

Understanding Community Investment in Recreation Spaces: Baseline Findings from Focus Groups in the City of Spruce Grove, Town of Stony Plain, and Parkland County (Fall 2011)

Final Report: November 2012

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Executive Summary

In order to explore City of Spruce Grove, Town of Stony Plain and Parkland residents' participation in recreation opportunities at indoor facilities and outdoor spaces, a telephone survey was conducted in the fall of 2011 (results available in a separate report¹). Focus groups were conducted as a follow up to the telephone surveys to gain a deeper understanding of how community members' use of indoor facilities and outdoor spaces and barriers to use of those spaces. A total of five focus groups were held in November of 2011: two *Adult Regular User* groups, two *Adult Non-Regular User* groups, and one *Youth* group.

Thematic analysis of the focus group discussions revealed a number of major findings regarding the accessibility and use of indoor facilities and outdoor spaces within the community. The following themes emerged and are described within this report:

- Satisfaction with indoor facilities and outdoor spaces
- Facilitators of the use of indoor facilities and outdoor spaces
- Barriers to the use of indoor facilities and outdoor spaces
- Suggestions for the improvement of programming and communication at facilities and spaces
- Suggested improvements to and maintenance of existing facilities and spaces and ideas for new facilities and spaces
- Suggested improvements to public transportation
- The use of private facilities
- Differing opinions on the development of community open spaces

The report concludes with the considerations for interpreting the focus group findings as well as general suggestions from the participants for ways to improve equitable access to indoor facilities and outdoor spaces for within the City of Spruce Grove, the Town of Stony Plain, and Parkland County.

¹ Suggested Citation: Nykiforuk, C.I.J., Berry, T., Vallianatos, H., & Nieuwendyk, L.M. (2011). Understanding Community Investment in Recreation Spaces: City of Spruce Grove, Parkland County and Town of Stony Plain Baseline Survey Results (General). Edmonton, AB: School of Public Health, University of Alberta.

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Introduction

Researchers from the University of Alberta worked with community partners from City of Spruce Grove, Parkland County and Town of Stony Plain (herein referred to as Tri-Region) to explore resident participation in recreation activities at local recreation facilities and open spaces. As part of this project, a two-year telephone survey (one pre-test and one post-test survey) is being conducted with community members in Strathcona County and comparing the results to community members in the Tri-Region area to better understand open space and recreation facility usage in the greater Edmonton area. A pre-/post-test involves conducting the same survey at two points in time to the same group of participants (e.g., residents of the Tri-Region area); at baseline (the pre-test) and follow-up (post-test). For this project the pre-test was conducted in the fall of 2011 and the post-test will be conducted in the fall of 2013.

In addition to the telephone surveys, focus groups were conducted with community members in November 2011 to gain a deeper understanding of the use of indoor recreation facilities and outdoor spaces within both Strathcona County and Tri-Region. A total of five focus groups were conducted within each community. This report summarizes the major findings from the focus groups conducted with residents of the Tri-Region area about their use of indoor facilities and outdoor spaces.

Recruitment of Participants

A list of respondents to the telephone survey² who indicated that they would be willing to be involved in future projects related to the study was provided to our research team by the research firm that conducted the telephone survey. Trained members of our research team contacted these individuals by telephone to recruit participants for the focus groups. Potential participants were called up to a total of 3 times, at which point if they did not answer they were removed from the list. The calling continued systematically until an appropriate number of participants was recruited for each of the five focus group sessions with Tri-Region residents. Our aim was to obtain a representative sample from the population, so tracking sheets were maintained during the recruitment process to track demographic variables (i.e., gender and income level). During the

² Nykiforuk, C.I.J., Berry, T., Vallianatos, H., & Nieuwendyk, L.M. (2011). Understanding Community Investment in Recreation Spaces: City of Spruce Grove, Parkland County and Town of Stony Plain Baseline Survey Results (General). Edmonton, AB: School of Public Health, University of Alberta.

recruitment process, individuals were selectively recruited, as required, to try and obtain a representative sample.

Two focus groups were conducted with adult participants categorized as “*Regular Users*” (defined as those who personally use indoor recreation facilities and/or outdoor spaces one or more time(s) per week). An additional two focus groups were conducted with adult participants categorized as “*Non-Regular Users*” (defined as those who personally use public recreation facilities and/or outdoor spaces fewer than once per week). One focus group was also conducted with *Youth*, aged 13-17, and this group was comprised of both Regular and Non-Regular Users.

Focus Group Attendance

Individuals who signed up to participate in one of the focus group sessions were re-contacted a few days before their scheduled session to remind them of time and location for the focus group. Messages were left for those who were not available at the time of our reminder calls, and voice mails were left at numbers with no answer. The following table displays the number of participants recruited for each focus group session and the number of participants who attended.

Table 1. Focus Group Attendance

Focus Group	Number of Participants Recruited	Number of Participants in Attendance
	n	n (%)
Regular Users (Group A)	9	6 (67%)
Regular Users (Group B)	11	4 (36%)
Non-Regular Users (Group A)	12	8 (67%)
Non-Regular Users (Group B)	13	3 (23%)
Youth (Regular and Non-Regular Users)	8	5 (63%)

Structure of Focus Groups

Focus groups took place at the Agrena and the Spruce Grove Public Library. The focus group discussions were led by a member of the University of Alberta research team and student research assistants were present to take notes. Refreshments and snacks were provided to participants at each session. Focus group facilitators followed a semi-structured question guide to lead each session. The focus groups were scheduled to last a maximum of an hour and a half, and varied in duration (62 minutes on average). The focus group discussions were digitally recorded and transcribed to ensure accurate recall by the research team.

Analysis of Findings from Focus Group Discussions

Transcripts of focus group discussions were analyzed by the research team using a thematic analysis approach. A number of major themes emerged. The following section outlines the major findings from focus group discussions among (1) *Adult Regular Users*, (2) *Adult Non-Regular Users*, and (3) *Youth* who reside in the Tri-Region area.

Adult Regular Users

Demographic Information

The following figures display demographic information about the *Adult Regular User* focus group participants, including age, gender, household income, as well as the community where they reside.

Figure 1. Age of *Adult Regular User* Focus Group Participants

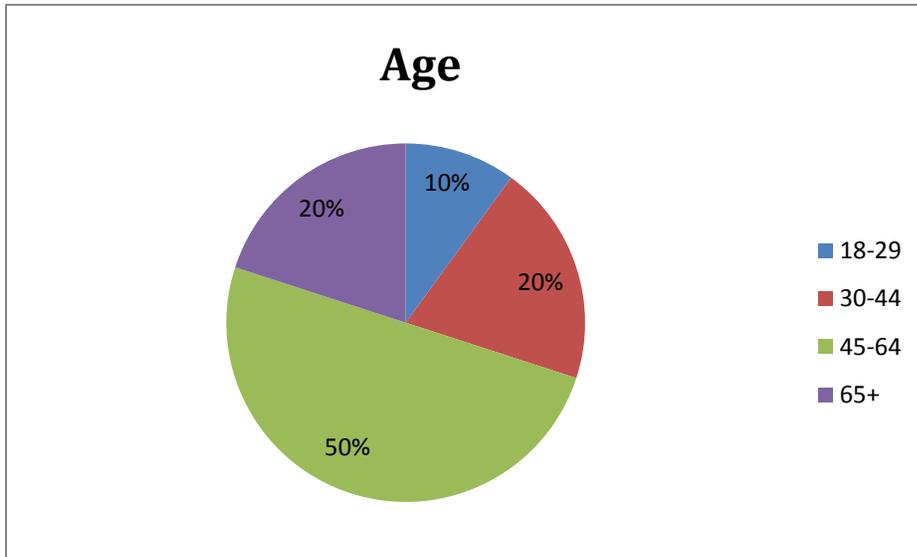


Figure 2. Gender of *Adult Regular User* Focus Group Participants

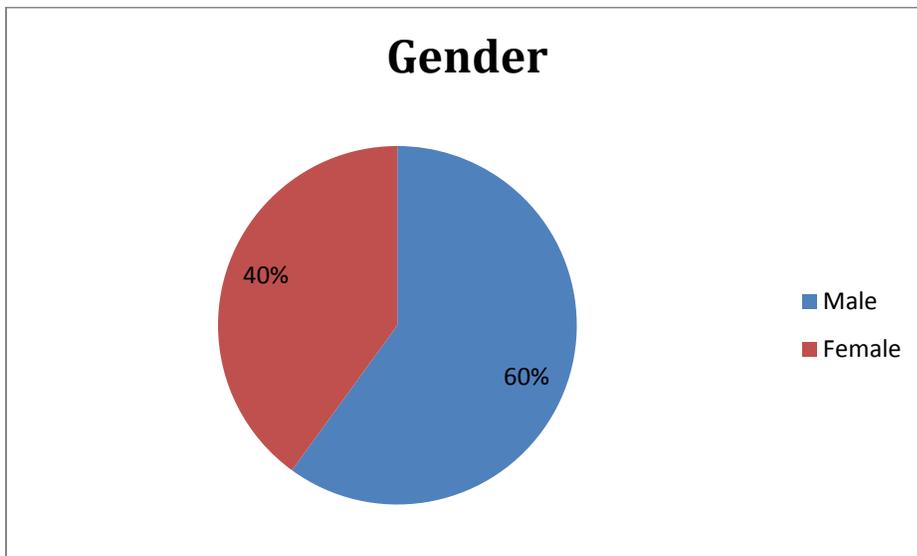


Figure 3. Total Household Income of *Adult Regular User* Focus Group Participants

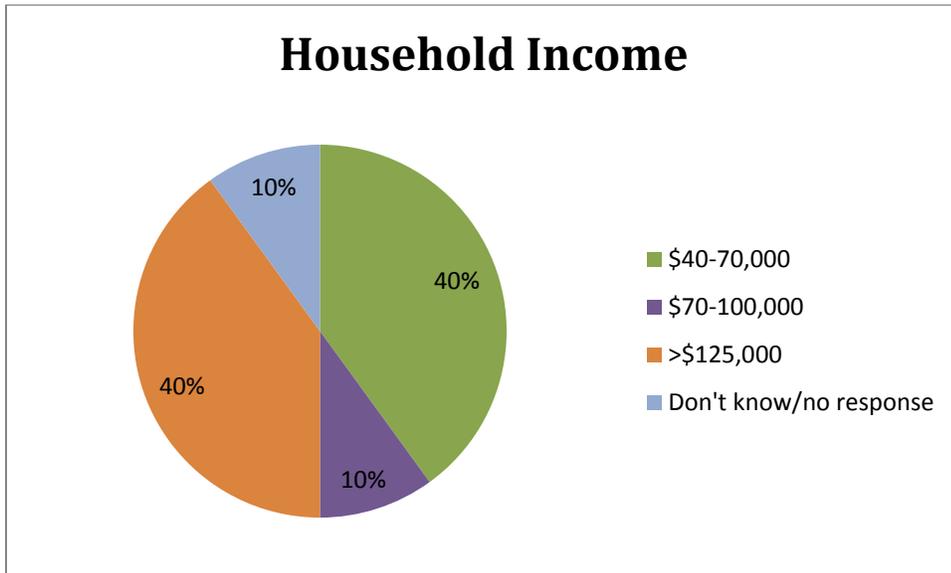
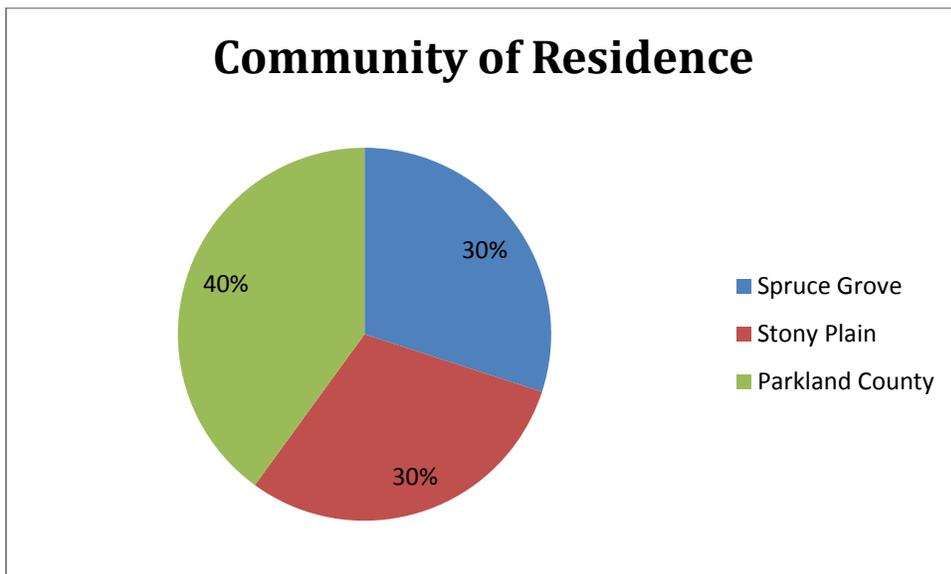


Figure 4. Community where *Adult Regular User* Focus Group Participants Reside



Findings from Discussions with Adult Regular Users

The discussions with *Adult Regular Users* revealed a number of interesting findings regarding community members' use of indoor facilities and outdoor spaces, in addition to their thoughts about the accessibility of these areas within the community. Discussions began by asking participants "what does physical activity mean to you?" This question was asked to initiate the flow of ideas and to help participants to think about opportunities for physical activity within their community. Some of the responses to this question that participants shared include the following:

"Anything where I'm not sitting down watching T.V. or on the computer, actually doing something." (TRU 4, p. 3)

"... working up a sweat and doing something." (TRU 4, p. 3)

"Typically... for me, sports related... but that will include running, going to the gym, anything from a CrossFit to a weight program, to a personal trainer." (TRU 4, p. 4)

Participants were then asked a number of questions to help gain an understanding of their use of indoor facilities and outdoor spaces, as well as gain insight into their opinions on the accessibility of these areas within the community. The group's responses to these questions have been organized into seven major themes, which are presented in this section.

Theme: Satisfaction with Indoor Facilities and Outdoor Spaces

The first theme to emerge through the analysis of focus group data was that participants were satisfied with the indoor facilities and outdoor spaces available to them within the Tri-Region area. Participants indicated they were pleased with the variety of activities that could be done at the various facilities and spaces. They also mentioned that the variety of options available provides opportunities for all individuals to participate in physical activity. Examples of some of the thoughts shared by participants regarding their satisfaction with facilities and spaces included:

"I think our community around this area, from my perspective, is incredible in the vast amount of opportunities people have, from recreational activity all the way to high end competitive activity." (TRU 1, p. 8)

“I think that one of the unique things is that you can participate at any level, and if being physically active means you can be someone who walks with your wife, or takes your dog for a walk, or someone who plays... at the international level of athletics. So that wide range of opportunity I think gives everyone reasons to participate...” (TRU 1, p. 8)

“I think it’s the variety of activities available, like if I pay to go to the gym at the Tri I can also go swimming, or use the track, or the basketball gym.” (TRU 4, p. 29)

“In the summertime the trails are great.” (TRU 4, p. 15)

“Chickakoo is really nice in terms of [cross country ski] tracks.” (TRU 1, p. 26)

“Yeah, Spruce Grove and Stony both have excellent walking trails.” (TRU 1, p. 28)

Theme: Facilitators of the Use of Indoor Facilities and Outdoor Spaces

The second theme that came across through the analysis of the focus group discussions with *Adult Regular Users* was factors that facilitate the use of indoor facilities and outdoor spaces. The discussion also included the general factors that facilitate the use of these areas for recreation.

Indoor Facilities

Affordability and reasonable cost to use indoor facilities was an important factor that facilitated use. Participants felt that membership costs were a good value and indicated that they were satisfied with the fee structure for individuals of different ages. Appropriate equipment was another facilitator mentioned by participants that directly pertains to indoor facilities. Participants mentioned that when facilities have the equipment that meets their specific needs (such as exercise or specialty equipment), this facilitates the use of these areas in the community. A participant provided the following example:

“... I work with three developmentally disabled adults, and we can’t use the Stony pool, so we have to use the one at the Tri, just because they have water wheelchairs.” (TRU 1, p. 13)

Outdoor Spaces

The main factor that facilitates the use of outdoor spaces was that they are free of cost to use. As shared by one participant:

“... That’s one of the great things about our community, is you can go to the dog park which is free, or you can use the walking trails and go to Chickakoo.” (TRU 1, p. 9)

General

Discussions with the two *Adult Regular User* groups revealed factors that act as general facilitators to the use of both indoor facilities and outdoor spaces. The first factor mentioned was personal motivation. Focus group participants provided two examples of personal motivation to engage in physical activity at the facilities and spaces. The first example of personal motivation was social interaction. Participants indicated that the social factor of certain activities, such as yoga, was motivating. The second example of personal motivation was the need to maintain personal fitness. Furthermore, one specific example shared by a participant was the need to maintain a level of physical fitness for certain employment opportunities:

“That’s what, well it has to be personal, because that’s what gets you there, is you want to be strong, you want to keep up with your fellow workers, whatever work you do. You want to be healthy.” (TRU 4, p. 57)

The second factor that acts as a general facilitator to the use of indoor facilities and outdoor spaces was the proximity to these places in the community. Having time in one’s schedule to engage in activities at facilities and spaces was mentioned as a third facilitator of their use.

Theme: Barriers to the Use of Indoor Facilities and Outdoor Spaces

A number of factors that act as barriers to the use of indoor facilities and outdoor spaces were raised during the discussions with *Adult Regular Users*. The barriers specific to the use of indoor facilities and outdoor spaces are presented separately below, followed by the general barriers to the use of both.

Indoor Facilities

Four barriers to the use of indoor facilities came through in the discussions with *Adult Regular Users*. The first of these barriers was cost. Although the participants generally agreed that membership costs are a good value, some expressed that certain members of the community may not be able to afford to use facilities:

“... There’s some people that just can’t afford to go to the Tri all the time, and some people that just don’t have the money, because of what they charge.” (TRU, 1 p. 9)

“I think for a family... if you wanted to take four kids and two adults to the Tri, just drop in... it becomes costly.” (TRU 1, p. 11)

The second barrier to the use of indoor facilities was crowding. Focus group participants indicated that when facilities are crowded with too many people, this deters them from using the facilities. Some opinions shared by participants include the following:

“So then the facilities at the Tri might not be that attractive if every time you go there, oh man, it’s like a mad house.” (TRU 1, p. 17)

“I have left the Tri without using it, because of the crowding” (TRU 1, p. 17)

“I don’t go [to the Tri Leisure] on the weekends, cause it’s just too crowded.” (TRU 1. P. 19)

The third factor that acts as a barrier to their use of indoor facilities was feeling intimidated by the exercise equipment at these facilities and by the presence of other people using the equipment. As expressed by one participant, a lack of knowledge about how to use exercise equipment contributes to this feeling of intimidation:

“I mean sometimes, well I feel intimidated with those machines, because I don’t know how to use some, and there’s everybody in there...” (TRU 1, p. 55)

Longer travel distances were mentioned as a general barrier to the use of indoor facilities. Focus group participants described how, for those who live in rural areas, the far travel distance to get to facilities prohibits their use. Some participants shared the following regarding travel distances as a barrier:

“Unfortunately if you’re living out in the rural area, you’re going to have to make that trip to go in.” (TRU 4, p. 82)

“You know cause I’ve talked to people in the west end of the county, and I said ‘do you use the Tri’ – ‘oh I wouldn’t go that far’”. (TRU 1, p.91)

In addition to further travel distances, winter road conditions were also mentioned as a barrier to using indoor facilities, specifically. The following was expressed by one focus group participant:

“... I find that the road in the winter... that would stop me from coming in.” (TRU 4, p. 83)

Outdoor Spaces

Three main barriers to using outdoor spaces in the community were shared by focus group participants. Ice on trails, creating slippery and unsafe conditions, was considered a barrier. As shared by participants:

“... I find [the trails] practically unusable in the winter, because of the ice.” (TRU 4, p. 15)

“Last year the outdoor trails got pretty treacherous.” (TRU 1, p. 87)

A second barrier was the isolation of these areas and how this could pose a personal safety issue. Participants shared the following about the isolation of outdoor spaces:

“Well if I go out to the park areas that are not near any facilities or other people, then it’s more safety if I fall, have an accident... I can’t reach my phone or can’t get to my phone, then I want other people with me.” (TRU 4, p. 66)

“And you also can’t call 9-1-1 and say ‘I’m at Chickakoo’ ... they won’t know where you are.” (TRU 4, p. 67)

The third barrier to the use of outdoor spaces, specifically, was large dogs on acreages. This was mentioned as being a barrier to walking in certain areas. As noted by one participant:

“And walking, if you’re on an acreage going for a walk, [it] isn’t always the best thing, because practically every acreage has a couple big dogs... so that stops people. I know it does, it stops me.” (TRU 4, p. 78)

General

Participants described personal health limitations experienced through aging as the one factor that acts as a general barrier to the use of both indoor facilities and outdoor spaces. Focus group participants shared the following about health limitations as a barrier to engagement in activity at indoor facilities and outdoor spaces:

“Yeah because injuries are a little bit, take a little longer to heal, and you know, something from years of abuse, knees are bad, shoulders are bad, and you can’t do – you’re brain wants

to do what you're doing, but as soon as you try to do something you used to, you pay for it."
(TRU 4, p. 9)

"Or in my case, as you get older, like I'm a senior here anyway, it's your health limitations."
(TRU 4, p. 26)

Theme: Suggested Improvements for Programming and Communication

During the discussions with *Adult Regular User* focus group participants, a few suggestions for improvements to programming and communication at indoor facilities and outdoor spaces were shared.

Indoor Facilities

One suggestion provided by participants was for facilities to offer dance classes or opportunities that combine physical activity with social interaction. For example:

"... it just occurred to me that...things like dance classes, and I know when you're working you don't have time for that, but maybe more for retirees. You know more social things, but physical social things... such as you know, dance classes" (TRU 4, p. 71-72)

Another suggestion shared by participants was to offer opportunities for drop-in curling.

"... I would probably go curl once in a while, if there would just be an open night somewhere, where you could just drop in, you don't have to join a league and be an excellent curler... so you know, if there was an opportunity like that, where they can just make an open night for somebody to drop in..." (TRU 1, p. 41)

It was indicated that offering classes at facilities directly after working hours may increase participation in these classes by those who work in town and live in the more rural areas. One participant suggested the following:

"You could have a program that starts at 5 o'clock, or 4:30, and run for an hour, or two hours. Then they'll do that program in town and then drive home." (TRU 4, p. 84)

Another suggestion made about programming was to provide complimentary one-time passes to indoor facilities as an incentive for community members to use these facilities. The following was shared by one *Adult Regular User*:

“I think that one of the things they should try to do, is to encourage people to use it by sending them one pass” (TRU 1, p. 65)

The discussions with *Adult Regular Users* revealed that there was a lack of information available about programming at indoor facilities. One participant shared the following, indicating the difficulty in accessing information regarding programming available at facilities:

“... even the classes at the Tri, I mean there’s billboards in the Tri Leisure about classes that are more privatized, but you have to be in the Tri and know where the board is.” (TRU 4, p. 69)

One suggestion provided by focus group participants would be to improve the amount of information provided to community members about activities and programs available at indoor facilities. Effective communication through modes accessible by all members of the community, such as newsletters or the newspaper, may help to improve the accessibility of programming.

Outdoor Spaces

The main suggestion provided by *Adult Regular Users* was to increase the amount of information about outdoor spaces. Participants specifically indicated that they would like more information available about the location of trails in the area. As shared by one participant:

“Like some of the places, they could have more information... like some of the trails, probably.” (TRU 1, p. 36)

Theme: Suggested Improvements to Existing Facilities and Spaces and Ideas for New Facilities and Spaces

During the discussions with *Adult Regular Users*, suggestions for improvements to existing indoor facilities and outdoor spaces, as well as ideas for new facilities, were shared.

Indoor Facilities

Adult Regular Users made one suggestion for improving for existing facilities in Tri-Region.

Participants indicated that more specialty rooms (i.e., rooms that are separate from the larger gym area) containing Swiss balls, Olympic weights, and other specialty equipment, would be beneficial. One participant shared the following:

“I think we need more of those rooms... cause they’re very booked with classes” (TRU 4, p. 61).

This suggestion could be implemented through the construction of more specialty rooms or by making adjustments to the programming to allow individuals not participating in classes to utilize these spaces.

A few ideas for new facilities were also shared by *Adult Regular Users*. One suggestion was to construct racquet sport facilities in the Tri-Region area. Participants indicated that there are no racquet sport facilities in the area, and the members of the community would benefit from this type of facility. One participant expressed the following:

“... you have to go to Edmonton for racket sports. And again, that’s a really specialized kind of small group of people... but it’d be nice for that group of people to have access here.” (TRU 1, p. 83)

Adult Regular User focus group participants also indicated that an additional facility like the Tri Leisure Centre could be of value to the community. As mentioned by one participant:

“Yeah there’s no question, I think we could always use another facility like [the Tri Leisure Centre], you know, just further west.” (TRU 1, p. 19)

Outdoor Spaces

Adult Regular Users provided a number of suggestions for improvements to existing outdoor spaces as well as ideas for new spaces in the Tri-Region. One suggested improvement to existing walking paths was to increase the number of benches beside the paths. As shared by one participant:

“Speaking from my mother-in-law who is 89 years old and still walks in Spruce Grove, more benches to sit down at... more benches on some places for the elderly people, because they like to go for a walk, but they need to sit.” (TRU 1, p. 98)

A few participants also noted that outdoor facilities could be improved by constructing shelters or buildings to provide an area for people to warm up in the winter months. Participants shared the following about this improvement to outdoor spaces:

“I guess some of those outdoor facilities could have, like Chickakoo doesn’t really have much of a building anymore to warm up, or that kind of thing.” (TRU 1, p. 69)

“A shelter or something, added to some of our outdoor facilities would be nice.” (TRU 1, p. 69)

Others suggested that a walking trail between Spruce Grove and Stony Plain would be of great benefit to the community. As mentioned by one participant:

“The only thing we’re lacking, what a lot of people would like to see, is a trail between [Spruce Grove and Stony Plain].” (TRU 1, p. 28)

One *Adult Regular User* participant offered a final suggestion for a new outdoor space in the community. This participant indicated that youth would benefit from having a designated area to play street hockey in. This participant shared the following:

“... the one thing that I know a lot of kids, know a lot of high school age kids would love to have in our community, is somewhere to play street hockey. They get kicked off of every place in the community for street hokey.” (TRU 1, p. 74)

Theme: Suggested Improvements to Transportation

Adult Regular Users provided one suggestion regarding public transportation related to facility use. They suggested that a bus service that takes people to and from indoor facilities and outdoor spaces would increase access to these places by all members of the Tri-Region area. One participant shared the following about this suggested improvement to public transportation:

“And I wondered if the municipalities couldn’t get together in this Tri area here, and have a bus that would be specific for taking people to recreation things.” (TRU 4, p. 53)

Theme: Use of Private Facilities

The final theme to emerge from the analysis of discussions with *Adult Regular User* groups was the positive and negative aspects of private facilities. Some participants indicated that they enjoy using private facilities in the community. For example, one participant shared the following:

“...the only private facility I go to is the hot yoga... and I quite enjoy that... as you say it’s not for everyone. I find it suits my needs, for sure.” (TRU 2, p. 34)

Participants also had ideas about why private facilities may be attractive to certain individuals, as expressed by the following participant:

“You know it’s going to be quieter at Perpetual Fitness than it would be at the Tri, you’re almost guaranteed. So I definitely see the purpose and I think it’s great that we have both.” (TRU 1, p. 51)

In addition to the positive aspects of private facilities, focus group participants indicated a few perceived drawbacks. *Adult Regular Users* indicated that the high cost to use private facilities and take part in classes at these facilities was one negative factor. In addition, one participant indicated that private facilities have less to offer than facilities such as the Tri Leisure Centre because they are not multi-use facilities.

Adult Non-Regular Users

Demographic Information

The following figures display demographic information about the *Adult Non-Regular User* focus group participants, including age, gender, household income, as well as area of the community where they reside.

Figure 1. Age of *Adult Non-Regular User* Focus Group Participants

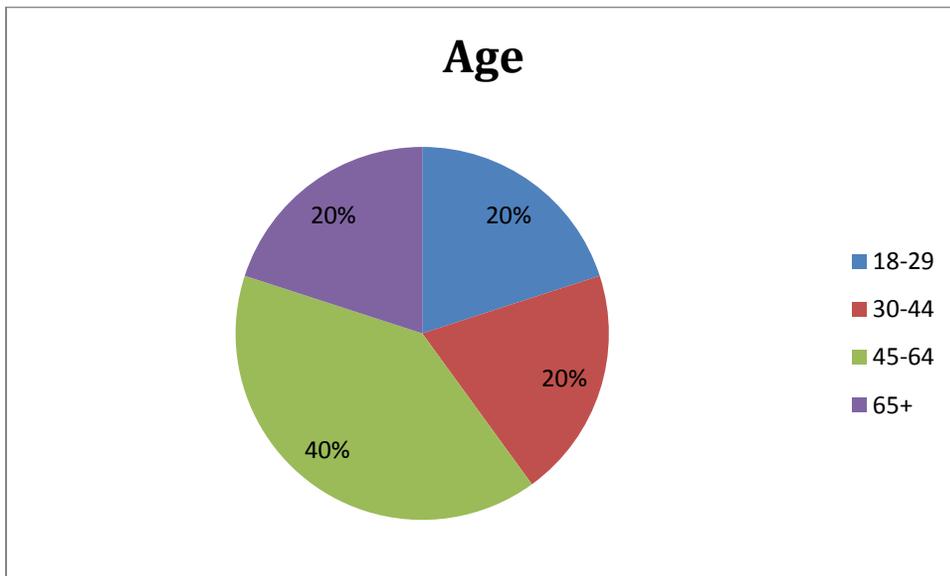


Figure 2. Gender of *Adult Non-Regular User* Focus Group Participants

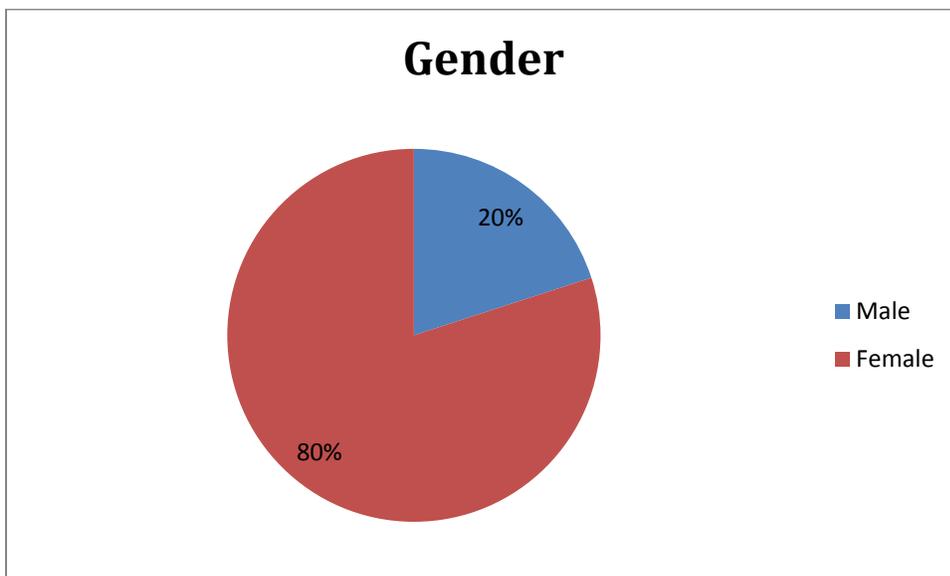


Figure 3. Total Household Income of *Adult Non-Regular User* Focus Group Participants

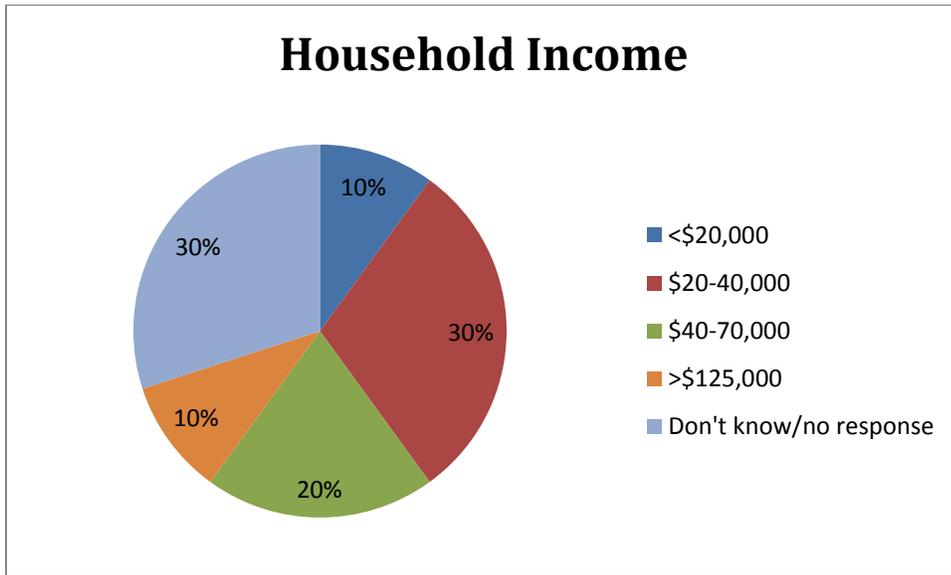
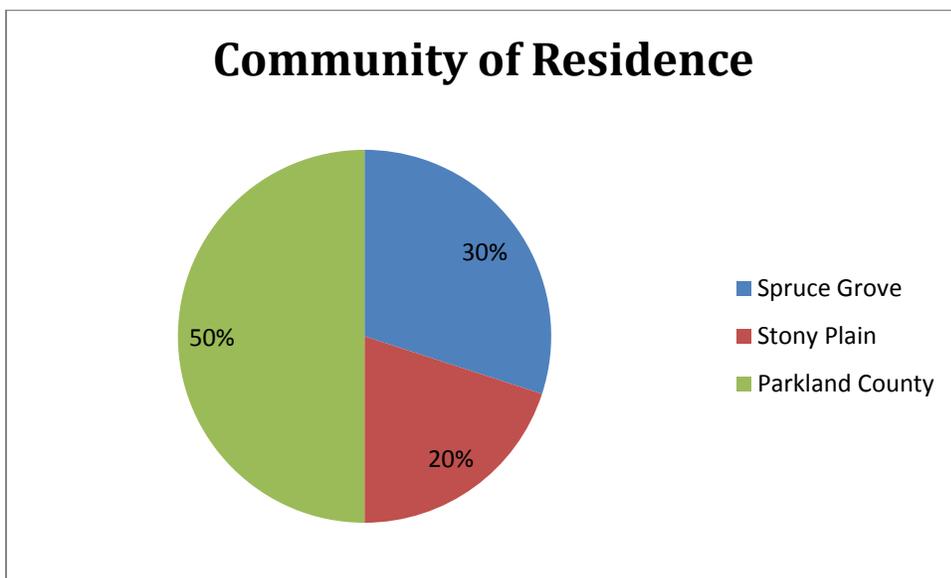


Figure 4. Community where *Adult Non-Regular User* Focus Group Participants Reside



Findings from Discussions with Adult Non-Regular Users

The discussions with *Adult Non-Regular Users* illuminated some similar findings to those found through discussions with *Adult Regular Users* noted in the previous section, however, a number of different findings also emerged. As with the focus groups conducted with *Adult Regular Users*, discussions began by asking participants “what does physical activity mean to you?” This question was asked to initiate the flow of ideas and to help participants start thinking about opportunities for physical activity within their community. Some of the responses to this question that participants shared include the following:

“Being fit.” (TRNU 2, p.3)

“Moving to the best of your ability.” (TRNU 2, p. 3)

“... it doesn’t always have to have the focus of health, I don’t think. It can be for enjoyment or... stress reduction, or anything really...” (TRNU 5, p. 5)

“An hour of physical activity a day.” (TRNU 2, p. 4)

“Skiing, skating, snowshoeing, biking, and even like with walking or biking... it sometimes gets me to go to the grocery store too... instead of [taking the] car.” (TRNU 5, p. 7)

The major findings of our discussions conducted with *Adult Non-Regular Users* have been organized into five major themes, which are presented in the sections below.

Theme: Facilitators of the Use of Indoor Facilities and Outdoor Spaces

One theme to emerge from the analysis of discussions with *Adult Non-Regular Users* was the factors that facilitate the use of indoor facilities and outdoor spaces. Participants shared two factors that acted as facilitators to their use of indoor facilities and outdoor spaces. The first factor mentioned was personal motivation to engage in physical activity. Participants indicated that social interaction is a motivator to engage in physical activities at both indoor facilities and outdoor spaces, as exemplified by the following quotations:

“... but it’s once a week and you get out and you get to know people. You dance with them, and you’re exercising at the same time, which is really nice.” (TRNU 5, p. 24)

“Well I play ball... in Edmonton... so it’s more about the social aspect of it.” (TRNU 2, p. 60)

The second factor participants mentioned as being a facilitator to their use of indoor facilities and outdoor spaces was close proximity. One *Adult Non-Regular User* shared the following, indicating that close proximity to outdoor spaces is convenient:

“It’s easier for me to walk around my subdivision. I don’t have to drive anywhere.” (TRNU 2, p. 60)

In addition to close proximity of walking trails as a facilitator of their use, participants indicated that no-cost outdoor activities were also attractive:

“At home in Wabamun we have lots of trails, so there I go out my door and pick a trail...So we are very fortunate out there, we have a lot of activities that we can do for free.” (TRNU 2, p. 64)

Theme: Barriers to Use of Indoor Facilities and Outdoor Spaces

A second major theme to emerge from the discussions with *Adult Non-Regular Users* was the barriers to their use of facilities and spaces. Participants shared barriers specific to both indoor facilities and outdoor spaces, as well as a number of general barriers to the use of both facilities and spaces within the community. These barriers are presented below.

Indoor Facilities

Adult Non-Regular Users shared three major barriers to their use of indoor facilities. The first of these barriers mentioned was a feeling of self-consciousness at indoor facilities. One participant shared the following about feeling uncomfortable and self-conscious at the gym:

“And I find it hard to go to [the] gym...because I’m afraid of what other people think, oh she’s too frumpy, she should work out more, just something like that. Like I just have that self-conscious little thing in my mind telling me, and that...doesn’t make me want to go [to] gyms, so I do mostly work out at home, or just, you know, walking.” (TRNU 5, p. 17)

One female participant also indicated that exercising in the same facility as males can sometimes make her feel self-conscious:

“I think when the male equation is out, even though it doesn’t really matter, cause I have a boyfriend and stuff, I still feel self-conscious all the time in front of them.” (TRNU 5, p. 15)

The second barrier to the use of indoor facilities was scheduling difficulties. One participant indicated that some of the programs at the Tri Leisure Centre are not offered at a convenient time, and this acts as a barrier to use:

“Some of the activities [at] the Tri Leisure, maybe not at a good time, for when I’m available.” (TRNU 2, p. 13)

The third major barrier was that indoor facilities are expensive, and that the high cost to use these facilities acts as a barrier to their use. The following quotations exemplify how cost may be a barrier to the use of indoor facilities:

“The Tri Leisure is expensive.” (TRNU 2, p. 23)

“...the only thing is the cost for me to go... and do that, I just can’t afford it right now, but I would really like to.” (TRNU 5, p. 27)

“To take a family there, you know, it’s a lot of money. So I would say for most people it’s not even an option.” (TRNU 2, p. 29)

“If you want to go on the walking track, you know, 7 bucks, that’s an awful lot of money.” (TRNU, p. 23)

Outdoor Spaces

Adult Non-Regular Users had a few comments regarding factors that act as barriers to the use of outdoor spaces. Participants indicated that it is difficult to use some of the open spaces within their communities because they are not well maintained. One *Adult Non-Regular User* shared the following regarding this lack of maintenance:

“Well I got a 16 acre reserve right beside me, you can’t even walk through with the windfall and deadfall... and rose bushes and everything else... well it’s not accessible” (TRNU 2, p.66)

Another participant shared that the presence of drug paraphernalia at the toboggan hill is a barrier to the use of this outdoor space:

“We’ve got a green space in our subdivision, that has a really nice tobogganing hill, or that’s what it’s turned out to be... the road has since, since we moved in has been reconstructed and paved. It’s Campsite Road and we get a lot of young people coming in, especially in the summer time, from Spruce and I’m not sure where else... who exchange drugs there, and

there's syringes, there's beer bottles. There's everything there. When the police are called it takes them a very long time to come out do to anything about it. So you tend not to even want to take your grandchild there to toboggan because [you're] afraid of what you might come across." (TRNU 2, p. 77)

General

Focus group discussions with *Adult Non-Regular Users* revealed a number of general barriers to the use of both indoor facilities and outdoor spaces. The first of these general barriers mentioned was far travel distances:

"Because if I was five minutes away from the Tri Leisure I would definitely, you can squeeze it in, but when you have to drive all the way here and stuff, when you're in surrounding areas, then it makes it harder." (TRNU 2, p. 14)

"Accessibility for me, I mean it's 15 miles to come [to Spruce Grove]" (TRNU 2, p. 31)

The second general barrier revealed was personal health limitations due to illness. Two participants shared the following about how their illness can act as a barrier to engaging in physical activity:

"I was diagnosed with metastatic cancer, so it was a total drop... like for energy, for strength, for everything, as I'm getting better... I notice my strength and everything goes up. But I look towards going to like the Tri Leisure, even like the Kinsmen would, it'd be as if you have to keep up to them."

"My health is not good. I have to be close to a bathroom."

"Right. So it creates some barriers for some spaces."

"It does sometimes, yeah I think so." (TRNU 2, p. 16)

The third general barrier to the use of both facilities and spaces was personal motivation, as exemplified by the following participant quotations:

"Plus the motivation again, like you know as I said, I'm highly motivated at certain times to do this tomorrow, but... tomorrow never comes, you know what I mean." (TRNU 2, p. 32)

“I think Stony in particular, have so many beautiful trails, that for me, it’s the lack of motivation.” (TRNU 2, p. 100)

Theme: Suggestions for Improvements to Programming and Communication at Indoor Facilities and Outdoor Spaces

The discussions with *Adult Non-Regular Users* clearly revealed that there was a lack of knowledge about what types of opportunities for physical activity are available in the Tri-Region area. The following quotations demonstrate this general lack of knowledge about facilities and spaces:

“I volunteered to participate more to find out what there is around...because I am clueless as to what’s available in my own community.” (TRNU 2, p. 25)

“You know when you see a sign or you know you pick up a flyer...then at least you have a little bit of information about some of the things that might be available, but I’m hearing about all of these things for the very first time. I didn’t even know Stony had ice, let alone indoor and outdoor.” (TRNU 2, p. 41)

Adult Non-Regular Users had a few suggestions as to how communication about recreation opportunities at indoor facilities and outdoor spaces could be improved. One participant shared the following about the need for more advertising about program opportunities available:

“... advertising, they got to like do a little more, because it’s like a needle in the haystack for trying to find out all the information from maps that, you’re going to Tri Leisure and seeing if there is like programs. Yeah good luck...” (TRNU 5, p. 44)

A few ideas on how information could be advertised were provided by *Adult Non-Regular Users*, including:

“You can advertise stuff in the library” (TRNU 5, p. 84)

“You know like a trade show almost... like in the Tri Leisure... what if they had something for like advertising physical activity opportunities.” (TRNU 5, p. 69)

“I was just thinking that I got this book at Costco about things to do around Edmonton and stuff... what if they made like a little thing about Spruce Grove and Stony Plain, and they handed it out at big places.” (TRNU 2, p. 89)

“List of what’s available, when it’s available, cost, you know, just even like a brochure you know, for the area.” (TRNU 2, p. 44)

Some suggested improvements to programming were also provided by participants. *Adult Non-Regular Users* shared that unless you are involved with a team, it is sometimes difficult to access facilities:

“They’re saying like the teams, like the teams, if it’s not organized sports it’s not as available for people that just want to go and play hockey, you know... just recreational skating, like that’s not as available, you have to be involved in teams.” (TRNU 2, p. 88)

Their recommendation would be to increase the amount of opportunities for those not on teams to access recreation facilities such as at swimming pools and hockey rinks.

Adult Non-Regular Users also had suggestions about the passes for programs at recreation facilities. They noted that one of the difficulties with scheduled classes is that it is sometimes challenging to go to all of the classes within a given time period. Their suggestion was to increase the number of drop-in class options at indoor facilities. As shared by one participant:

“It would be nice if some programs didn’t have like a fee for 10 sessions.” (TRNU 5, p. 27)

In addition, participants mentioned that reducing the restrictions on passes (i.e., the need to pay for additional activities on top of memberships) would increase the use of indoor facilities:

“... if they had less restrictions I think a lot of people would actually be more inclined to try it more, because there’s more options available.” (TRNU 5, p. 57)

Furthermore, participants also suggested that complimentary one-time use passes be provided to community members as an incentive for them to use indoor facilities.

The unavailability of childcare during the times of certain scheduled classes was mentioned as a barrier, for example:

“And their child care is ok, but... it was always at times that didn’t really mesh with the times of classes, so it wasn’t available for me when I needed it.” (TRNU 2, p. 30)

Opportunities for engagement in classes at indoor facilities could be increased among parents with children if options for childcare were better aligned with scheduled classes.

Two specific ideas for programming were also provided by *Adult Non-Regular Users*. The first arises from comments made by participants regarding a lack of recreation opportunities for individuals of all ages, as exemplified by the following participant quotation:

“... I’ve been looking and all I see around here is senior citizens and then moms, and then kids. It’s like ok, what is there much for me, really nothing.” (TRNU 5, p. 23)

It was suggested to provide more programs for people of all ages to improve overall access to recreation opportunities at indoor facilities.

The second specific recommendation made by participants was to create walking groups to help motivate members of the community through social engagement. One participant shared the following about this suggestion:

“Like a group of people that are motivating each other to walk, and so you get to just chat and go for a walk or something.” (TRNU 5, p. 36)

Outdoor Spaces

The one recommendation provided by participants regarding improvements to programming and communication at outdoor spaces was to advertise outdoor spaces through community events. As shared by one participant:

“... how convenient would it be gathering these people in this one big area, and then... you know you see everything.” (TRNU 5, p. 69)

This participant suggested that community events should be held in areas close to outdoor spaces so that community members could see what is available for them to use. The fireworks during the winter holiday season were suggested as one such community event that could help to advertise the outdoor spaces, such as toboggan hills and skating rinks, within the area.

Theme: Suggested Improvements to Existing Facilities and Spaces and Ideas for New Facilities and Spaces

During the discussions with *Adult Non-Regular Users*, a number of suggestions for ways in which existing facilities and spaces could be improved were provided, along with ideas for new facilities and spaces.

Indoor Facilities

Adult Non-Regular Users had a few suggestions for how existing indoor facilities could be improved. One suggestion was to enhance the Tri Leisure Centre to turn it into more of a leisure facility through the provision of wireless internet, more comfortable places to sit, and other ideas:

“Well that’s the thing, being the Tri Leisure being a public facility it’s, I don’t know, it’s lacking for me. I wish it was better... I wish it was more of a leisure facility, where I could go there and spend some time. To drive in there for half an hour class, well what if there was free Wi-Fi... what if there was a Tim Horton’s, what if there was, the library had been put there. What if there was an actual leisure facility that I could spend more than a half an hour. I’m not going to work out for three hours, I just want to go in and make it worth my while, and it’s not really worth, it’s not worth the while to go in there... like there’s not comfortable places to sit, like it’s not a leisure facility, and it would be nice if it was, people would use it more” (TRNU 2, p. 90)

One comment shared by an *Adult Non-Regular User* indicated that the family change rooms at the Tri Leisure Centre could use improvement:

“Yeah the family room is awful, it has very few lockers, it’s dirty sometimes. They don’t clean it well enough.” (TRNU 2, p. 34)

This discussion revealed the importance of ensuring that indoor facilities are maintained and kept clean, as this may increase the use of these facilities by community members.

Outdoor Spaces

It was shared by participants that certain outdoor spaces are not easily accessible by those who use walking aids. As shared by one participant:

“Some of the access to the trails are a problem, if I do go for a walk I need my walker... so the ramps to on and off the trails, well there are no ramps”. (TRNU 2, p. 102)

Increasing the number of ramps or other structures that would facilitate the use of trails by those requiring the assistance of walking aids may increase the accessibility and use of these spaces.

Adult Non-Regular Users also had ideas for new outdoor spaces. One idea provided by a participant was to create a batting cage facility in the Tri-Region:

“If the batting cages from Whitemud would come over here, I’d be happy.” (TRNU 5, p. 24)

A second suggestion was to develop a walking trail between Spruce Grove and Stony Plain.

Theme: Opinions about the Use and Development of Community Spaces

One interesting theme to emerge in the *Adult Non-Regular User* groups was that there are differing opinions on the development of open community spaces into areas for recreation. Some participants held the opinion that the open spaces designated for community use could be developed to provide more spaces for recreation, as exemplified by the following quotations:

“...I mean you’ve got all this wide open space and they’ve done nothing with it, like nothing.” (TRNU 2, p. 70).

“Well throw up some monkey bars for the kids in the neighborhood you know, whatever.” (TRNU 2, p. 70)

While these *Adult Non-Regular Users* felt that the development of community spaces for recreational purposes would be of benefit to the community, other participants indicated that they would not ever want the open spaces in their communities to be developed and they would like them to stay the way they are. One participant who held this view shared the following:

“Yeah, I don’t know, it just depends on the place. I’m not interested in my subdivision park for being developed, at all... it’s just there, and I don’t, we don’t have a problem with it, I wouldn’t want it developed, and I’m hoping it never is, so. (TRNU 2, p. 81)

Youth

Demographic Information

The *Youth* focus group had five participants, including four males and one female. Participants ranged in age from 13 to 16. Four participants were from Parkland County and one lived in Stony Plain.

Findings from Discussion with Youth (aged 13-17)

The discussions with the youth started in a similar manner to the discussions conducted with the adult groups. Participants were first asked, “what does being physically active mean to you?” The discussions started with participants sharing a number of responses to this question, including:

“To get out and do something for your health, slash just for fun, it’s part social, socializing with friends, and having fun.” (TRY, p. 3)

“Participating in a sport, like a team or something.” (TRY, p. 4)

“Exercise.” (TRY, p. 3)

The focus group discussions continued by asking the youth a number of questions about their use of indoor facilities and outdoor spaces. Five major themes emerged through the analysis of the focus group discussions with Tri-Region *Youth*, and are presented in the following sections.

Theme: Satisfaction with Indoor Facilities and Outdoor Spaces

Youth focus group participants indicated that they were satisfied overall with indoor facilities and outdoor spaces in the community. They shared the following, indicating that they are happy with the Tri Leisure Centre, specifically.

“The Tri is really well built that way, the areas and space is used perfectly... like you think of just the running track, they got way upstairs is basically right by the ceiling, so its not in the way of anything else.” (TRY, p. 20)

“I like how sometimes at the Tri they have that little floating obstacle course.” (TRY, p. 72)

They also indicated they were happy with the trail system and other outdoor spaces, such as the Stony Plain Pool.

Theme: Facilitators of the Use of Indoor Facilities and Outdoor Spaces

Youth focus group participants identified socializing with peers as a facilitator for the use of indoor facilities. With respect to outdoor spaces, warm weather was mentioned as the primary factor contributing to the use of trails in the summer months. Close proximity to outdoor spaces was also noted as being facilitative, as exemplified by the following quotation:

“I still live in Stony, but where I used to live in Stony I was not even a block away from the outdoor pool, so it was everyday during the summer I was there... but now I’m on the other side of town, it’s a bit harder to get to, so I didn’t go there at all this summer...” (TRY, p. 9)

Theme: Barriers to the Use of Indoor Facilities and Outdoor Spaces

During the focus group discussions with youth, a number of different factors that act as barriers to their use of both indoor facilities and outdoor spaces emerged.

Challenges with Transportation

Difficulty in accessing transportation was the most significant barrier to the use of indoor facilities and outdoor spaces among the youth. The majority of the discussion regarding perceived barriers to the use of indoor facilities and outdoor spaces focused on their reliance on parents for rides to indoor facilities. Some of the difficulties shared by participants were as follows:

“I guess yeah transportation’s the biggest thing.” (TRY, p. 7)

“Yeah exactly, you know there’s certain days where... you can go to the Tri and say those days your parents can’t drive you there because they’re working, and when they’re off you don’t either feel like it, or you’ve got school, or other commitments and you can’t go...” (TRY, p.24)

“... that’s the only real thing that stops me from using stuff more often, is that I can’t get rides there very well.” (TRY, p.93)

Another transportation-related barrier to accessing facilities and spaces mentioned by youth was further travel distances and travel time:

“No, mostly for like, in my case, mostly, like all the stuff’s in town... yeah, so you got to drive out to get there.” (TRY, p.8)

“Like and the biggest thing with the time is just the transportation of getting there.” (TRY, p. 23)

One participant indicated that poor road conditions in the winter months can be a barrier to accessibility:

“It’s more with accessibility...for instance, with Chickakoo in the winter, those roads aren’t really maintained... so it’s not necessarily the fact of how far away it is, it’s the actual, the road conditions.” (TRY, p. 36)

Outdoor Spaces

Youth focus group participants noted three specific barriers to their use of outdoor spaces. One barrier was that both youth and their parents perceive the skateboard park in Stony Plain as unsafe. The major concern shared was that both youth and their parents do not feel comfortable with the type of people who are present at the skateboard park at times. The following demonstrate this feeling of unease:

“I guess one thing would be, for instance not necessarily the BMX track but the skateboard park... and how, like there’s people that would want to go there to just, to go there and have fun with it, but there’s then the people that are there that, I guess scare people off maybe... I actually, I last summer, it was me and one of my friends and we go to the skate park all the time, and if we’re not scared of the people that are there, go to the skate park [or] the BMX track, or whatever’s not as busy. As then the one time I invited two of my other friends, and

they basically when they saw that we were going to the skate park, they stopped and turned around and went home.” (TRY, p. 39)

“Like my parents are still nervous and weary about letting me go to the BMX track, and skateboard park. I’m 17, and they still don’t want me going [to] those places.” (TRY, p. 85)

Another specific barrier mentioned by youth was that the ice track in Stony Plain is not available for use because it is locked. One participant shared the following about this barrier:

“The thought that like, the one thing that I don’t like that the, I guess the town did or whether it was the organization or the Town, but there’d be an ice track in Stony Plain where it used to be just completely public, anyone could go use it whenever you wanted. And then the organization they fenced it off, put a lock on it.” (TRY, p. 13)

The third barrier directly related to outdoor spaces was that vandalism of ice rinks in Stony Plain makes these spaces unusable for periods of time. As shared by one participant about this issue:

“...then they’ve got the problem with, there’s people in town that’ll go there and they will grab the rocks from around the edge of it and throw the rocks on the ice and see if they can break through the ice... and then there’s just, so there’s tons of rocks all over the ice here, and the town’s got to go and pick out all those rocks, making it another two weeks before it’s open for public skating...” (TRY, p. 49-50)

Theme: Suggested Improvements to Existing Facilities and Spaces and Ideas for New Facilities and Spaces

A number of ideas for improvements to existing facilities and spaces, as well as suggestions for new outdoor spaces, were provided by the youth.

Indoor Facilities

One suggestion for increasing the use of an existing indoor facility was to have the gym at Memorial Composite High School open to the public after school hours:

“Yeah, I could see like if the Memorial gym was open after school for, not even just the people that go to the school but for the public, I mean there’s lots of parking at the high school. Lots of people could just go and there’s a nice gym and good facilities.” (TRY, p.31)

The other suggestions regarding improving an existing facility were to add some new elements to the Tri Leisure Centre pool. Some examples of suggestions provided by the youth are as follows:

“A new slide at the Tri Leisure.” (TRY, p. 67)

“Yeah a new water slide.” (TRY, p. 67)

“A zip-line into the pool.” (TRY, p. 68)

“Well I’ve seen in some, like it’d be a great thing to put at the Tri even, I’ve seen places where the pool there, and they’ll put a climbing wall basically beside the pool.” (TRY, p. 71)

Outdoor Spaces

One comment made by the *Youth* focus group was that if certain existing spaces were better maintained, members of the community would use them. A specific example provided by one participant was the maintenance of a subdivision skating rink:

“Well there’s a little hockey rink in our little subdivision. No one ever like ices it, so no one ever goes to it... if it was iced it would be pretty fun, but... no one ever takes care of it” (TRY, p. 26)

When asked what would make parks in their community better for youth, one participant shared the following:

“Like add swings or something, or make awesome slides. So like, curly ones... to make it more entertaining for I guess, older kids. Like the people that do these kind of things, don’t realize anything, like there’s still a little kid in all of us... and they make these parks that are only for like 5,6, year old... and you know, you still kind of want to go there, just to, just cause but now it’s like boring.” (TRY, p. 56)

In addition to suggested improvements for existing outdoor spaces, the youth shared a few specific ideas for new spaces. Examples of these suggestions for new spaces included:

“It would be nice if they had a sail centre, near here.” (TRY, p. 42)

“We should have a zip-lining centre.” (TRY, p. 68)

“If they had like, something like Rabbit Hill but closer.” (TRY, p. 75)

Theme: Suggested Improvements to Transportation

As described in the above section outlining barriers to the use of indoor facilities and outdoor spaces, transportation emerged as one of the largest barriers faced by youth. During the discussion about their difficulties accessing transportation to facilities and spaces, a few ideas emerged about ways in which transportation could be improved for youth:

“... if there was a, one or two buses that constantly did routes from say, Stony- say town hall in Stony Plain to the Spruce Grove Tri. I’m sure the Tri would have so many people going there, like I’d use it.” (TRY, p. 78)

“They don’t have a bus that goes [to the Tri Leisure Centre] yet, so yeah you have to get a ride from parents, friends, someone.” (TRY, p. 79)

“But say something along the lines of like how there’s he coupons for the Tri... within that same kind of coupon there was included the ride there, say it was a bus or cab, you just show the driver and you’ve got this ride there... and say you or your parents, or you buy in advance like the coupons for the Tri” (TRY, p. 81).

These discussions revealed that enhancing public transportation options for youth could help increase their access to – and use of – indoor facilities and outdoor spaces in the Tri-Region area.

Summary of Main Thematic Findings from Focus Groups

The table below summarizes the major thematic findings that emerged through the focus groups with *Adult Regular Users*, *Adult Non-Regular Users*, and *Youth* in the Tri-Region.

Theme	<i>Adult Regular User Focus Groups</i>	<i>Adult Non-Regular User Focus Groups</i>	<i>Youth Focus Group</i>
Satisfaction with Indoor Facilities and Outdoor Spaces	•		•
Facilitators of the Use of Indoor Facilities and Outdoor Spaces	•	•	•
Barriers to the Use of Indoor Facilities and Outdoor Spaces	•	•	•
Suggested Improvements for Programming and Communication at Facilities and Spaces	•	•	
Suggestions for Maintenance of and Improvements to Existing Facilities and Spaces/Ideas for New Facilities and Spaces	•	•	•
Recommended Improvements to Public Transportation	•		•
Use of Private Facilities	•		
Opinions on the Use and Development of Community Spaces		•	

Limitations and Considerations

The discussions with community members revealed a number of very interesting points regarding the accessibility and use of indoor facilities and outdoor spaces within the Tri-Region area; however, there are some considerations that must be taken into account when interpreting findings from focus groups. As with most focus groups, our discussions only involved a few individuals. This small sample of individuals may not represent the larger community in their thoughts about indoor and outdoor recreation facilities, which must be taken into account when considering the findings. Additionally, when participants were recruited over the phone there were challenges with putting people into the correct group (*Regular User* vs. *Non-Regular User*). Some people may have self-selected themselves into the incorrect group.

It is also important to note some of the differences in socio-demographic variables between the *Adult Regular Users* and *Adult Non-Regular Users*. First, a larger proportion of the *Adult Non-Regular User* focus group participants were female (80%) than the *Adult Regular Users* (40%). Second, there was a greater representation of income levels among the *Adult Non-Regular Users* than the *Adult Regular User* groups. The differences in socio-demographics need to be considered because the sample of people that participated may not have been representative of the entire Tri-Region population. Some of their thoughts about the accessibility and use of indoor facilities and outdoor spaces in their community may be influenced by socio-demographic factors.

Conclusions

The focus groups conducted with *Adult Regular Users*, *Adult Non-Regular Users*, and *Youth* residents of the City of Spruce Grove, Town of Stony Plain, and Parkland County provided insight into residents' participation in recreation opportunities at indoor facilities and outdoor spaces. A number of facilitators and barriers to the use of facilities and spaces were described. Addressing some of the barriers to accessing indoor facilities and outdoor spaces identified by these focus groups could help to improve equitable access to recreation opportunities for all members of the Tri-Region community.