized fees, a voucher program, or some other form of fee reduction. Much of the policy development has been from a top down approach by bureaucrats in the recreation field, usually without input from marginalized citizens who use or are affected by such policies. There is a growing body of research that illustrates how problematic existing leisure access policies are (Frisby et al., 2002; Reid et al., 2002; Donnelly & Coakley, 2002; Sam, 2003; Frisby et al., 2005).

Not only was the system for accessing a subsidy a deterrent for many of the women, but their treatment was a source of humiliation because they had to "ask for charity or beg for reduced fees" (Reid, et al., 2002, p. 3).

These policies are not widely advertised, because recreation departments are worried that citizens will abuse the policy and that the bottom line will be affected

(Frisby et al., 2005). The few who have discovered leisure access policies are disappointed to learn that they only partially cover program fees, and other costs like childcare, equipment, apparel, and transportation prevented them from participating (Frisby & Fenton, 1998). While many recreation departments are involved in community development and claim to work with community groups and citizens:

the extent to which staff actually work with marginalized citizens to develop policies and programs that are relevant to them is suspect. More often, middle-class professionals make assumptions about needs of marginalized populations and offer recreation programs with little or no input from marginalized citizens (Reid et al., 2002, p. 5).

Little has been done on the intersections of class, race and gender in getting meaningful input so that policies are relevant to all groups who wish to participate in recreation programs (Donnelly & Harvey, 1999; Paraschak, 1999; Paraschak & Tirone, 2003). The dominant "Euroamerican" culture (Paraschak, 1999) that has influenced the delivery of recreation and physical activity in North American has hindered the participation of Aboriginal people, people of colour, and immigrants from other parts of the world (Paraschak, 1999; Paraschak & Tirone, 2003). While physical activity and games are important in Aboriginal culture and participation in sport and physical activity are seen as important in the lives of parents and children of color (Paraschak & Tirone, 2003; Frisby et al., 2005,), racism and discrimination are often faced when participating in mainstream activities (Paraschak & Tirone, 2003). For example, immigrants from South Asia view the concept of recreation very differently from those who are non

immigrants (Paraschak & Tirone, 2003). Stereotypes are also prevalent as the following quote demonstrates:

Those studies that are available tend to reproduce broad and sweeping generalizations about "Indian" women and sport, the severe constraints of aspects of "traditional" Indian culture upon their physicality and the "controlling attitude" of the Indian male as if all Indian women had similar religious and cultural backgrounds (Vertinsky, Bath & Naidu, 1996, p. 5).

In the sporting community we have often heard how sport brings together nations, helps to build a national identity, helps bring together people of colour and helps to break down barriers of race and build relationships with all people. But in order to understand issues of racism we cannot approach sport and recreation in such a simplistic way (Jarvie & Reid, 1997). As an example black athletes have been treated as objects and exploited. In the 1968 Mexico Olympic Games there were demonstrations by the black athletes:

For years we have participated in the Olympic Games carrying the USA on our backs with our victories and race relations are worse than ever. We are not trying to lose the Olympics for America, what happens is immaterial. But it is time for the black people of the world to stand up as men and women and refuse to be utilized as performance animals in return for a little dog food (Jarvie & Reid, p. 214).

We cannot look at race in isolation of class and gender and that 'whiteness' is the standard:

the main weight of any explanation of racial inequality, like any other social inequality, must rest on how groups impinge on each other (Jarvie & Reid, 1997, p. 217).

In order for leisure access policies to be effective, women on low income from different racial and ethnic backgrounds must have a role in the decision making process (Harvey, 2001). There has been some success where women on

low income have worked in conjunction with recreation service providers to create more affordable recreation programming and a more inclusive leisure access policy (Frisby & Miller, 2002). Not only must we consider social class, but women of colour and Aboriginal women and their life experiences must form part of the discussions leading towards policy development (Naples, 2003).

Issues surrounding citizen participation in policy development

Over the past few years the general public has demanded involvement in government decisions. Some citizens have insisted on being consulted about policy development and being included in how governments proceed on issues affecting their lives (Arai, 1996; Patten, 2001; Phillips & Orsini, 2002). The literature indicates that governments are increasingly aware of the need to involve citizens in policy debates and other social issues:

Whereas a traditional top-down approach emphasizes control and uniformity, horizontal governance recognizes that governments alone may not have the capacity, knowledge or legitimacy to solve complex public policy problems in a diverse society (Phillips & Orsini, 2002, p. 4).

Deliberative democracy is about ensuring that citizens are heard, that the voices of those who are marginalized due to economic and social inequality are acknowledged, and that their knowledge is valued and used in the development of public policy (Patten, 2001). Hearing from women on low income is important as existing leisure access policies are inadequate and do not meet the needs of them and their families. Mothers on low income in a study done in five large Canadian cities indicated that they would want to be involved in having input into

policy development that affects the delivery of recreation services, but only if meaningful policy change is likely to occur (Frisby et al., 2005).

It has also been suggested that involving citizens in policy development gives them a sense of belonging to a community, thereby decreasing isolation and giving individuals a sense of empowerment:

Not surprisingly then, citizen participation is directly linked to empowerment as a means of promoting healthier individuals and healthier communities (Arai & Pedlar, 1997, p. 170).

The promise of more citizen involvement in public policy development by local politicians often discounts the realities of participatory politics and the need to fully understand the barriers and dynamics of citizen engagement. A number of ideas were involved in getting citizens to participate in public discussions, such as "interactive websites, citizens' juries and panels, visioning and community planning" (Lowndes, Pratchett & Stoker, 2001, p. 445). However it was found that these methods did not necessarily influence the final decision making of the government (Lowndes, et al., 2001).

In the study by Lowndes, Prachett and Stoker (2001) a number of reasons were cited as to why citizens did not involve themselves in citizen engagement, issues such as not having trust in their local government authorities, believing that the officials would not take an interest in their issues, and finally that their input would not be acted upon. Citizens were not aware that they could participate in discussions and did not know how they could become involved and this combined with a lack of response by local government to citizens concerns

created apathy. Their involvement in policy development needs to be seen as important and useful in deliberations for change.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The qualitative approach used to address the research questions involved focus groups of mothers living on low income who had children under the age of twelve, as well a document review of policies and other relevant materials from three municipalities involved in the study. In addition, I recorded my reflections on methods and comments made by the mothers in field notes after each focus group. This chapter contains information about site selections, study participants, document analysis, focus groups, field notes, data analysis, ethics and my role as a researcher.

Site selection

The Research Sub-Committee of the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association identified the five cities that were involved in the larger research project and I conducted focus groups with parents in three of these cities: Richmond, Winnipeg and York Region. The locations for the focus groups took place at community centres identified by municipal recreation staff as being geographic areas where there was a significant population of residents living on low income.

Selection of study participants

After receiving ethical approval from UBC and agency approval for the larger Canadian Parks and Recreation Association study, parents on low income from different ethnic backgrounds were recruited by recreation department staff

by way of posters. The parents self identified as living on low income and pseudonyms were used to identify the mothers while maintaining confidentiality and anonymity. Free childcare was available for the parents if needed. The parents were given a letter inviting them to participate, information about the research, and a consent form to sign (Appendix D).

There were a total of seventeen parents on low income who participated in the focus groups. I chose to focus my data on the mothers because they are much more likely to live in poverty in Canada (NAPO, 2003) and because only the Winnipeg focus group had fathers (n=4) in attendance. A total of three mothers in Richmond, four mothers in York Region and seven mothers in Winnipeg participated in the focus groups. Their self-identified ethnicities were Caucasian, Iranian, Pakistan, Jewish, Black and Aboriginal and this information was obtained through a short survey given out at the end of each focus group. All of the mothers in Winnipeg who identified as Aboriginal also identified as Métis, Ojibwa and Native American.

The parents were recruited by staff from Richmond Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services, Winnipeg Department of Community Development and Recreation, and York region Family and Children's Services department. In Richmond, the agency recruited mothers on low income by placing recruitment posters in social housing complexes and in schools. In Winnipeg, the agency recruited mothers on low income from a community centre located in a neighbourhood with a high population of Aboriginal residents. In the York region, the agency staff, recruited parents on low income by telephone and by

recruitment posters. The mothers contacted the agency to indicate their interest in participating in the focus groups.

Selection criteria for the mothers was as follows: that they self identified as living on low income, that they and their family had not participated recently in registered recreation programs offered through municipal recreation centres, that they spoke English, and that they would voluntarily sign a consent form (Appendix D).

Document analysis

For background information I reviewed current leisure access policies for Richmond, Winnipeg and the York region, provided to me by recreation staff. Program brochures from Winnipeg and Richmond Hill were reviewed for information on Leisure Access Policies. Statistics Canada census information was used to analyze the demographics of each city.

Budget information was reviewed that was provided by recreation staff as well budget information was retrieved from the York regional web site for the PLAY program. In addition the Winnipeg Community Services web site was viewed to obtain the mission statement for the Community Development Department.

Probably the greatest strength of content analysis is that it is unobtrusive and nonreactive. The researcher determines where the greatest emphasis lies after the data have been gathered (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 117).

However, there is also some caution needed with content analyses because one is not able to determine the reasoning behind the content and such documents

do not necessarily provide all the information about the practice (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Focus groups

Focus groups have traditionally been used for market research; however, in the last number of years this method has been seen to be very useful in the social sciences. At the start of each focus group, I introduced the overall project and spoke about who was involved. I explained that I wanted their viewpoints and thoughts regarding municipal recreation and that a final report would be prepared for the three departments involved in my portion of the larger Canadian Parks and Recreation Association study.

It was important to make certain that I listened carefully to the mothers and their different experiences while ensuring that no individuals dominated the discussion (Myers, 1998). The focus groups provided a setting where the mothers were able to expand and build on each other's thoughts and experiences, but there was also room for discussion about any disagreements (Myers, 1998; Devault, 1999; Smithson, 2000). Overall, the mothers appeared to be comfortable in expressing their thoughts amongst others who understood their issues (Smithson, 2000).

The questions for the focus group (see Appendix A) were predetermined by the Research Sub-Committee responsible for the larger CPRA study. I had some input into the questions but the committee had the final say. The questions

were semi-structured to create a focus while allowing for natural interaction among the mothers.

I was able to use a number of probes to elicit further information that allowed for a number of different responses rather than one word answers (Puchta & Potter, 1999). My experience in the municipal recreation field allowed me to ask very detailed probing questions with regard to program offerings and leisure access policies. As well my experience in facilitation of focus groups in my consulting business allowed me to use my listening skills to elicit a number of rich responses from the mothers. It was also interesting to note that while there was a sequence of questions the mothers often chose to follow their own agenda and it was important for me to allow this to occur:

Focus groups are considered as a relatively egalitarian method...as by the sheer number of participants, the power of the researcher is reduced (Puchta & Potter, 1999, p. 316).

My colleague who was also one of the research assistants involved in the larger study, was responsible for tape recording all the focus groups. He kept a speakers list and a list of what each mother said at the beginning of her turn, so that when transcribing the tapes I was able to identify each mother. The tape recording provided a verbatim discussion by the mothers. At the conclusion of the focus groups the mothers completed a survey that identified some demographic information about themselves. A copy of the survey is attached in Appendix B.

Field notes

At the conclusion of each focus group I recorded my observations in a detailed manner. I focused on my reflections with my fellow research assistant which became useful as a tool to analyze issues of my own power in facilitating the focus group as well as my own feelings of being in a privileged position (Ristock & Pennel, 1996). I also recorded my preliminary analytical thoughts about the comments made in the focus groups in the field notes.

Data analysis

"The data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data" (Marshall & Rossman, 1998, p111). All data from the focus groups was transcribed into a word processing file and analyzed using the qualitative data analysis program *Atlas.ti*.

An effective data management system potentially encourages researcher to produce analysis which is explicit, systematic and transparent (Lee & Esterhuizen, 2000, p. 234).

A codebook was developed with key themes relating to the different perspectives the mothers had with respect to their childrens' participation in municipal recreation programs, barriers they faced to participation, and leisure access policies. The themes and subthemes are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1
Major themes for coding

<p>Importance of participation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health • Sense of belonging • Affordability • Sense of self esteem • Importance of physical activity <p>Leisure access policies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proof of poverty • Process • Limited opportunities • Lack of input • Lack of communication • What mothers want 	<p>Barriers to participation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Material exclusion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Money ○ Transportation ○ Location • Cultural exclusion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Safety/trust ○ Isolation ○ Racism ○ Language ○ "Poor bashing" ○ Stereotyping • Institutional exclusion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Leisure access policies ○ Communication ○ Limited offerings
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Quotations from the transcribed documents were coded according to the themes. The information was displayed in an organized way and this allowed me to organize my findings and conclusions in the form of summaries and synopses (Lee & Esterhuizen, 2000),

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was received from the UBC Ethics Committee (Appendix C). Informed consent was also received from all three municipalities that participated in the study. Informed consent forms were prepared and distributed to the mothers on low income requesting their participation in the study. The forms fully described the study, its goals and methodology. I also answered any further questions the mothers had prior to the start of the focus groups. The mothers were asked to sign the consent forms to conduct the focus groups.

Confidentiality and anonymity was ensured to protect participant privacy. Anonymity will be maintained by using pseudonyms when writing my thesis.

How I situated myself as a researcher

The insider/outsider binary is of interest in how I placed myself in this research. I struggled with the issue of being middle class, white, former senior bureaucrat in municipal recreation, lesbian, and conducting research about mothers on low income, factors which placed me as an outsider (Ristock & Pennel, 1996).

What we want to avoid is feeling satisfied that we have adequately located ourselves when we have merely listed the social and identity groups to which we belong (Ristock & Pennel, p. 67).

It was important that I understood my role as researcher of mothers living on low income of different ethnicities and that I could not speak for the mothers in the study, but rather speak out for the mothers, voicing their experiences in accessing community recreation programs and their thoughts on leisure access policies (Acker, 2001).

I needed to be aware of issues of power and that self-reflexivity was essential to my data analysis and conclusions. I needed to be careful not to be merely satisfied that I had reported on where I located myself, and that this needed not to be questioned any further (Hill Collins, 1999; Acker, 2001). As an outsider, it was important that I acknowledged that I come from a privileged position, thus having no experience of their lives and that my analysis was

shaped by my social location as a researcher (Ristock & Pennell, 1996; Acker, 2001).

As an outsider I may have many different insights into the lives of mothers on low income, which because of the oppression of poor women may be more obscured for them. I believe that my position of having been a senior bureaucrat in the municipal parks and recreation field provided me with some insider information that normally would not be available to the mothers in the study. As a lesbian, I may have been either an outsider or an insider depending on the sexual orientation of the group of mothers, which because of the oppression of homophobia was not known.

The insider/outsider binary is by no means clear and indeed at times both insider and outsider could have been operating. It would be beneficial and useful to move from a dualistic perspective to a more nuanced one in which the researcher's position is more fluid and ambiguous. So the question for me in doing qualitative research is: are the findings more valid when done by an insider than an outsider, or at times was I somewhere in between and saw myself sometimes as an "outsider within"? Patricia Hill Collins (1999) suggested that moving from a dualistic perspective, or either an outsider or an insider to a more fluid position as the "outsider within". In her article "Learning from the Outsider Within", she explained:

Either/or dualistic thinking is so pervasive that it suppresses other alternatives. As Dill points out, "the choice between identifying as black or female is a product of the patriarchal strategy of divide-and-conquer and the continued importance of class, patriarchal, and racial divisions, perpetuates such choices both within our consciousness and within the realities of our daily lives." (Hill Collins, 1999, p. 162).

I did my utmost to ensure that I wrote with integrity at the same time realizing that I might not always be able to present completely what they had said. I noticed that at the conclusion of each focus group I experienced many emotions brought up by the fact that I was middle class and in a very privileged position. Many times I felt guilty when conducting the research because I had no power to ensure that the municipal recreation departments would act on the recommendations provided by the women. This coincides with the following comment by England (1994):

Reflexivity *can* make us more aware of asymmetrical or exploitative relationships, but it cannot remove them (p. 86).

In the next chapter, the results from this study are discussed.

Chapter 4

Findings & Discussion

This chapter highlights the voices of the mothers on low income regarding their insights and views on existing municipal recreation programs and leisure access policies (also known as fee subsidy or waiver policies). The mothers spoke about how they viewed the participation of their children in recreation programs and how that affected their children's lives. In the first part of the chapter I will contextualize the study further by providing information about the three research sites and the mothers who participated in the focus groups. In the second section, I will analyze issues associated with the leisure access policies and in the final section focus group data will be presented in relation to the themes and issues that the mothers raised. Pseudonyms were used for all the mothers on low income to maintain confidentiality and anonymity.

Contextualizing the Research Sites

The three large cities where my research took place were Richmond, British Columbia, Winnipeg, Manitoba and the York region in Ontario. These cities were chosen by the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association research sub-committee because of their geographic regions and the diversity in population as described below. Information will be provided for the recreation departments along with demographic data for each city based on the 2001 Census data.

Richmond

As revealed in Table 2, there is a significant visible minority population in Richmond, with the largest minority population being of Chinese heritage. Richmond had a higher visible minority population of 58.6%, than the Greater Vancouver Regional District average with 36.5% (Statistics Canada, 2001). There was ethnic diversity represented with the mothers in the focus group (see Table 6), however none of the mothers identified as Chinese suggesting that future research is required.

Table: 2
Richmond (Statistics Canada, 2001)

City Population 164,345			
Aboriginal population	1,165		
Visible minority population	96,385 (58.6%)		
Chinese	64,270 (39.1%)	Arab	875
South Asian	12,120 (7.4%)	West Asian	1,155
Black	1,470	Korean	900
Filipino	7,190 (4.4%)	Japanese	3,615 (2.2%)
Latin American	1,165	Other	355
South East Asian	12,120 (7.4%)	Multiple visible minorities	3,025 (1.8%)
All others	67,010 (40.8%)		

The total number of families was 46,015 and of those, 5,345 (11%) were headed by female lone parents. The reported number of families living below the poverty line was 23.9% (Statistics Canada, 2001). Federally, single parent mothers are the poorest family type in Canada and they account for more than 90% of poor single parent families (National Council of Welfare, 2004).

The Richmond Parks, Recreation and Cultural department (from now on referred to as the recreation department) had an annual operating budget in 2004 of \$16,474,288 and revenues of \$5,967,733 (Richmond City web site). The recreation facilities included two indoor pools, two outdoor pools, eight ice rinks, and eight community centres. In the document review, there was no available data on the number of participants in registered programs; however there is a general rule of thumb used by practitioners is that approximately 10% of the populations are involved in municipal recreation programs.

There is a small division of three staff members within the recreation department who are responsible for special needs and accessibility and this division was also responsible for the administration of the fee subsidy policy. For a mother on low income to obtain a fee subsidy, Statistics Canada information is used in determining eligibility for a fee reduction. Families had to be Richmond residents and once staff had determined that families were qualified via an income test (which was based on the Canada Low Income Cut-offs provided by Statistics Canada and commonly known as poverty lines), the family or persons were eligible for one program per person or one family activity for each of the four program seasons. I wondered what parents would think of the income test, as a more common practice in other municipalities is to require a letter requesting subsidy. With this latter policy, individuals are not required to provide personal financial information to recreation staff.

Once the family was approved, a credit note is issued based on the difference between what the individual would pay and the cost of the program.

The credit note identified the program, the cost of the program, the amount that would normally be paid, and the subsidy amount. There was then a three month waiting period before a family could obtain another subsidy. This policy that required mothers to apply four times a year is not an uncommon practice in the municipal recreation field and the implication is that they have to keep proving their poverty so that their children will have the opportunity to participate (Evans, 1998; Frisby, 2005; Reid, 2004).

Winnipeg

The goal for the focus group in Winnipeg was to recruit mothers on low income of Aboriginal descent income as Winnipeg has the largest population of Aboriginal persons in Canada (Winnipeg United Way, 2004). The Aboriginal population (Table 3) was 9.6%. The total number of Winnipeg families was 167,230 and the number of female lone parents was 25,515 (15.3%) (Statistics Canada, 2001). Aboriginal people have a larger proportion of female led lone parent families, 73% of Aboriginal single mothers are poor compared to 45% of non-aboriginal single mothers (Blackstock, Clarke, Cullen & Formsma, 2004). The poverty rate for Winnipeg was reported at 28.4% (Statistics Canada, 2001), which was the highest of the three research sites.

Table 3
Winnipeg (Statistics Canada, 2001)

City Population	619,544		
Aboriginal population	59,300(9.6%)		
Visible minority population	82,565(13.3%)		
Chinese	10,890 (1.8%)	Arab	1,065
South Asian	12,165 (2%)	West Asian	815
Black	11,275 (1.8%)	Korean	945
Filipino	29,995 (4.8%)	Japanese	1,560
Latin American	4,500	Other	1,960
South East Asian	5,030	Multiple visible minorities	2,005
All others	528,530 (85%)		

The Winnipeg Community Development and Recreation Services Department (from now on referred to as the recreation department) operated 10 Leisure Centres, 16 indoor ice arenas, and 13 indoor pools and these facilities were maintained and programmed by paid staff. In addition the department had 70 community centres which were operated by volunteer boards and volunteer staff. The community centres were maintained by the city but all programming was done by volunteers, which is not a common practice in municipal recreation. The budget for the Department was \$40,890,671 and the revenue was \$10,969,875 (Winnipeg 2004 Budget document).

Within the Community Development and Recreation Services Department there were six divisions including:

- Community Development and Recreation and Initiative Branch, (non registered free programs);
- Recreation Services and Special Events Branch, (revenue producing registered programs);
- Community Centres/Neighbourhood Facilities Development Branch;
- Aquatics Branch;
- Safety Risk Management Branch;
- Operational Services Branch.

The Community Development and Recreation and Initiative Branch provided:

A set of public services that contribute to neighborhood development and sustainability, including capacity-building of our citizenry through the provision of recreation and leisure services, with a particular focus on Winnipeg's high need populations (Community Services Department web site, 2005).

A program known as Free Play was available for children aged six to twelve, which provided recreation activities based on drop in and no registration

was required. The activities included arts and crafts, sports, cooperative games, board games, drama, skits, cooking, special events and field trips.

The fact that the Community Development and Recreation Services Department had a division with paid staff and programming that was aimed at families on low income was unique and to my knowledge is not done in any other large metropolitan city in Canada. I found this to be a progressive approach in delivering recreation programs and services to families on low income as many other municipal recreation departments in Canada are following a more business like model because they are more concerned with the bottom line in their budgets (Thibault et al., 1999).

The mothers on low income could also register for recreation programs offered by the Recreation Services and Special Events Branch and the Aquatics Branch that had fees attached by applying through the fee subsidy/waiver policy. In my document review, the fee subsidy/waiver policy was advertised in the Leisure Guide that is a brochure advertising recreation programs. It appeared in a small paragraph under the heading "economically disadvantaged individuals", that might suggest not much importance was placed on this policy due to the Free Play program that was aimed specifically at families on low income.

The procedures for the fee subsidy/fee waiver policy required that a letter be written by the applicant indicating the reason for the request and what programs they wanted to register in. The policy also asked if the person could afford to contribute to offsetting the cost of the program and indicated that the program was available on a first come basis. The fee subsidy/waiver policy was

available for all registered recreation program that came under the auspices of the Community Services Department.

This fee subsidy/waiver policy was different from the one in Richmond where applicants were required to have an income test to determine eligibility. Typically fee subsidies require that applicants pay a portion of the registration cost, even though it might be a minimal amount.

Regional Municipality of York

The region is comprised of nine municipalities and each municipality has its own government. The mothers who participated in the focus groups lived in Markham and Richmond Hill. The visible minority population in Markham (Table 4) was 55.4% that is considerably higher than the average for the region at 29.7% (Statistics Canada, 2001). In Richmond Hill, (Table 5) the visible minority population is 40.3% and this too was higher than the average for the region.

Table 4
Markham (Statistics Canada, 2001)

City Population		208,615	
Aboriginal population	290		
Visible minority population	115,485 (55.4%)		
Chinese	62,355 (30%)	Arab	1,660
South Asian	26,360 (12.7%)	West Asian	2,305 (1.1%)
Black	7,860 (3.8%)	Korean	2,265 (1.1%)
Filipino	5,265 (2.5%)	Japanese	670
Latin American	1,055	Other	2,725 (1.3%)
South East Asian	955	Multiple visible minorities	2,005
All others	92,465 (44%)		

Table 5
Richmond Hill (Statistics Canada, 2001)

City Population		132,030	
Aboriginal population	290		
Visible minority population	53,185 (40.3%)		
Chinese	28,760 (21.8%)	Arab	1,935 (1.5%)
South Asian	8,180 (6.2%)	West Asian	4,420 (3.3%)
Black	2,650 (2%)	Korean	1,510 (1.2%)
Filipino	1,580 (1.2%)	Japanese	430
Latin American	735	Other	1,025
South East Asian	895	Multiple visible minorities	1,065
All others	78,420 (59.4%)		

The total number of families in Markham was 58,555 while the number of female lone parent families was 5,400 (9.2%). For Richmond Hill there were 36,895 families with 3,530 (9.6%) female lone parent families (Statistics Canada, 2001). The poverty rate for Markham and Richmond Hill respectively was 14.6% and 17.5% (Statistics Canada, 2001). While the poverty rates in these areas were lower than in the other two research sites, it was still significant to do the research here, because it was important to show that no matter where mothers on low income lived, they faced very similar issues in accessing municipal recreation programs for their children.

The Community Services and Housing department of the regional government had a division known as Family and Children Services which in 2004 introduced a program known as PLAY (Positive Leisure Activities for Youth),

where children of families on low income could register for recreation programs free of charge. The PLAY program was available for children aged four to twelve of parents who were receiving social assistance, social housing, or income child care fee assistance. Each child was allowed up to \$90 to participate in one recreation program each session in any of the nine municipalities' recreation departments within the region. The budget in 2004 for PLAY was \$470,000 and the number of participants was 2100 (York Region web site).

What was so unique about this program was that mothers on low income did not have to be subjected to a screening process to determine whether they were eligible. In addition this program was available to any resident who lived in one of the nine municipalities. The mothers who were on the types of assistance listed above were contacted personally to inform them of the program, so that there was no reason for them not to know about it. In addition to the personal contact, any mailings from Family and Children Services included information about PLAY. The guidelines and rules were made clear from the onset to the mothers on low income. This program was innovative and progressive and much more effective than most approaches currently utilized by municipal recreation departments in Canada.

One drawback of the program was that it was only available to those mothers that were on some kind of social assistance, so that other mothers who were not on social assistance were not eligible for the ninety dollars. While the ninety dollars was provided it was unclear as to how far this money would go.

In my document review, Markham municipal recreation department advertised a fee assistance program in addition to PLAY (provided by the York Region) that allowed for twenty five, fifty or seventy five percent reduction for each person in a family for one recreation program per session (Markham municipal recreation web site). There was no rationale provided for these particular percentages and how they were determined. This approach is in keeping with the general practice of fee subsidies in many Canadian municipal recreation departments and does not show any innovation. Richmond Hill had one small paragraph that referred to assisting residents who were economically disadvantaged, but no information as to who to contact or what kind of assistance was available (Richmond Hill Leisure Guide).

While Richmond Hill and Markham provided little information on fee subsidies, the York Region PLAY policy allowed residents in these cities to register for recreation programs that meant that the regional government took responsibility for ensuring access to recreation programs. However, it might also suggest that Markham and Richmond Hill do not feel the need to provide additional policies for low income residents because the poverty issue is taken care of through the regional government and PLAY.

The next section describes the demographic characteristics of the mothers on low income who participated in the focus groups.

Study participants

There were three mothers who participated in the Richmond focus group, and the demographic information collected on the short survey appears in Table

6. While we did not specifically ask a question about whether the mothers were lone parents, I was able to determine from the transcripts that two of the three mothers identified as single mothers. The pseudonyms assigned to the mothers to maintain confidentiality were Namra, Sheila, and Devorah.

In Winnipeg there were seven mothers on low income of Aboriginal descent who participated in the focus group. The pseudonyms assigned to the mothers were Pat, Mary, Judy, Sasha, Rose, Susan, and Rebecca as all of them had Western sounding names. Two of the mothers indicated that although Cree was also spoken, English was the main language spoken at home. Ignace (1998) noted that the Aboriginal community lost their native languages in the late nineteenth century due to the Church (Protestant and Catholic) and the State who saw the need to assimilate and "civilize" the Aboriginal people.

There were four mothers on low income who participated in the York region focus group. The diversity of ethnicity was reflected with the mothers, as they self-identified as Black, Iranian, Pakistan and White. The pseudonyms assigned to the mothers were Aisha, Yasmin, Helen and Liz. Two of the mothers identified as single mothers in the focus group, one mother identified as having a husband, and the fourth mother did not identify her marital status.

Table 6
Demographic Characteristics of mothers and their children

	Children Age & sex	Primary Language Spoken at Home	Other Languages Spoken at Home	Ethnic Background
Namra Richmond	10 year old female 8 year old male	English & French	Farsi	Persian
Devorah Richmond	18 year old male 15 year old male 8 year old female	English	Hebrew	Jewish
Sheila Richmond	10 year old female 5 year old male	English	N/A	White
Rose Winnipeg	7 year old male	English	N/A	Ojibway
Patricia Winnipeg	3 year old female	English	N/A	Aboriginal
Sasha Winnipeg	6 year old female	English	N/A	First Nations
Rebecca Winnipeg	9 year old male >1 year old male	English	N/A	First Nation/ Aboriginal
Susan Winnipeg	11 year old male 10 year old male 8 year old male 7 year old male	English	N/A	Metis
Mary Winnipeg	12 year old female	English	Cree	Aboriginal
Judy Winnipeg	13 year old male 9 year old male	English	Cree	Native American
Liz York Region	5 year old male 7 year old male	English	Spanish	White
Helen York Region	17 year old male 10 year old male 3 year old male	English	Yes, but not identified	Black
Zarrin York Region	13 year old female 9 year old female	Farsi	N/A	Iranian
Aisha York Region	15 year old male 11 year old female	Urdu & English	N/A	Pakistani

Focus Group Findings

The following section deals with the findings from the data of the focus groups as it related to each research question. The first research question was:

Do mothers on low income see any benefits for their children participating in municipal recreation programs?

A number of themes were identified that related to this question including: affordable recreation, benefits of participation, physical health and sense of belonging, well being and self esteem.

Affordable recreation

While the mothers pointed out that their children did not participate in registered municipal recreation programs because registration costs were prohibitive, they had found free recreation programs in other agencies that were deemed beneficial to their children. Two of the mothers in Winnipeg mentioned that their children were involved in Free Play, the free programs provided by the Winnipeg Development and Recreation and Initiative division, indicating that the mothers did not distinguish or were not aware that those programs were part of the municipal system.

The Boys and Girls Club was one of the not-for-profit agencies that provided free recreation activities and leadership opportunities for children and youth. It was obvious that the mothers saw the value of being involved in a club where the children felt they belonged and were encouraged to contribute and be part of a community (Donnelly & Coakley, 2002).

Judy: I have a boy, thirteen, he has been going to the Boys and Girls Club since he was in grade three and he is in grade eight now. He is still involved with that, same with my other son. He is nine. So they have been involved with the Boys and Girls Club for about six, seven years now, and my oldest one was a junior leader for the Choices club too. So he gets involved in every little thing he could. So when they go on the outings and that they are all free, and they are supervised, like picked up and dropped off, also, so they have been involved in that for a long time now.

It is interesting to note that her sons had consistent long term involvement with the Boys and Girls Club and that they continued to participate. It seemed important that there was supervision provided and that her oldest son was able to develop leadership skills in the Choices club. It was evident in the following quote that Judy saw the Boys and Girls Club reaching out into the community, a concept that is part of a community development model (Frisby & Millar, 2002). When I asked Judy if she ever considered registering her children in municipal recreation programs she replied:

Judy: No, because when programs do come up like that, the Boys and Girls Club let me know and they say my sons should get into it. I can just go ahead and fill out the forms and whatever else has to be done, so yeah, I have been with the Boys and Girls Club a long time.

When she spoke I got the sense that she thought her sons were content with their involvement as she was, and that she saw no reason to switch to municipal recreation programs.

Another mother, Helen spoke about taking her children to the YMCA and that the activities there were affordable. When I asked why she goes there she replied, "It is cheap" and then she went on to say:

Helen: Actually my ten year old and myself and my 17 year old, once a week, twice a week. We always make a habit of going out and pushing some ball, just go and do some physical exercise.

Not only did Helen want her sons to have access to inexpensive recreation programs, but she was also involved with them in doing physical activity because she associated it with being healthy (Hanvey, 2001; Donnelly & Coakley, 2002). This supports other studies that have demonstrated that if recreation programs are accessible and affordable, mothers on low income and their families will want to participate (Reid et al., 2002).

Benefits of participating in recreation programs

Donnelly and Harvey (1996) proposed a model for understanding barriers to active living for those families on low income, one of which was lack of knowledge about active living; however the mothers in this study contradicted their premise. The mothers knowledge about the benefits of physical activity and its role in the development of their children was passionately spoken about in the focus groups. They understood how it could be a benefit for them socially, physically and psychologically thus confirming research in this area (CPRA, 1997; Donnelly & Coakley, 2002; Reid, 2004).

Participation in cultural programs, sport programs and other recreation activities are thought to increase children's self esteem, their health, sense of well being and sense of belonging (CPRA, 1997; Hanvey, 2001; Donnelly & Coakley, 2002). Research shows that children from low income families are the least likely to participate in these types of activities (Jackson, Roberts & Harman, 2001). It is possible to draw conclusions that mothers on low income want the same opportunities for their children as do middle and high income mothers, yet

research indicates that participation of children increases as income increases (Jackson et al., 2001).

There are significant differences in levels of participation between youth from low income families and those from middle and high-income families. Participation in physical and artistic activities is particularly low and irregular for children from low-income families (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2001, p. 7).

One of the mothers mentioned that it was important for her children to be involved in physical activities because they were overweight from sitting around and watching TV:

Aisha: I want them to be participating in these programs my son likes basketball, swimming, they are a little overweight. I really want them to be participating.

It was interesting to note that this issue of children being overweight was a reoccurring theme with two of the mothers, as the following quote from Zarrin reveals:

Zarrin: Yeah, I think it is so helpful for my daughter, cause she is overweight and she doesn't have any activity but her blood cholesterol is high, the doctor just go you know. So, gym or something like these activities, I think it is good for my daughter.

When I asked why she thought it was important for them to be participating, Aisha went on to say:

Aisha: Good for them, and it's more like good for them, rather than sitting at home playing games and physical is good.

A number of mothers spoke about the fact that sitting around watching TV and surfing the computer were leisure activities they worried about and this concern might not be different for middle and upper class parents. As Mary explained:

Mary: Yeah, it is very important, that the kids, they are just getting lazier and lazier, and do nothing, there motivation is not there, and I think they need that, especially around here. They always think there is nothing around, there is nowhere to go. They end up staying at home, playing games, whatever, and I think it is very important for them to get, them involved in physical activity.

Sense of belonging, well being and self esteem

Studies indicate that participating in recreation programs gives one a sense of belonging and being part of the community (Donnelly & Coakley, 2002; Hanvey, 2001; Reid, 2004). The mothers spoke frequently about how important it was for their children to be involved and to belong and be with their friends.

Liz: I think, it helps them to develop into well rounded individuals. Like I think there are all kinds of elements that contribute to a child becoming an adult. I think that it is very important for them to be involved in those kinda, its social too its not just the physical part of it, which has great benefits, but the social part of it as well, it is important.

There is literature to suggest that the benefits of recreation are a civil right:

If participating in structured recreation has a beneficial effect on the physical and psychosocial development of youth, then access to participation should be extended to all children (Canadian Council of Social Development 2001, p. 4).

Barriers to participating in recreation programs

This section deals with data from the focus groups related to the second research question:

What are the barriers facing mothers on low income attempting to involve their children in recreation programs and services?

The barriers are grouped into three themes related to material, cultural and institutional exclusion. Reid (2004) shows how material exclusion (unaffordable housing, childcare, transportation and recreation), cultural exclusion (stereotypes of women on low income, racism, gender roles and lack of social support) and institutional exclusion (restrictive policies and practices by government) are major obstacles for mothers on low income in trying to participate in civil society.

Material exclusion

The mothers spoke repeatedly about costs and transportation as major barriers to their children's participation in recreation programs. One of the mothers spoke about how circumstances had changed for her when she became a single parent and how she no longer could afford to do things for her children that she had done in the past.

Liz: My situation is a little different cause when my husband and I separated, I mean the piano lessons had to stop, the swimming lessons had to stop, everything had to stop because financially, then we had to move, uproot, and move, to affordable housing and so there was a lot of situations there, but my kids were pretty good about it. Like I still try to save, but our vacations are different, they are not like they used to be, and things like that, and so, and you know everytime they see new toys and everything on the market my kids are right on top of it, they want it, and its like sorry.

Janna: So, now they don't participate?

Liz: No, because there is no money.

Liz spoke passionately about becoming a single parent and how this had affected her life and what her life looked like now. She no longer has a middle class life where her children were involved with a number of recreation pursuits. The fact that Liz was no longer able to buy her children the toys they wanted or to go on vacations as perhaps some middle class families would speaks to material and cultural forms of exclusion. Resiliency was also apparent as Liz went on to say that you just never knew what would happen to you and that it was important to keep positive and to keep going.

Another mother spoke about not being able to have her son participate in sports such as hockey and baseball and that he probably would never get the opportunity to participate in these sports:

Julie: Some things are not covered under you know like, in the recreation guide, things like baseball, or hockey or those kind of things, and my little guy, he is almost five, I know he is going to want to do hockey, and you know I don't think that is going to be an option for him. Even for the things like baseball and soccer, like you have to register, and it is like one hundred dollars.

The mothers who had sons spoke about involvement in sports while the mothers with daughters wanted them to participate in programs involving art/drama/music indicating gender differences in involvement. The research indicates that male youth participate more in organized sport than female youth and that female youth participate in the arts and culture in larger numbers than male youth (Jackson et al., 2001).

The lack of money was repeatedly referred to as being one of the major obstacles for the mothers, and they said that after they paid the bills and had food on the table that there was nothing left for their children to be involved in recreation programs.

Rebecca: Swimming, my daughter likes to go swimming, but sometimes I can't take her. Like all the time she wants, when she asks, it costs money to go, like to go swimming, unless I have passes I cannot take her. Other than that, cause it does cost a lot for one adult, to go to the Y. It is hard.

Although Winnipeg parks and recreation had a division that was dedicated specifically to community development and free programs for children and youth, four of the mothers spoke about wanting to register their children in registered

recreation programs that they viewed as offering more variety, but were not accessible due to the high registration cost:

Rebecca: There is a lot of stuff in the leisure guide that she could do, but it does cost a lot of money, and its money that we don't have, but I could still hope (laughter).

The comment made by Rebecca was indicative of what many of the mothers in Winnipeg had to say about programs that were offered through the Leisure Guide. The mothers were very cynical about this brochure because the programs advertised were out of reach for them and their families.

The lack of transportation was a reoccurring theme and the majority of mothers did not have cars and this meant that they had to rely on public transportation. Many had to travel for long periods of time and found it awkward taking their small children on public transit. One of the mothers had this to say when asked about barriers for her children's participation in recreation programs:

Sheila: Well, I mean we can't afford it, or no it is too hard, because I don't have a car and that is my problem. It is like, now we can't afford it and we might not be able to get there.

Rose spoke about the fact that taking buses was a tedious chore because it took so much time and money:

Rose: The thing is transportation, it would be good, yeah, transportation, yeah, you know the buses are two hours; bus prices \$2.00, \$1.50 for youth.

Location of programs was mentioned several times by the mothers as being another major barrier to their children's participation.

Mary: I think, like when you look in the leisure guide it is always the location of where the programs, even if I had the money, yea, so I would like to have stuff around this area.

I was struck by the number of times the mothers spoke about transportation, location, and cost of programs and while this has been demonstrated in other research (Jackson et al., 2001; Reid et al., 2002; Reid, 2004), it has not been translated into meaningful public policy change. As Thibault et al., (2004) have argued, this is due to neo liberal ideology in governance where revenue generation takes priority.

Cultural exclusion

Data from the focus groups demonstrated how racism and language were barriers for mothers accessing recreation. The data provides insights into how racism affects participation of children in recreation programs and the importance of realizing the complexity of it and how there is not just one simplistic approach to dealing with this issue (Jarvie & Reid, 1997; Vertinsky et al., 1996).

The Aboriginal mothers spoke about the issue of trust and safety and how important it was for them to know that their children were safe and that the instructors could be trusted. The mothers lived in an urban environment in Winnipeg and it is interesting to read an article by Oikawa (2002) where she wrote about the relationship that people have to spaces. She spoke about how white people's hegemony has created isolated spaces for people of color and Aboriginal people and how this has segregated them setting them from the rest of society. This violence of spatially segregating people historically has left memories which have been passed down from generation to generation (Oikawa, 2002), and this may help explain why the issue of safety and trust was so very

important to the mothers in Winnipeg. Below are a number of quotes from the mothers about safety and trust that illustrate their concerns:

Sasha: It is kinda scary, the city is dangerous. I would like to see Bev, to have somebody I could trust; to pick her up, and send her off if there was transportation, if she was able to do recreation.

Here we have Sasha speaking about the city being "scary" and dangerous and then we have Rose's son being scared to go to the community centre. Living in areas of poverty sometimes creates unsafe spaces due to drugs and violence (Reid, 2004).

Rose: I don't know, it is pretty much, stay at home, he is too scared to go out, and even this is close but I just don't like him coming here. (This is in reference to the community centre where the focus group was held, and where the programs for the children and youth are free.)

The next quote by Judy indicates that the fear of violence was connected to transportation as a barrier and how a safe walk program could help overcome this concern.

Judy: But there is also activities here, that I see that I would want them to do but they are scared to come here. So that is what I was talking with somebody here, that they should have the safe walk program where they pick up the kids and drop them back off. Cause my boys wanted to come and do some things here but I didn't have time to bring them here, and then to pick them up. So they didn't want to come after all because they are scared of being beaten up or something.

Another type of fear of violence that one of the mothers spoke about was the physical abuse at home with the children's father and how she taught herself and her children Tai Kwon Do to protect themselves. She ended up leaving her husband because of the abuse and is now a single mother of three sons.

Janna: You have a black belt in Tai Kwon Do?

Helen: Yeah, my oldest boy I teach him Tai Kwon Do, so he has got a brown belt.

Janna: So physical activity has played a big part in your life?

Helen: Oh yeah, when my kids father, you know he was very, ah, when he was (pause) very punchy, just put it like that. So you come to a point that you have to move fast and get out of the way, you understand what I am saying?

I do not want to go into all the complexities and research of family violence, but suffice it to say that it is a multifaceted problem that affects many people regardless of class, gender, age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and family status (Department of Justice, Canada, 2006).

The hegemonic white culture is infused in the delivery of recreation programs (Paraschak, 1999; Paraschak & Tirone, 2003) and some participants do experience racism when participating in mainstream recreation (Vertinsky et al., 1996). The delivery of organized sport and recreation has been dominated by traditional white males, heterosexuals, and middle class systems that continue to exclude women of colour on low income and their families (Vertinsky et al., 1996; Paraschak, 1999; Paraschak & Tirone, 2003; McDonald, 2005). This was confirmed when a debate occurred in one of the focus groups where one of the mothers, who self identified as black (Helen), and another mother who self identified as white (Liz), were involved in an impassioned conversation about racism. I have elected to include the complete conversation as an illustration.

Janna: This is a two part question and it may sound confusing, but here goes. Are there activities that you prefer that your children participate in, first part, with other children of the same age and second part is, with you and other parents?

Helen: I thought you were going to say with a different race.

Helen's response to the researcher's question could suggest that she had to deal with racism on a continuous basis. Our discussion continued as follows:

Janna No, no.

Helen: Because a lot of parents don't want their kids to um participate with other ethnic backgrounds.

Liz: in Toronto?

Helen: Oh yeah, my youngest boy

Liz: (interrupts) Because that is like the way of life here, it is like the cess pool of all diversity (laughs).

When I heard this comment, "cess pool of all diversity" I was shocked that Liz thought it was okay to make such a comment. That remark might lead one to think that if you were not white you belonged in the "cess pool" and as Kleg and Yamamoto(1995) pointed out:

Certain perceived physical features continue to function as the signal for negative social attitudes, and such nonwhite peoples as Turks, Koreans, Japanese, Chinese, and African Americans remain among the more clearly distanced (p. 66).

Helen went on to challenge Liz by explaining that she has no understanding of what her son, who is black, faces in society.

Helen: But the problem is you are not black, you don't see it.

Liz: Well I have a lot of friends that are black and they don't think that way.

Helen: But, trust me, they do, they might not tell you but.

Janna: But her experience is yes (said to Liz).

Helen: My youngest boy is Jewish and Italian.

Liz: But I am not like that.

Helen: I know that (Liz breaks out into astonished laughter).

Janna: I don't think she is saying that I think what Helen is saying you don't have the same experiences.

Helen: My youngest boy is Jewish and Italian, he is my baby, and my two oldest is German and English. I know, every time I tell people, yeah, but umm my oldest boy is black, and ah and trouble with certain kind of people, they call him the black word, the one.

Liz: The what?

Helen: The n word, and this word and you're this and that or whatever.

Liz: Yeah, but people who are aware, they do the same things, they get into the same problems, though (acts indignant).

Helen: You don't understand what I am saying, I am saying that certain children and certain people will not have anything to do with them; do you guys understand what I am saying? Will not have anything to do with a certain ethnic background, a certain kind of people.

Helen was frustrated with Liz in that she did not understand how racism worked due to the fact that she was white and was not at the brunt of racist remarks.

Below, Helen attempts to explain this to Liz.

Janna: That is your experience?

Helen: (said to Liz) Yeah, and I think a lot of people experience it not like you, you're born Canadian, and white, right? It is easy for you to say I have black friends, yeah you have black friends. All my friends are white, I don't date black men right, all my friends are white, so my experience is totally different, right?

This conversation between Helen and Liz created tension in the focus group, as there were two other mothers of color who had identified as being immigrants. My impression was that they became withdrawn and did not want to participate in the heated discussion that was taking place.

Immigrant women face a number of barriers coming to Canada, they are isolated and discriminated against in areas of civil society (Ley & Murphy, 2001). There also is a link between women of color and poverty and one of the mothers, Zarrin spoke about how language had been a barrier for their family. The following conversation came about as a result of a question I had asked about barriers for their children participating in recreation programs:

Zarrin: She is too young, she is a newcomer, she feels she not want to go, her English is poor.

Janna: So that is a barrier?

Zarrin: Yes.

Janna: Language is a barrier?

Zarrin: Yes.

Another immigrant mother spoke about coming from Montreal, where she learned French and now has moved to Richmond and has to learn English. She still found it difficult even though she had been here a few years.

Narma: I came from east Canada, so from Montreal specifically, so it's small, uh, language issue. So French was the official language, and so I have big problems. So it is almost five years now, my English, but uh, this is a big issue for me.

Janna: So language is a big issue?

Narma: Language.

Janna: So did you speak French in Montreal?

Narma: Yes,

Janna: Yes, that is a big switch; we don't speak much French here.

Narma: I had to start from the beginning, in job search, in Vancouver. I believe it is more difficult, Chinese more easier.

Institutional exclusion

This section deals with data from the focus groups that addressed recreation policies and practices for mothers on low income and how they proved to be restrictive. The term Leisure Access has been used in the research literature when describing policies that provide for either a fee reduction or waiver for registration fees for recreation programs (Reid, 2004).

Proving poverty

Women on low income and their families have indicated in a number of studies that having to prove that they are poor in order to obtain a fee subsidy/waiver has been both upsetting and degrading (Reid et al., 2002, Reid, 2004)

In my document analysis, I found no mention of a fee subsidy/fee waiver policy in the Leisure Guide from Richmond, yet the three mothers spoke about the policy and how it affected their lives. In hindsight I wished I had asked the mothers how they found out about the policy. As indicated earlier in this chapter the application process in Richmond required an income test and then a note was written with how much of a reduction they were entitled to. This section addresses issues where the mothers had to prove that they were eligible for a subsidy. The two mothers in Richmond were the only ones who had any experience with the application process for fee subsidies. Sheila and Devorah had this to say:

Devorah: You know, I would like to be able to put them into something without having to go through all that. Also just one thing I found too when I

was going through that whatever it is called the process. Say you wanted to be registered so you would go into the community centre, you'd say you know I am applying for this could you hold the space. Then you have to go through the whole thing with the front desk. Then if there is some sort of a problem, then they are phoning the person to find out you know if you are really if that, if you are applying or not and now the whole front desk knows. You know if you are in a small community like this, you know everyone knows everyone in Steveston to be standing at the front desk and they are checking it all it is almost better not even to do it.

It seemed to me that Devorah, who indicated that she lived in a small local neighbourhood was embarrassed by the treatment she had received at the front desk, and that she did not want everyone to know her business. In a study by Reid (2004) the women on low income reiterated over and over again about the embarrassment and humiliation they received when making application for a fee subsidy.

In the next quote Sheila spoke about her experience in trying to get admission tickets to an aquatic centre where she wanted to take her three sons go on a family outing to a wave pool:

Sheila: So what I said was could I just get strip tickets to go to Water Mania and she said Water Mania is very expensive and can you afford it, I said excuse me, you know and she said you get more tickets if you go to Minoru because it is a regular pool. Water Mania is you know a wave pool you know and she said to me, she said, well how can you get there you live closer to Minoru. I said well that is not your concern (laughs in indignation). I get there, it is very embarrassing, and you know it is very, you know like I never picked up the letter.

Sheila felt a disrespectful attitude had been shown by the staff person in suggesting that she should consider another facility that would cost less. The research suggests that this disrespect for mothers on low income is a common refrain and that poor bashing and blaming mothers is constant and ongoing (Young, 1990; Evans, 1998; Reid, 2004). Sheila spoke further about how the

municipal recreation department contributed to her feeling of exclusion with the poor treatment she received in her dealings with staff.

Sheila: It is embarrassing, well it's done well almost after the fact, well to register for something like swimming, one of the more popular things to do, so they say put the money out, and we will reimburse you. I am calling you because I can't afford it, and they said well you can phone with a credit card, and I said (laughs) well I am on disability, and this is why I am asking, for help, and they said, well it could take two to three weeks, and by that time, and its twenty four hours and once it goes out there, the most popular classes are gone, you know.

This kind of policy suggested that if you pay instantly, in other words by credit card, you get into the recreation program immediately, and if not you are out of luck. This method of payment discouraged Sheila from even bothering to apply as she knew that she would not be able to get her children into the program that she wanted. Sheila and Devorah continued to speak about how embarrassing and awkward the application process was for getting a fee subsidy. Although Leisure Access policies vary from department to department, the research suggests that the process for applying is frequently both uncomfortable and degrading for women on low income (Reid et al., 2002; Reid, 2004):

Devorah: They do offer a discount or a subsidy and you have to keep re applying and it is an issue, and you know financial, part of it, and as I said you can apply for the grant. But it is, you know, it is not comfortable to do it, and I don't like to phone.

The following quote addresses the questions that staff asked in Richmond about the mother's income in order to determine the amount of subsidy they are eligible for. The implication here seemed to be that government agencies have to continue to ensure that mothers on low income do not defraud the system and

that they have to be held accountable, which is yet another form of poor bashing (Banneji, 2001; Reid, 2004).

Sheila responding to Devorah's comment: Yeah, we all had I went through it initially to do it. You go in, and you chat and they ask a bunch of questions and it I don't know. I understand you know, they have to do it, but they have to do what they have to do, you know there could be a better way to do things.

Limitations of leisure access policies

This section addresses the third research question:

What is their assessment of the Leisure Access policy in their community?

Devorah from Richmond elaborated on how unfair the system was and how she was made to feel if she didn't contribute some money towards the registration fee. Once again there appeared to be little or no understanding by staff regarding barriers facing some mothers on low incomes (Reid, 2004). In addition, a subsidy of 50% on the registration fee only addresses some of the obstacles faced and other issues like transportation, childcare, and expenses for equipment and clothing are not taken into consideration with the policies (Reid et al., 2002, Reid, 2004).

Devorah: Yeah, it is like every, if the class, is like a month long, you have to phone in and go through all the details, and then they say to you then how much of it are you willing to pay. They want you to pay, they want you to pay part of it, and but then you have to come up with your own amount, up to 50%. So then you have to say 50% and then it looks like you are you know you are either cheap or you know.

Rose and Susan in Winnipeg spoke about the importance of having their children involved in sports and how the policy did not cover the cost of sports. From my past experience leisure access policies covered municipal recreation

programs and those minor sport organizations often had their own fee subsidy policy but this was not necessarily communicated to the residents in a community. A mother in Winnipeg had this to say about having her son involved in sports.

Susan: Yeah, I heard about it from a friend of mine, because she went through it with her son, her son got into football in the summer. I was telling her that my son wanted to get into football too, and I go I can't afford stuff like that. She told me about that, and so I phoned here, cause she said it would have to be in your community, and they didn't know nothing about it.

This comment about playing organized sports was gendered, in that two of the mothers who had sons spoke about having them involved in organized sports and three of the mothers spoke about getting their daughters involved in day camps and swimming. While there has been an increase in girls playing organized sports, boys still outnumber girls and girls still tend to be involved in physical activities that are less competitive such as swimming and outdoor activities (Jackson, et al., 2002). This suggested that a policy of "one fits all" is not necessarily workable. What is needed is a diverse approach to the development of Leisure Access policies that takes into consideration a number of factors including race, gender, geographic location etc. based on input from those who are the intended beneficiaries of such policies (Frisby et al., 2005).

The criteria for the fee subsidy in Richmond required that the mothers made application for each session and this often meant a delay in getting approval, which at times meant the more popular programs were full when they were finally notified that they were eligible for the fee subsidy program. The

statement below by Namra suggests the need for changes in the Richmond policy.

Namra: When I start at the end of spring time, I don't have many choices, sometimes also I have all the classes are full. This is why all the time, like just today I wanted to sign up and it's all full. So if I know I have to start from the beginning so I would have more opportunities to make decision, just waiting, but they should give me a subsidy from the beginning.

Most municipal recreation departments state that they have a social welfare mandate to provide accessible recreation programs and services for all citizens in the community (Thibault et al., 1999), however the following statements by Devorah and Sheila show the skepticism they had for the system.

Devorah: I almost feel like, and I don't know if it is true or not. But I almost feel like this is a way of doing it. so it is not too expensive, for them, so they don't have as many people to have to, you know its such a big job to actually get in there, make the appointment and actually get the money.

Janna: So you think that is a barrier to you?

Sheila: Yeah, and I think it, probably for there budget it is a good thing. You know I don't know if that is part of the plan or not. It doesn't really, if you see how long, the letter is, it is really crazy, to think that it is that complicated, for one course and that is every single time you have to do it.

The comments made by the mothers from Richmond, Winnipeg, and the York Region suggested a need for an overhaul in leisure access policies and a need for public input into such policies. The research literature strongly advocates the requirement to reach out into the community and have citizens from disenfranchised groups come together and have input into public policy development (Arai, 1996; Arai & Pedlar, 1997; Campbell & Marshall, 2000; Reid et al., 2002).

Communication of leisure access policies

There was a mixed reaction as to whether the mothers from Winnipeg knew about the leisure access policies, as two mothers indicated they were aware of the policy while five of the mothers had never heard about it. Research has shown that often those on low income are often not aware of these policies because they are poorly communicated due to fears that middle and upper income citizens will abuse the systems (Frisby et al., 2005). Following are comments made by the mothers in Winnipeg in response to whether they knew about the policy.

Janna: Patricia, have you heard of this policy?

Patricia: No I haven't.

Mary: I was wondering is it limited to certain programs or is it for all programs?

Janna: It doesn't say if it is limited to any programs at this point in time.

Mary: So how would anybody know, which programs to really apply for. I would be really interested because I wouldn't know if you do want to get into one program, and then you find out it is not subsidized. So I would rather know what is being offered, or what is going to be subsidized or whatever.

One of the questions asked of the mothers related to the method of communication and what would work best for them to find out about fee subsidies, the following response from a mother in Winnipeg who obviously was trying to inject some humour at the expense of the white researchers when she spoke about "smoke signals":

Janna: Ok, so if you don't read the leisure guide, what would the other way be to reach you then?

Janna: Sasha?

Sasha: Smoke signals (lots of laughter) probably the same thing, a brochure.

King (2005) contends that white researchers in sport studies are in the "ivory tower" doing research on race and questions whether this research will become sanitized and dominated with our thinking:

Within and beyond the sport studies classroom, there is grave danger that whiteness studies will be whitewashed. Absorbed by white studies, I fear, it will become a white-centered, white-dominated, and white-identified social field, a context in which white perspectives and practices (ways of thinking and learning) shape the organization and dissemination of knowledge about largely white actors and authors within spaces marked by white-centered norms of civility and sociality (p. 403).

Perhaps the comment from Sasha suggests that she is tired of being "researched" and that action needs to happen instead in response to the history of Aboriginal oppression in Canada (Paraschak & Tirone, 2003).

The Play program administered by the Family and Children Services Division of the York Regional government was more effectively communicated to the mothers by either personal phone call or in person contact from a staff person within the division. This is what the mothers had to say about this alternative approach:

Liz: Can I just say something here, cause remember I talked to you earlier, that the York region had actually started something here, PLAY and I am actually going to register. Now they phoned me, if they had not phoned me, ok, I would not have, whose going to pick up a brochure and like really read it.

Janna: Were you aware of the new policy that the York region has for reduced fees, so that your children twelve and under can participate in recreation?

Zarrin: Yes.

Janna: How did you find out about it?

Zarrin: My worker said it.

In this case Zarrin was speaking about her social worker who told her about the fee subsidy program. It was interesting to note that there was obviously good communication between regional departments to ensure that the mothers who received some form of social assistance were made aware of the policy. This outreach to the mothers by a social service agency could be considered one of the components of a community development initiative (Frisby & Millar, 2002). The agency had worked in conjunction with the local municipal recreation departments in developing PLAY and they also had input from a few of the mothers who were on social assistance. One of the mothers, Liz from the York Region certainly had a good insight as to what made sense in getting the message out.

Liz: Like maybe another way could be, like when you have your interviews like I know when you are on subsidized daycare for example, you have to every six months report your income and these kind of things. You know if they inform you, then that's a way they can inform you of the benefits of the things that you are eligible for and for your children. Things like that, I think there are more effective ways than having brochures sitting there.

A different approach to leisure access policies

In this section, the mothers speak about the different approaches that should be considered in the development of leisure access policies. My experience has been that we have not asked for or listened to mothers as to what works and what does not work with public policies. In order to be relevant in today's society it is prudent for public agencies to hear from citizens who are

often disenfranchised from civil society when developing public policy (Lowndes, et al., 2001; Pratchett & Stoker, 2001). The mothers provided a number of insights on how to improve leisure access policies.

Liz: Sometimes with programs, it is not always well thought out, and it doesn't take the dynamics of each community into consideration. You know sometimes, they might have a broad policy across the board, but different communities may have different needs than other communities, right? So it is better to have people who live in the community be involved when they make decisions rather than just doing it when they don't even live here, they live in BC!

While Liz injected a little bit of humour when she mentioned making decisions in British Columbia, as she lived in the York region, her point is valid and supports the need for public input into policy development particularly from groups who are marginalized as mothers on low income are (Patten, 2001; Phillips and Orsini, 2002).

In Winnipeg there was no guarantee that once you applied for the fee subsidy that you would necessarily be able to enrol your children in a recreation program:

Rebecca: Yeah, I guess I'd like to see if they ever have policy changing, they get to put in there, that when you are applying, that it is guaranteed, not just, like rolling the dice and seeing if you are going to win.

The need to hear from mothers on low income is vital as this gives mothers a sense that what they actually do have a say that what they have to say is important (Arai & Pedlar, 1997; Patten, 2001). While I could not promise the mothers that they would be involved in future deliberations about leisure access policies, they showed great enthusiasm of wanting to be involved.

A more seamless process to the application procedure for fee subsidy would prove to be less uncomfortable and degrading. As mentioned earlier the research points to the fact that the application process is both embarrassing and humiliating (Reid, 2004). Devorah and Namra from Richmond provided good solutions to the endless application process that is required every program session:

Namra: I prefer to have the coupons, or a pass, it is better. Its better and they don't have to know your situation, and they don't have to know that you are on subsidy.

Devorah: I think eh, if they had some kind of an access card or something. The thing is I don't want to be phoning in forever every six weeks or eight weeks, whenever the season changes and having to you know going to have to talk to this person all the time. It's embarrassing you know I would like to be able to put them into something without having to go through all that.

Two of the mothers in the York Region had a number of suggestions on improving the policy that would be more inclusive of families. Not only did they want programs for their children but in some situations they wanted to be able to participate as a family or even have opportunities to participate themselves while their children were in daycare. The realities faced by single mothers are often overlooked and the following quotes illustrate the importance of hearing from the mothers and that policies need to reflect the realities of mothers on low income.

Helen: Don't get me wrong, I love my kids and everything, but what about us parents. Isn't there something our there for us, where we can go for an hour and stress free workout.

Liz: You mean while they are participating, when you can't participate, cause when they are older they participate, yeah, usually they have coffee, vending machines and everyone huddles around.

Helen: Yeah, but what I am talking about an hour for ourselves, even when the kids are out playing ball, skating or whatever. We can put on our clothes and go work out, or something, even if the kids is not there.

Janna: So if there was something, even like childcare if it was available at the community centre which is offered free and you can go participate, would that work for you?

Helen: Yes, Yes,

Janna: Would you use that?

Everyone: Yes, yes, yes.

Liz: I would rather do it, when they are participating in something, the time management is a thing for me, I work full time, right so I mean like I don't have the time to go there twice or three times or four times. So for me it is like if something was available for me at the same time my kids were doing something, that would work better for me but some people may have a thing where they want day care.

Here Liz (who had earlier disclosed that she was a single mother) spoke about the realities of her life and the difficulties she faced. The simplistic approach to current leisure access policies involving a reduction in registration cost obviously does not work. This statement of wanting to be involved and being listened to was echoed a number of times in all the focus groups, indicating the importance of community development and the importance of having those who are disenfranchised being involved in developing policies and practices that affect their lives (Arai & Pedlar, 2001; Frisby & Millar, 2002).

The final chapter of my thesis will deal with conclusions based on the data examined and will provide recommendations for mothers on low income, municipal recreation departments. I will also provide recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter includes the conclusions based on the analysis of the research questions. Recommendations are also included for municipal recreation staff and for mothers on low income. The final section addresses the limitations of the research and provides suggestions for future research.

Conclusions

1. Do mothers on low income see any benefits for their children participating in municipal recreation activities?

There was never a doubt from the mothers on low income who participated in this study saw several benefits derived of their children's involvement in recreation programs. Their wishes in having their children involved is not likely different from what we would expect to find from middle and upper income mothers.

It was apparent that the mothers on low income saw recreation programs providing social, cultural, and physical benefits that were important for their children's sense of self worth and their health, a theme supported in the literature (CPRA, 1997; Hanvey, 2001; Donnelly & Coakley, 2002). Mothers recognized that having their children active helped with issues of being overweight by diverting them away from passive activities such as watching TV and playing computer games. Children who are active and involved do not get isolated and have a sense of belonging (Donnelly & Coakley, 2002) and this was echoed numerous times by the mothers.

However, the mothers I talked to found other agencies besides municipal recreation that provided affordable recreation programs for their children. For example, the mothers in Winnipeg spoke about their children being involved in Free Play and the Boys and Girls Club. One of the mothers from the York Region chose to play basketball in the back yard, as she knew the value of physical activity. It was apparent that the mothers were able to utilize different approaches to ensuring that their children were involved in recreation programs.

2. What are the barriers facing mothers on low income attempting to involve their children in recreation programs and services?

The barriers for mothers on low income and their children's participation included material exclusion (cost, transportation, location of programs), cultural exclusion (racism, language, fear of violence) and institutional exclusion (restrictive leisure access policies and practices) that supports previous research (Frisby et al., 1997; Reid, 2004; Frisby et al., 2005).

The new public management trend adopted by some municipal recreation departments that emphasizes a more business like approach to program delivery has meant that recreation services are geared more to middle class participants and have therefore excluded mothers on low income and their children (Thibault, et al., 1999; Frisby et al., 2004).

Mothers in Winnipeg spoke about their concern for their children's safety travelling to and from recreation programs as well as the need to trust those who delivered the programs. Oikawa (2002) wrote about how historically Aboriginal people have faced issues of "violence" and that "memories" of the hegemony of

the white people has been passed down to each generation, therefore issues such as trust and safety became major concerns for the mothers. One of the mothers in the York focus group spoke passionately about the effects of racism on her children, and how her child had been treated poorly by others in the neighbourhood. Language was also identified as a barrier for some of the mothers who found that speaking English was difficult so asking about opportunities for their children was avoided.

Communication of fee subsidy policies and affordable recreation opportunities through the Leisure Guide were largely ineffective. However the exception to this was the PLAY program that was administered through the Regional Municipality of York, which effectively notified the mothers with direct contact either by phone, mail or in person. There was suspicion by the mothers in Richmond, that these policies were not advertised because the municipality did not really want them to utilize the policy as they wanted to save taxpayer dollars. A more effective method of communicating affordable recreation programs and services was needed in order for the mothers to find out about such opportunities.

3. What is their assessment of the leisure access policy in their community?

In Richmond, the fee subsidy policy process for application and approval was humiliating and embarrassing and mothers were made to feel that they were abusing the system and that they did not deserve the subsidy. Municipal staff was often rude and insulting to those mothers that made application for the fee

subsidy which deterred them from applying in the future. This humiliation and embarrassment in applying for fee subsidies has been documented in previous research (Frisby et al., 1997; Reid et al., 2002; Reid, 2004).

The eligibility process for the York Region PLAY program I found to be reasonable in that the mothers who received some form of social assistance automatically qualified and did not have to go through another process a second time. However mothers on low income who were not on some form of social assistance, were not eligible and had to make application through their local recreation department subsidy program. None of the mothers in the York Region had applied for any fee subsidy. There was little information available from Richmond Hill, Markham, Winnipeg and Richmond municipal recreation departments as to the process for application for fee subsidy that suggested the need for more effective communication of policies.

The fee subsidies in Richmond and Winnipeg were limited and did not provide for a varied selection of program opportunities for the children to participate and did not take into account other barriers that mothers faced such as transportation. There was no consideration given to possibilities of including the mothers in program opportunities with their children or having programs for children at the same time as mothers participated in other programs. The York region policy that provided ninety dollars for each child was more progressive because it allowed parents the freedom of registering for programs without going through the municipal recreation departments application process.

The mothers in Winnipeg were unclear about who was responsible for administering municipal registered recreation programs, the FREE PLAY program and minor sport opportunities and they did not differentiate between organizations responsible for offering these programs. The FREE PLAY program that was administered by the Community Development and Recreation and Initiative Branch was unique as it offered free programs for mothers and their families.

Communication of fee subsidy policies in Richmond, Winnipeg, ,Richmond Hill (York Region) and Markham (York Region) were inadequate and often did not exist and in some cases were only advertised with a one line sentence in the recreation brochure. There is a large body of literature that supports the need to include citizens in the deliberation of public policy and to reach out into the community to those who are most disenfranchised (Lowndes et al., 2001; Harvey, 2001; Phillips & Orsini, 2001).

The rules and regulations in Richmond and Winnipeg were cumbersome and some of the mothers in Winnipeg found other agencies that provided affordable recreation programs and in some cases they just did not bother to apply. It was my observation that mothers from the Richmond focus group were angry and frustrated with the process and that they really wanted to tell the municipal staff what was necessary to provide for a more user friendly process.

The issue of racism was raised both in the York Region and in the Winnipeg focus groups indicating the need to address this issue in the delivery of recreation programs. The data in Tables 2, 3 and 4 indicated the large visible

minority populations in Richmond and the York Region, as well as the large population of Aboriginal persons in Winnipeg, suggesting that there is a need to develop policies that address all citizens in the communities. In fact in the document analyses the only policies that were identified in the local recreation brochure dealt with fee subsidies and policies in regard to issues of special needs for persons with disabilities.

Inclusion in recreation program delivery for families on low income is important and the idea that one program fits all, does not work. A community development approach to program delivery would be more beneficial to those needing access (Frisby & Millar, 2002) rather than an approach that delivers recreation programs based on revenue generation priorities (Thibault et al., 1999).

Suggestions for future research

It would be beneficial to go back to the York Region, Winnipeg and Richmond, to conduct more focus groups to determine if the patterns found in this study are more wide spread. In addition individual interviews with the mothers would also provide more insights into issues already identified from the focus groups.

Other suggestions for future research:

- Conduct additional research with mothers on low income from smaller cities, rural communities and remote communities

- Conduct further research with mothers on low income from specific ethnic minorities.
- Conduct research with municipal recreation agencies on leisure access policies and other approaches to providing access to recreation programs for mothers on low income.

Recommendations for municipal recreation departments

While there are policies in many municipal recreation departments that address fee subsidies for the economically disadvantaged, gender equity and persons with disabilities, none exist that address the intersections of race, class, and gender. One of the key recommendations is that Leisure Access policies be multi-faceted to address the intersections of race, class and gender.

The research literature suggests that many municipal parks and recreation departments are following a new public management approach to the delivery of recreation programs and services and that programs that bring in revenue are more important than providing access to mothers on low income and their children (Thibault et al., 1999; Thibault et al., 2004). One component of community development is bringing marginalized groups to the table in the development of public policy (Arai & Pedlar, 2001; Frisby & Millar, 2002). Ensuring that mothers on low income are always at the table when developing policies and programs would be an important first step in this regard.

- Provide diversity training for all municipal staff, including front line staff, program staff, supervisors and managers. This diversity training to include

issues about poverty and how it affects various groups. In addition how issues of race, religion, language, culture, ethnic background, gender, sexual orientation and age affect mothers on low income should be incorporated.

- Ensure that Leisure Access policies are effective and are advertised in a variety of locations other than the brochure, including bulletin boards at social housing complexes, food banks, community centres, local newspapers, bulletin boards in such locations as laundry facilities, various religious establishments and other bulletin boards which may be in the local neighborhood.

Recommendations for mothers on low income

In attempting to address the issue of providing recommendations for mothers on low income I found that the best way to frame this was, what would I say to mothers on low income about recreation programs for their children? My suggestions for mothers would be the following:

- If there was a community centre in the neighbourhood, visit the centre and ask a staff person what kind of fee subsidy was available for your children, and what the guidelines are to apply for the fee subsidy.
- Telephone the municipal city hall and ask for information about the local recreation department and how to contact them and who would be the best person to talk to.

- Form community groups with other parents on low income to discuss and lobby for improvements in recreation policies and programs.

Limitations of research

One of the main limitations was the time frame available to conduct the research that did not allow for a more thorough and diverse approach in reaching out to the communities to solicit mothers on low income. Only a few mothers on low income in Richmond and the York Region participated in the focus groups. The goal was to have 8-10 mothers per focus group, but the numbers were small, however this did allow for in depth discussions which provided a number of insights. Another limitation was that only one focus group was held in each city, it would have been desirable to have gone back a second time to meet with the focus groups. While there were a number of ethnicities represented, not all ethnicities identified in the demographics of the cities were represented. However this study was a starting point and hopefully the information contained in this study will be useful for municipal recreation departments and that mothers on low income will be consulted.

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APPENDIX A

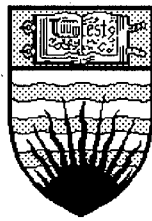
Making Community Recreation Accessible for Youth from Low-Income Families

Focus Group Questions for low-income parents of children 12 years and under

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this focus group that is exploring recreation for children 12 years and under. We would like to hear from everyone on each question. An order of speaking list will be maintained to facilitate the transcription of this focus group session.

1. What do you most hate saying "no" to your children about?
2. Have your children (12 and under) ever participated in recreation programs offered by your city (e.g. swimming, art, drama, day camps)?
 - a) If yes, what were the activities and did your child enjoy them?
 - b) If not, are there any activities that you would be interested in having your children participate in?
 - c) Where do they do these activities?
 - d) Are there any activities that your children (12 and under) would like to do but have not had the chance to do? (Probe: What are the activities and why haven't they had a chance to try them?)
 - e) Do you think it is important for your children (12 and under) to be involved in physical activity and recreation? Why or why not?
3. Are there things that make it difficult for your children (12 and under) to participate in activities? (Probe: What are they?)
 - a) What would make it easier for them to participate?
4. Are there activities that you prefer your children participating in:
 - i) with other children the same age ii) with you and other parents?
5. What is the best way to reach you to let you know about activities for your children (12 and under)?
6. *Have one of the moderators read the city's Leisure Access (or fee reduction) policy?*
 - a) Were you aware of this policy?
 - b) Would the policy help your children (12 and under) become more involved in activities?
 - c) Could changes be made in the policy to make it easier for your children (12 and under) to participate?
 - d) Would you like to provide input into the recreation policies and programs for youth in your city?

APPENDIX B



University of British Columbia
School of Human Kinetics

Background Survey (Parents - Kids 6-12)

City of residence: _____

What is your sex? ☐ Female ☐ Male

How many children do you have aged 6-12? _____

What are their ages? Years _____
Years _____
Years _____
Years _____

How many of those children are: Female _____ Male _____

What language is mainly spoken at home? _____

Are any other languages spoken at home? _____

What is your ethnic background? _____

(Examples: Greek-Canadian, East Indian-Canadian, Korean-Canadian, Aboriginal Canadian)

Have any of your children aged 6-12 taken part in municipal recreation programs in the past?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, please specify: _____
(Examples: Swimming Lessons, Youth Camps)

Participant Consent form (parents of youth aged 6-12)

**Making community recreation accessible
for youth from low-income families**

I have read the attached *Information Sheet* and understand the nature of the study as described in the *Information Sheet*,

I have a copy of the *Information Sheet* for my own records.

I understand that my participation in the study (entitled "*Making community recreation accessible for youth from low-income families*") is entirely voluntary and that I may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without jeopardy to my employment, or standing in the sport and recreation community. I have received a copy of the letter of initial contact, information sheet and a copy of this consent form for my own records.

I consent to participate in this study.

Participant Signature

Date

Signature of Witness

Date