

Program Evaluation

Yukon's RHEAL Leader Program

May 7, 2016

**A report highlighting participant-specified benefits and recommendations on
RPAY's Rural Healthy Eating Active Living Program from participants surveyed in 2015**



Prepared for: Recreation and Parks Association of the Yukon

Prepared by: Christina Panagio
Baobab Consulting

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	2
Background	2
What is the RHEAL Leader Program?.....	4
How does the RHEAL Leader Program work?	4
Program Details	4
Purpose of the Evaluation.....	5
Methodology	5
Evaluation Questions and Answers	6
Profile of Respondents.....	6
Home communities of participants who responded to the survey.....	6
Age of participants who responded to the survey.....	6
Gender of participants who responded to the survey	7
The season(s) when respondents participated	7
The year that participants participated.....	7
Type of RHEAL Leader program participated in.....	8
Thematic analysis	9
Personal benefits of participating in a RHEAL Leader program.....	9
How the program promotes and supports a physically active lifestyle.....	10
Community benefits of having a RHEAL Leader program	11
What would be the detrimental effect to the community without the program....	12
Potential improvements to the RHEAL Leader program.....	13
Summary	14
Recommendations.....	15

Executive Summary

The vision of the Recreation and Parks Association of the Yukon (RPAY) is to improve quality of life across the Yukon by increasing participation in active and meaningful recreation. Until now, effectiveness of the Rural Healthy Eating Active Living (RHEAL) Leader program has been assessed by gathering information from RHEAL leaders and RPAY staff. However, very little was known about the impact of the program on the lives of its participants.

The purpose of this evaluation is to explore the personal and social benefits experienced by participants in Yukon's RHEAL Leader program to understand how to strengthen the program. In order to do this, a survey was developed and distributed through current RHEAL leaders. Past participants of RHEAL Leaders programs responded to the survey from April 2014 to August 2015; 170 responses were received.

Comments were positive and many of the participants responding expressed their desire for additional programming more times through the year. Responses highlighted the program's strengths including its impact on rural communities. From the 170 responses, for example, 32 participants reported taking healthy eating and cooking courses. These types of programs potentially affect entire families and may empower groups to encourage local retailers to bring in healthier food options.

RHEAL Leader programs impact entire families. Many respondents reported that their families registered in various programs, for both adults and children. Some families reported taking four or more programs, while one family registered in 11 different types of programs prior to taking the survey.



Seniors Snowshoeing

The RHEAL Leader program provides more than just physical activity or fitness, skills building, or personal development. In each of these small communities, the RHEAL Leader program brings together individuals who may otherwise feel a sense of separation from their community, or even isolation. Many participants surveyed mentioned that, without the program, their lives would lack something that helps them feel less secluded, depressed and lonely – especially through the winter months.

Each of the RHEAL Leader programs also provides an opportunity to foster additional skills development and healthy living guidance. RPAY might consider additional resources to train the leaders in additional programming skills, nutrition, skills to help them find funds/grants to continue offering programs, and more.

Based on an analysis of responses from participants in local RHEAL Leader programs, the following recommendations are made.

1. Set up a peer-to-peer learning webinar where RHEAL leaders can talk about their programs, share some of their knowledge related to recreation and healthy lifestyles, and develop skills such as securing additional funding, community building and marketing their programs.
2. Help RHEAL leaders market their program to their community.
3. Organize focus groups with participant stakeholders to discuss some of the improvements suggested in the survey in greater depth.
4. Mentor community leaders to be able to run additional RHEAL Leader programs throughout rural Yukon.



Skiing the Yukon River in Dawson City

Background

What is the RHEAL Leader Program?

The Rural Healthy Eating Active Living (RHEAL) Leader program supports local leaders to deliver community-based programs that increase active living and healthy eating opportunities in rural Yukon communities. Local leaders implement programs that complement existing recreational programs and support community participation in recreation. Partnerships with local recreation departments, schools, businesses, facilities, and etcetera are encouraged to make the most of what is offered in each community.

RHEAL Leader programs are offered regularly over two months or longer, are led by a local leader and include 30 minutes or more of physical activity per session. The RHEAL Leader program is possible because of ongoing funding through the Yukon Active Living Strategy and the Yukon Northern Wellness Project.

How does the RHEAL Leader Program work?

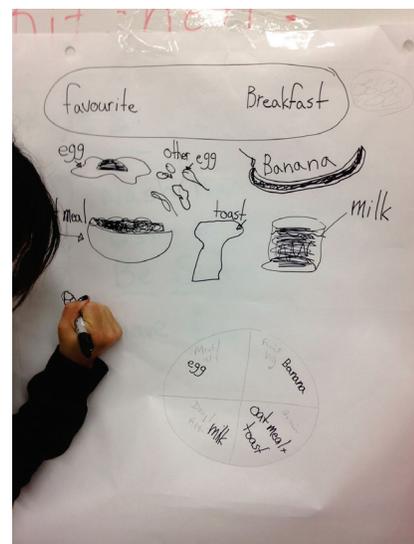
Whether they are individuals or organizations, RHEAL Leaders receive an honorarium for short-term contracts that fund the materials and/or supplies required by their program, access to training, and an invitation to the Annual Recreation Gathering.

Applications are accepted twice a year (fall/winter) for a maximum funding of \$3,000.00 per program.

Program Details

The Rural Healthy Eating Active Living (RHEAL) Leader Program is community-based because it supports local leaders to encourage active, healthy lifestyles in their communities. The program criteria accepts applications that are:

- Led by a local leader.
- Offered regularly over two months or longer and include 30+ minutes of physical activity.
- Reflective of community interest and/or need and show evidence of community support for the program.
- Partnership-oriented, delivered with local recreation facilities, schools, businesses, etc.
- Complementary to, but do not replace or duplicate, existing community programs.



Kids in the Kitchen Leader Training

The programs delivered by a local RHEAL Leader must:

- Promote improved health and well-being.
- Encourage changes in attitude or beliefs about healthy living.
- Lead to increased knowledge of the benefits of active, healthy living.
- Encourage changes in daily routines so that physical activity and/or healthy eating becomes a greater part of lifestyles.
- Help people can become more active in their day-to-day lives and make smarter food choices.

Purpose of the Evaluation

The purpose of this evaluation is to explore the personal and social benefits experienced by participants in Yukon's RHEAL Leader program in order to understand how to strengthen the program.

While evidence of program outcomes had been assessed by gathering information from RHEAL Leaders and RPAY staff, at this time RPAY wants to evaluate and further develop the program based on *participant inclusion*.

RPAY's vision is to improve quality of life across the Yukon by increasing participation in active and meaningful recreation. Without a clear understanding of how participants experience their participation in, and the benefits of, the RHEAL Leader program, it is not possible to determine the extent to which the program helps RPAY achieve its vision and make a difference in the lives of rural Yukoners.



Winter Active for Life - Snowshoeing with YNTEP

Methodology

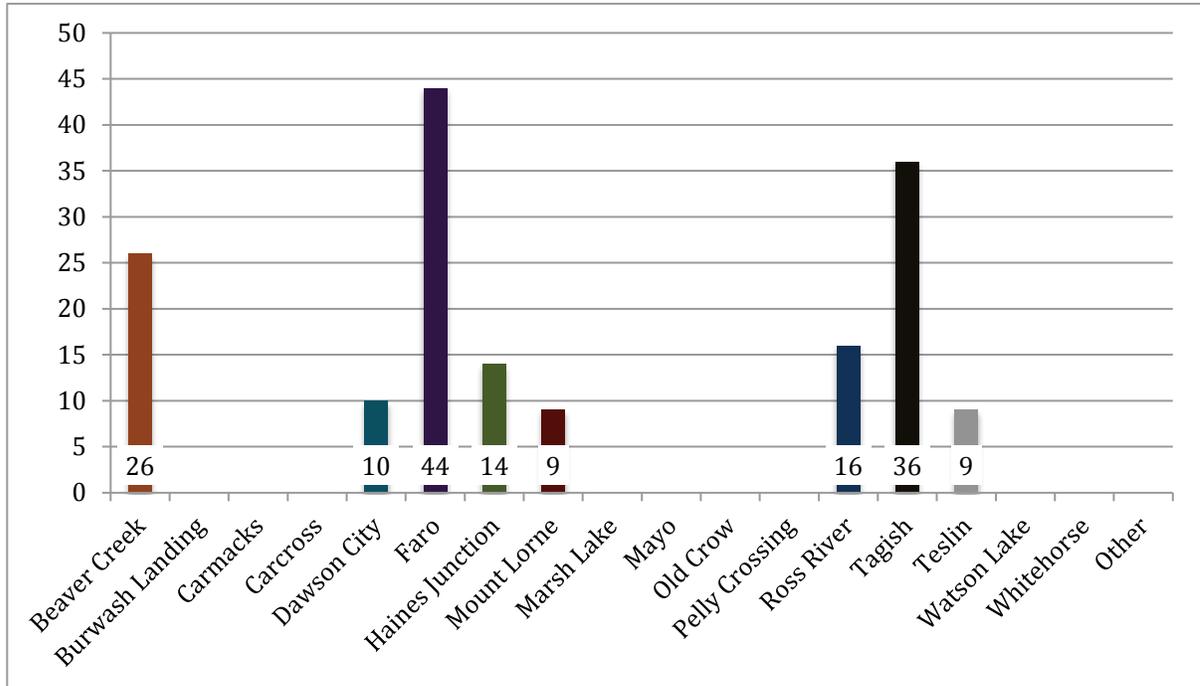
A survey was developed and distributed both in print, and also electronically via Survey Monkey, to past participants of the RHEAL Leader program over a one-year time frame. Print copies were sent with stamped, addressed return envelopes to ensure that participants would incur no cost in the process. Print responses were entered into Survey Monkey to collect the data in one place for analysis.

Surveys were distributed through current RHEAL Leaders beginning April 2014 and collected officially through to April 2015. Surveys were accepted, however, until the end of August 2015.

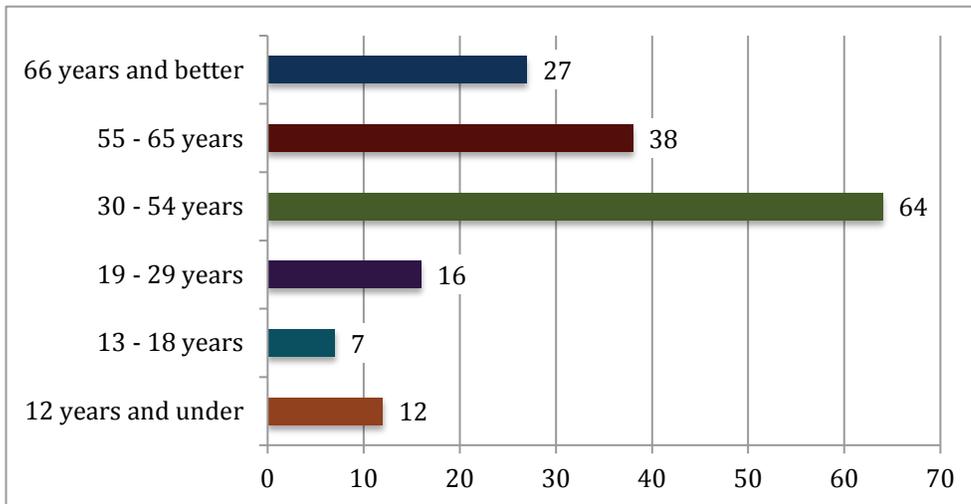
Evaluation Questions and Answers

Profile of Respondents

Home communities of participants who responded to the survey (n: 168)**

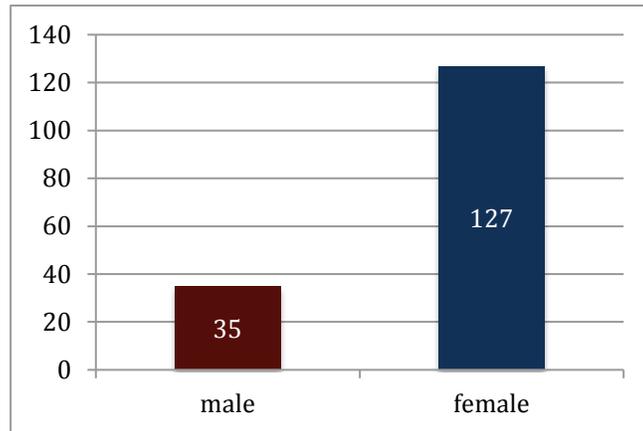


Age of participants who responded to the survey (n: 168)

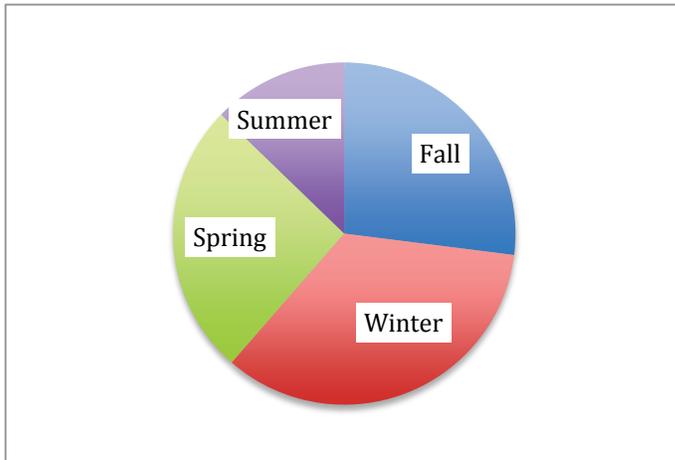


**n represents the number of individuals who responded to the specific question out of the 170 respondents. It is possible that n will often be a value of less than 170.

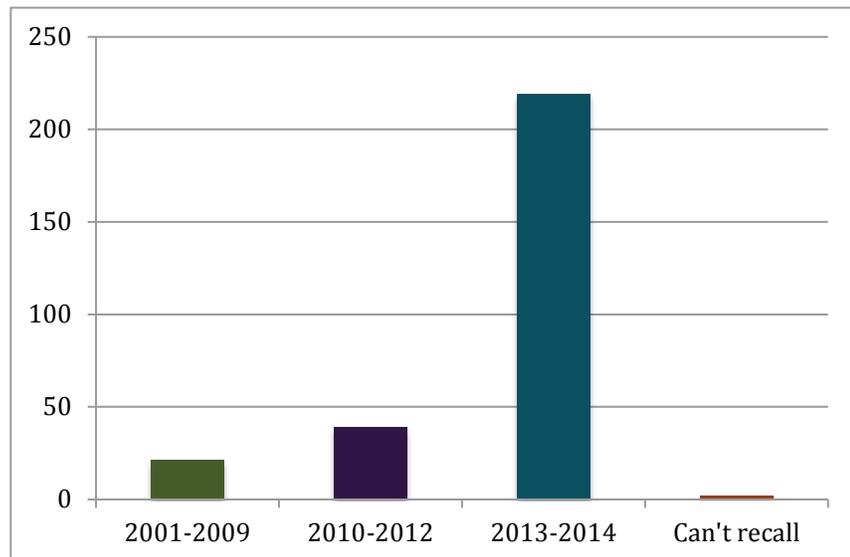
Gender of participants who responded to the survey (n: 168)



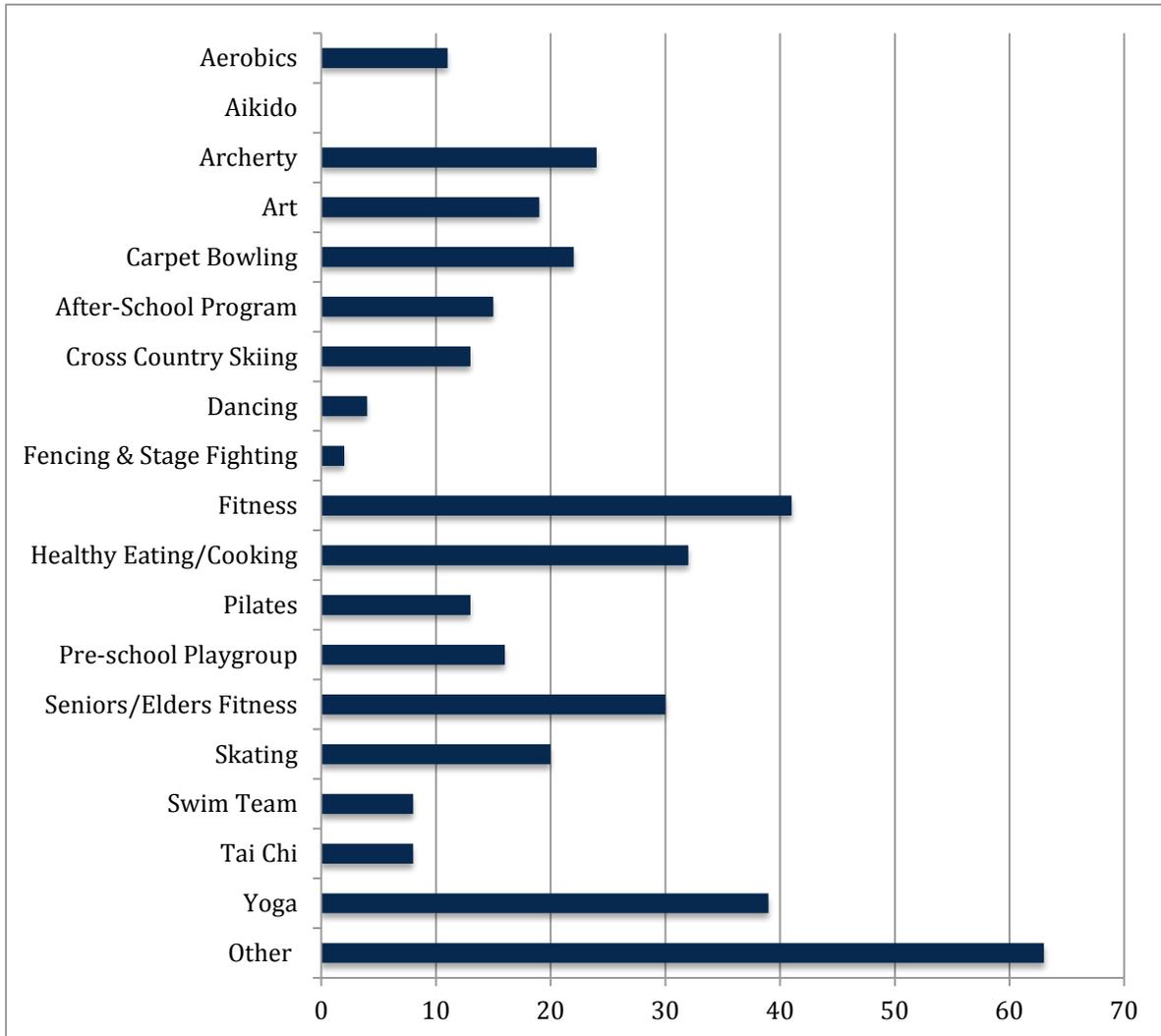
The season(s) respondents indicated they participated in the program (n=170)



The year that participants participated (n= 170)



Type of RHEAL Leader program participated in *n=170*



Other programs include:	
Aquafit	Restorative Yoga
Basketball	Singing
Biking	Skating
Bocce Ball	Skiing
Boxfit	Story Time
CATCH Program	Stretch and Tone
Chanting	Volleyball
Energy Healing	Walking
Hockey	Women's Drum Circle
Meditation	Women's Wellness
Nordic Walking	Zumba
Osteofit	

Thematic analysis

Personal benefits of participating in a RHEAL Leader program (n=170)

RPAY's mission is to empower communities to support Yukoners to lead an active, healthy lifestyle through recreation and parks, and therefore the survey asked participants what their personal benefits of participating in their programs were. All 170 participants stated that the program had impacted their lives in a positive way.

- One of the main benefits participants listed was that the program created social settings, and the programs were considered a place to meet friends.
- Participants were happy that their programs helped to increase their fitness levels, and that they encouraged regular physical activity.
- Some of the programs also helped develop skills such as cooking healthier meals, learning about nutrition, and developing new habits and lifestyles.

“The program is the only physical activity-based program for the children who are preschool age in the community.”

“The program was a great 'kick start' for me. I've been meaning to eat healthy and get active for a while, but to do it right always seemed a daunting task. The program has definitely put me on a path to better health and active living.”



Photo: Ursula Angerer

CATCH Kids Club - Tagish

How the program promotes and supports a physically active lifestyle (n=156)

Many of the respondents spoke about the accessibility of their community programs, whether it was the:

- central location,
- convenient times the program was offered,
- the low or free cost to participate, or
- the ability to participate because the equipment was provided.

Other program benefits noted were that they included:

- healthy snacks
- stress relief
- encouraging social gatherings
- and giving people the confidence to make healthier decisions.

“All of the programs that were supported have in one way or another taught some good life lessons or supported healthy living.”



Winter Active for Life Program – Dawson City

“With the provision of snacks and equipment the cost to participate is minimal if any, which allows everyone in our community to be able to benefit.”

“We have a great instructor who takes time to talk and teach us exercises to benefit us in our elder years. It brings us together so we can talk about healthy living.”

Community benefits of having a RHEAL Leader program (n= 170)

The program benefits to the community could be regarded as one of the keys to the program's success. Each of the 170 participants surveyed had only good memories of the program's capacity to help build their **connection to community**.

This included:

- Bringing families and friends together
- Building skills to work as a team
- Helping participants meet new people.

One participant noted that the program even encouraged volunteer-involvement, which means that some people rolled up their sleeves to get involved in the program.

"It is bringing women together in our neighbourhood and makes us feel the strength of the community we're part of."

"People who don't normally do things together were able to interact in a comfortable area doing the same activities."



WAFL - Skiing in rural Yukon

What would be the detrimental effect to the community without the program (n=170)

All of the 170 respondents stated that the RHEAL Leader programs were a benefit to them, their families, and their communities, and many participants surveyed shared that these were the only such programs available in their communities.

“Our children would be greatly missing out on the opportunity to socialize, be active and learn.”

The programs provide a great number of benefits to the communities, so that if they were **not** offered, the surveyed participants felt that they would not have:

- Discovered their strengths.
- Learned about new topics.
- Met a lot of their friends.
- Been as active as they have.
- Spent time with like-minded people.
- Had the confidence to explore nature.
- Started to cook in healthier ways.

In addition, some participants felt that without their local RHEAL Leader program, they would become depressed and/or lonely and that young people would feel less connected. Two participants even stated that they would not have any reason to leave the house without their program. The program, therefore, provides some people far more than an activity or a place to gather a few times per week; the program has filled a void.

“Yes, the program has increased my awareness and focused me by way of not only participating in the scheduled programs, but about 4 of us started exercising at the community centre on days when the scheduled programs were not offered. We added additional elements to our exercise such as Pilates. I do not believe we would have undertaken this initiative without the scheduled programs being in place.”

Potential improvements to the RHEAL Leader program (n=129)

Only 129 of the 170 respondents answered the question about how the RHEAL Leader program could be improved. The suggestions included:

- Offering the program(s) more times per year
- Providing more cooking classes; one respondent would like education on nutrition
- Advertising the programs more
- Mentoring new community program leaders to be able to run additional programs
- Increasing funding to bring in more leaders and more programming
- Making changes so that the administration is easy for the people offering the program.*



WAFL Programming in Beaver Creek

“Ongoing funding to allow behaviour change to settle in.”

“Right now it's all on a few people in the community, maybe RPAY could try running a program trying to show others how they could apply and run programs.”

*Respondents did not specify the types of changes. They noted that administration needs to be easy for local leaders. Evidence of how to do this may be available in the end-of-program reports provided by each RHEAL leader. This analysis is outside the scope of this report.

Summary

When analyzing the messages from the 170 participants who responded to the RHEAL Leader survey, it becomes evident that the RHEAL Leader program provides more than simply physical activity or fitness, skill building or personal development. In each of Yukon's small communities, where these distinct and diverse programs would not be otherwise be available, the RHEAL Leader program brings together individuals who may otherwise feel a sense of separation or isolation from their community. **Many surveyed participants mentioned that without the program, there would be a gap especially in the winter months. RHEAL Leader programming fills the gap and helps rural Yukoners feel less secluded, depressed and lonely.**

In addition to providing a feeling of connection, each of the RHEAL Leader programs provides an opportunity to foster additional skills development and healthy living guidance. RPAY might consider additional resources to train the leaders in nutrition, further programming skills, skills to help them find funds/grants to continue offering programs, and more. Many of the surveyed participants also requested additional programming, for more months of the year, but this may be limited by funding restrictions, priorities and availability.



Drum and Song Circle – Ross River

When asked about what the possible improvements would be to the RHEAL Leader program, most respondents suggested that:

- the programs be offered more times per year,
- the programs include nutrition education, and
- programs for pre-school aged children be increased in some communities, and
- administration be easy for RHEAL Leaders to register participants.

The next section presents several recommendations that may address these improvements.

Recommendations

Based on an analysis of responses from participants in local RHEAL Leader programs, the following recommendations are made.

1. Set up a peer-to-peer learning webinar where RHEAL leaders can talk about their programs, share some of their knowledge related to recreation and healthy lifestyles, and develop skills such as securing additional funding, community building and marketing their programs.
2. Help RHEAL leaders market their program to their community.
 - Supply a poster or flyer template in Google Drive, which can be augmented with each leader's program details. Program leaders can be encouraged to post posters in community stores, recreational centres and schools.
 - In case the target audience uses social media, provide some sample Facebook messaging that the leaders can adjust for their own use and provide a webinar coaching session for social media.
3. Organize two focus groups with participant stakeholders to discuss some of the improvements suggested in the survey in greater depth:
 - Ways to market the program to the community so that more community members learn about the program before it begins.
 - The types of programs that are having the greatest impact and the ways that they serve the community.
 - Additional programs and skills required by the communities and local RHEAL leaders.
 - Ways in which the program can improve at the community-level.
4. Mentor community leaders to be able to run additional RHEAL Leader programs throughout rural Yukon.



Carpet Bowling - Tagish

For more information on the RHEAL Leader Program, please contact:

*Adrienne Marsh,
Active Living Coordinator
Recreation and Parks Association of the Yukon
Phone: 867-668-2328
Email: adrienne@rpay.ca*

