

Alberta Doctors' Digest

Keeping the kids moving

When Esther Sieben, Physical Education and Physical Literacy Lead at Cochrane High School, found out about the AMA Youth Run Club [Run, Walk, Roll Grant](#), she knew right away how she could apply those funds to helping Cochrane High School's students with complex needs participate in organized, outdoor physical activity.

"It's something they all love," says Esther. "It's never a chore to get them outside, running and moving."

The biggest challenges are transportation, equipment and human resources. "We need access to equipment such as wheelchairs, braces, modified implements and balls, and most importantly, specialized learning assistants," Esther explains. "And we need to have partners to run and be with the kids; to help and to cheer and encourage."

In her 20 years at Cochrane High School (grades 9 to 12), Esther has taught outdoor/physical education and social studies. Last year, shortly before the pandemic arrived, Esther had the opportunity to become the physical education and physical literacy lead at Cochrane High.

Presented by The Alberta Medical Association Youth Run Club we are giving schools the opportunity to apply for \$500, \$1,000 or \$2,000 (per school) to support your club this spring.



These grants were made possible by the generous donations of doctors from around the province



"We're going to make such good use of this grant!" - Esther Sieben, Physical Education and Physical Literacy Lead, Cochrane High School

In a year of extraordinary challenges and rewards, Esther has appreciated the assistance and support of Ever Active Schools (EAS), the AMA's partner in the AMA Youth Run Club. "Krista (Health & Wellness Consultant with EAS) told me about the

YRC's Run, Walk, Roll Grant and I immediately got excited," says Esther, who got right to work on her grant application, which she submitted in January.

"With the financial assistance of the grant," Esther explains, "I would be able to work with our school's learning assistants and the school's two learning support teachers, Cassi James and Midori Monan, to have the individual support the kids need to participate in unified sports activities."

"I'm always looking for ways to get them outside and active, and hands-on support is really the best, most effective form of assistance," she adds.

Thinking of her students with complex needs who are skilled runners and who, in a unified sports context (with a running partner) could join the school's track team and Youth Run Club, Esther says, "I've been building a program, based on unified sports, to identify ways we could include all students on our teams and in our YRC," says Esther.

Participating fully, getting the t-shirts and the water bottles – all the benefits of being a member of a team, or a club – that's what Esther, Cassi and Midori would really love to see their students experience.

When she found out in mid-April that her application for the Spring 2021 Run, Walk, Roll Grant had been successful, Esther shared the great news with her students. "They were over the moon!" she exclaims. "They wanted to start right away!" And as the spring weather cooperates, Esther anticipates they will be able to do just that (albeit within the parameters of pandemic restrictions).

"COVID restrictions do complicate things," she comments. "With our already-set ratio of students to teachers, aides/assistants, and then add in physical distancing requirements and we're more limited than normal; we can't all be outside at the same time," says Esther. "We're going to have to get creative."

While the Run, Walk, Roll Grant is normally applied to activities in the school season in which it is awarded, Esther and EAS have agreed to extend Cochrane High School's learning support grant into next fall, too. The numerous, COVID-related disruptions of the past 1.5 school years, with students learning in-school and from home (and back and forth), has complicated program planning.

"We are getting out already, as much as possible," says Esther, describing how she sets up pylons in a course around the school field. For the students with a wheelchair and a walker, and others who just like it, Esther says they have "The Jet Run." It's sidewalk around the school that the students get on for some smooth sailin'!

"They're great kids," says Esther. "We're going to make such good use of this grant!"

About the AMA YRC Run, Walk, Roll Grant

Begun last fall as a pandemic-inspired initiative to help schools maintain physical activity as a priority for students during the pandemic, the inaugural \$10,000 AMA YRC [Run, Walk, Roll Grant](#) was kindly funded by AMA Youth Run Club gold sponsor, [Alberta Blue Cross](#).

Excited by the opportunity that AMA member donations afforded Ever Active Schools to maintain the popular grant, EAS promoted a spring 2021 version. Twelve schools and

their AMA Youth Run Clubs benefitted from this spring's \$15,000 Run, Walk, Roll Grant, generously funded through the donations of AMA member physicians. In 2020, members donated over \$21,000 to the AMA Youth Run Club.

AMA Youth Run Club sponsors

Since it began in 2013 with 4,000 kids and 77 schools, the AMA Youth Run Club has been steadily growing in participant numbers and expanding its program offerings. This school-based, inclusive health and physical activity initiative would not be possible without the support of our generous [program sponsors](#): Alberta Blue Cross (gold); MD Financial Management & Scotiabank Healthcare+ (silver); and Canadian Tire Jumpstart (in-kind).

Banner image: Cochrane High School Physical Education & Physical Literacy Lead, Esther Sieben (far left), learning support teachers, students and CHS's impressive Cobra mascot gather in the gym to celebrate receiving an AMA YRC Run, Rock, Roll Grant in April.