

SUMMER CAMPS

Physical Literacy Camps at the YMCA: Encouraging All Kids to Be Active for Life!

Each summer, 2,100 children get moving, have fun and make new friends at YMCAs of Québec camps. In the summer of 2019, campers will get a brand new physical literacy program. Not only will the program help participants improve their physical skills, this inclusive program is designed to build their self-confidence so that they can enjoy being active at an early age and throughout their lives.

Learning how to move is just as important as learning how to read or write according to Tina Tran, Physical Literacy Advisor at the YMCAs of Québec. “Studies have shown that a child who learns basic motor skills is more likely to participate in sports activities and lead an active lifestyle,” she says. “We want our campers to develop physical literacy so they all can reach their full potential.”

A pilot project with convincing results

In 2018, thanks to funding from Manulife, Tina Tran joined the YMCA team specifically to develop a physical literacy program. Physical literacy is kind of like the ABCs of physical activity. Essentially, it's a question of building up certain basic movements through play, like throwing, running or jumping, and making sure that these activities are offered in an environment that is stimulating, safe and respectful of everyone.

“Physical literacy is all about getting a child to participate and encouraging them to be comfortable and enjoy being active.”

A cohort of counsellors was specially trained to lead two YMCA physical literacy day camps in the summer of 2018. On top of learning tools to teach children basic motor skills, counsellors were encouraged to expand their activity bank by adding game variations. “We want all children to feel competent,” says Tina Tran. “So, we showed the counsellors easy ways to change up games and modify movements as well as levels of intensity and difficulty to keep all the children motivated.”

During the pilot project, with funding from Montréal physiquement active, YMCA established a partnership with Suzanne Laberge from the École de kinésiologie et des sciences de l’activité physique at the Université de Montréal to evaluate the program’s training content and tools. Following this evaluation, the program was optimized to keep campers engaged.

“The physical literacy program touches on emotional, physical, cognitive and behavioural components. It’s by working on all these aspects that we have a better chance of getting a child to be active for life.”— Tina Tran

Playing catch with a rubber chicken

In the summer of 2019, the YMCA physical literacy program will be deployed in all nine day camps across greater Montréal and at Camp YMCA Kanawana. “What’s different about the new program is physical competence,” adds Tran. “We will develop five different movements and use progressions during the week. But the camp will remain a place for playing, for making friends. Every Monday, there will be icebreaker games to learn the name of campers. We’re also working on alternatives to elimination games to create a fun and positive play environment.”

In order to promote physical literacy, Tina Tran and her team have developed several tools, including a special guide on how to integrate sports activities into camp games. All YMCA counsellors will receive a physical literacy bag with all they need to add variety to games, including a ball, a jump rope, cones and a rubber chicken that they can use to play catch. Rubber chicken football will surely be a hit this summer!

“We want kids to spend as much time as possible outdoors, but most of all, we want them to move in different ways and be as active as they can be when they’re outside.”—Tina Tran

From inclusion to inclusive physical literacy

Inclusion is one of the YMCAs of Québec's fundamental values. "For us, inclusion not only means offering support and companion services to children with different needs, but also making sure that all campers are active and valued members of their camp community," says Beth Jersey, Diversity and Social Inclusion Advisor. In all YMCA day camps, campers with different needs are part of regular groups with children of their own age.

Beth Jersey and Tina Tran both think that helping youth with different needs to develop their physical literacy is crucial because they often have fewer opportunities to do so. As a result, they decided to combine their efforts and expertise to create an innovative and inclusive physical literacy program in Québec.

"We combined inclusion and physical literacy to ensure that kids who have needs in terms of their communication, sensory integration, agitation and impulsivity also have a chance to improve their physical skills, motivation and confidence, and to enjoy being active."—Beth Jersey

Special tools for inclusive physical literacy

After identifying the main barriers that prevented youth with different needs from participating, Beth Jersey and Tina Tran moved onto developing special tools to support inclusive physical literacy at day camp. Given that the clientele mostly consists of children with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD), they decided to create social stories to help children who may have trouble decoding certain social situations or developing their personal autonomy. These stories include three situations that are likely to happen at camp, such as losing a game, going to the pool or having to wait your turn to play. Presented as a comic strip, this intervention tool aims to reassure children so they will be more inclined to have fun during physical and sports activities.

Focusing on positive reinforcement by emphasizing children's good behaviour and participation is fundamental to developing physical literacy. But how do you make sure that children with different needs participate to the fullest extent possible? With the

collaboration of Stéphanie Girard, professor in the Sciences de l'activité physique department at the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, the YMCA team also developed a training tool to help counsellors adapt activities to ensure that everyone can make progress at their own pace and to increase the participation of all campers.

“Whenever possible, if there are certain barriers preventing a child from participating in an activity, we want counsellors to have the reflex of adapting the game so that everyone can join in.”— Beth Jersey

Beth Jersey and Tina Tran are committed to creating environments that encourage all children to play, develop their physical literacy, and lead healthy and active lives. Also, the Association des camps du Québec did not hesitate to call on the YMCA's expertise to develop inclusive adaptations for the *PeP ton jeu!* mobile app, which offers a camp game bank based on different variables. All in all, 150 games will be adapted to promote the inclusion of all children, no matter their skills and needs, and to help them feel competent and enjoy being active.

By focusing on playing, having fun and being healthy, physical literacy is a promising strategy for the future of youth. And, as Tina Tran points out, the YMCA has no intention of stopping there. “We started with camps,” she says. “But we intend to deploy this program throughout all of our activities for children.”

* Learn more about the [YMCA's physical literacy program](#).

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