

Get ready to 'Run. Jump. Play. Everyday!' in Aurora

By Brock Weir

If Gemma Goldstein was going to have to sit at work, she wanted to do so knowing she was making a difference and now, here in Aurora, she is doing just that - aiming to get kids off their butts one activity and recipe at a time.

Ms. Goldstein is spearheading the Healthy Kids Community Challenge, a partnership between Windfall Ecology Centre and the Town of Aurora to improve the health and fitness of local youngsters and those who guide them.

Launched earlier this fall, the program is currently conducting a needs assessment study looking at opportunities across the Aurora spectrum to foster a supportive environment to enable healthy behaviours, healthy weight for children, and related support behaviours from their parents and the community.

'Before we aim to increase capacity or implement and evaluate [a program] we need to know what is actually going on in the community,' says Ms. Goldstein, the program's Project Manager. 'It is our first undertaking and we are evaluating the situation in the community right now, looking at what the current health, economic and well-being situations are and looking at what assets we have in the community already, including programs that are already in place, and barriers, and that is going to be going through in November.'

Come next month, the plan is expected to kick into high gear with the development of an action plan and an official launch event at a handful of local schools by January. At Family Day's Arctic Adventure at Town Park, they hope to launch the program further with a splash, but details are currently under wraps.

The first component of the program, however, is on the launch pad this Saturday. Entitled 'Run. Jump. Play. Everyday!', this theme focuses on physical activity and will be a component of various activities being held around Aurora to mark RBC Sports Day, including free public skating and swimming at the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex, rock climbing and an RBC Learn to Play Zone at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex, and free time at The Loft youth space, also at the Leisure Complex.

The second component will zero in on food. Working with the York Region Food Network and York Region Public Health, the Healthy Kids Community Challenge is working towards developing programs aimed at increasing the availability of healthy food and getting kids into the kitchen to learn how to whip up some tasty, healthy treats.

'We are going to have twitter posts focusing on physical activity and sport, but later on I am going to be putting up healthy recipes for kids to try out,' explains Ms. Goldstein. 'We are going to have healthy cooking clubs, work with local supermarkets to make their cooking classes healthier and less focused on cookies and cupcakes, and more on teaching kids the basics of how to cook.'

Windfall Ecology Centre was established as a non-profit social enterprise focused on building sustainable communities. Healthy kids, she says, is a natural extension of that mandate.

'This is why I went into non-profit,' she says. 'When kids start off life on the right foot, your whole life changes. If kids get a healthy diet and physical activity, it has been shown to improve performance at school, it has been shown to improve life later on whether it is [better] health and less hospital visits, less heart disease and things like that, but also in academic ability later on, performance at work, and things like that. It affects their whole life and I wanted to make a difference from the beginning.'

'We're focused on the zero-to-twelves and it is really trying to make a difference from the beginning.'

To follow the initiative on Twitter, hit @FitKidsAurora or visit them on Facebook at facebook.com/fitkidsaurora.