

Teens get skates —and get active— with community's help

Canadian kids like to skate. It's part of our Canuck heritage. But what if you're a kid from a lower-income family and skates just aren't in the budget? Teacher Alison Pinkerton came up with a way to get those kids on the ice: free skates.

"Getting enough physical activity is so important for teens and skating is a great way to keep fit and have fun," said Alison, Physical Education Department head (now on a one-year sabbatical) at Queen Elizabeth Collegiate Institute in Kingston. "It's a simple idea but one that requires a lot of organization to make it happen," she said.

That's where the City of Kingston's Bill Reason came in. Bill, Assistant Supervisor of Culture & Recreation Programs, took on the task of organizing a community-wide skate donation.

So how did this all start?

"When I first started teaching at QECVI, I noticed that there were kids who didn't even have running shoes, which really limited their participation in gym," said Alison.

A running shoe drive solved that problem—more than a hundred gently used pairs were donated through the Runner's Choice store downtown.

"That got me thinking about the obstacles for these kids and it became so obvious to me: simple equipment needs of individual kids are critically important. I knew there were kids at QECVI who wanted to ice skate, but they had no skates. That's when I realized that we needed to reach out to the community."

The community came through in spades. "By November of last year, we'd collected 150 pairs of skates for our school. (The remaining donated skates went to other groups who

needed them.) Some were brand new and some ancient—but they were all in great shape and ready to use."

Canadian Tire even threw in a free blade sharpening with each pair distributed and the City of Kingston pitched in with a free skating coupon for any city rink.



"It was so rewarding to see the faces of these kids—for some, this was their very first pair of skates," said Alison.

"Health and wellness for the entire school community was always my main focus. Team sports are great but they mean that just twelve kids get to participate—what about the rest of the students who aren't on school teams? To really engage teens, you have to pick something they enjoy and skating seemed to be the thing."

Getting these kids more physically active was a community-wide effort, says Alison. With citizens partnering with the school and with local businesses, these teens were given the means and the opportunity. They say it takes a village to raise a child—perhaps it takes a whole community to get a teen to be more physically active.



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