

Alberta Doctors' Digest

Endings and beginnings are all good with the AMA Youth Run Club

The [AMA Youth Run Club](#) began its 2020 fall season last September somewhat “COVID-tentatively,” with fewer clubs than normal, but by the time the school year wrapped up in June, the YRC had hit its stride, with 210 schools registered and over 8,000 students from 39 schools participating in the province-wide Virtual Fun Run May 17–28.

Grants

Every year, on behalf of the YRC, [Ever Active Schools](#) (AMA’s partner in the YRC) applies for a variety of physical activity-, health- and student-related grants, with received grant funds distributed among schools with AMA Youth Run Clubs.

This year, Cleardale Colony School in the Peace River School Division was one of the fortunate recipients of a YRC grant to be applied to developing their YRC. In a thank you note to EAS, Cleardale Colony teacher Margaret King said, “We do not have a gymnasium, but our students are very active! By partnering with the AMA Youth Run Club, our students [had] a focus all year [as they] prepared for the final marathon of races at our school-closing Sports Day. We used [the grant] to purchase some equipment that we can use both indoors and out for students from grades one to nine.”



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but our students are very active!”

- Margaret King, Cleardale Colony teacher

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Adjusted expectations

As we begin a new school year with many unknowns and strong concerns about the Delta variant and its effects on children, our hopes and expectations of just a couple of months ago for a return to mostly normal for YRCs this school year have been tempered.

The pandemic has been the very definition of a Catch-22 with respect to children's mental and physical health. A long, indisputable list of benefits rolls out when you look at the effects of activity on physical and mental health for people of all ages. For students, research has shown that regular physical activity contributes to higher academic scores, improved sleep quality, reduced feelings of depression and anxiety, improved self-confidence, and protection against many chronic diseases, such as obesity, diabetes, cancer and heart disease.

Even before COVID-19, we knew that Canadians of all ages were not meeting the minimum physical activity guidelines to receive these health benefits; only 9% of children and youth were getting the recommended 60 minutes of heart-pumping activity a day. Enter the pandemic and the picture is even more grim, as revealed in a recent study in the [*International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*](#) (Moore et al 2020): only 4.8% of children (2.8% girls, 6.5% boys) and 0.6% of youth (0.8% girls, 0.5% boys) were meeting combined movement behaviour guidelines during COVID-19 restrictions. Children and youth had lower physical activity levels, less outside time, higher rates of sedentary behaviours (including leisure screen time) and more sleep during the outbreak than previously.

It would be an understatement to say the AMA YRC is anxious to get back into schools – to be there for our children and youth as a source of physical activity, as often as possible in the great outdoors to provide a place and a way to mentally rejuvenate where the rewards aren't measured by stopwatches and ribbons.

But we aren't losing sight of our 2021 – 2022 school year goal. We know we'll get there!

YRC sponsors, we couldn't do it without you

The AMA Youth Run Club would like to take this opportunity, as we reflect on our last school year and look towards the new one, to thank our YRC sponsors: Alberta Blue Cross (gold level) and MD Financial Management (MD)/Scotiabank Healthcare+ (silver level).

Each in their fifth year of YRC sponsorship, Blue Cross and MD see great value in their investments in the good health of Alberta's youth. Brian Geislinger, Vice-President Corporate Relations, Blue Cross, comments, "As a champion for wellness and health promotion, we see this program as an incredible initiative to get children active and moving."

Adds Daniel Labonté, President and CEO, MD, "We believe that investing in Canada's youth is critical to shaping a better, healthier future. That's why we're proud to continue to support the AMA YRC."

While we are always truly grateful for the contributions of Alberta Blue Cross and MD –

and those of YRC's supportive in-kind sponsor Canadian Tire Jumpstart – the past 18 months of world-turned-upside-down pandemic chaos, particularly for school-aged children, finds us feeling extra grateful.



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