Public Health Nurses at the Durham Region Health Department conducted thirteen focus group discussions across Durham Region between May 27 and July 18, 1997. The purpose was to determine the interest in and current status of physical activity among Durham youth aged 10 to 16 and parents of children this age.

Participants were grouped into three categories: 10- to 13-year-olds (95 participants); 14- to 16-year-olds (30 participants); and parents (15 participants). They were recruited with the assistance of teachers, community group leaders, and work-site contacts. For the children and adolescents, teachers selected a cross-section of inactive and active students. In the category for 10- to 13-year-olds, boys and girls were interviewed separately by gender to increase their comfort level. The youth focus groups were conducted in elementary and high schools and at two community sites. The parent focus groups were held at an elementary school and a work-site.

A systematic approach was used in analyzing the information gathered. The analysis continuum began with the accumulation of raw data. A brief description was used to provide a summary of this data, and the summaries were then interpreted to generate meaning and understanding.

The following are the findings for each of the three categories:

What the 10- to 13-year-olds said…
- Both boys and girls enjoy participating in a variety of activities, preferring those that are fun, challenging, and provide social interaction and a way to stay in shape.
- Boys like hockey, basketball, baseball, soccer and track the most.
- Girls’ favourites are soccer, basketball, biking, in-line skating and volleyball.
- Some boys had little interest in baseball, soccer and badminton because of low challenge and slow pace.
- Girls had little interest in tennis, golf, baseball and fishing. They do not like to participate in activities where they lack skill and stamina.
- Overall, boys and girls like the same types of activities. They favour particular activities primarily because of the enjoyment they experience when participating in them.
- Most students are active several times per week, usually after school and on weekends.
- More physical activity takes place in the summer.
- Many students feel that they do not get enough gym-time per week.
- Children in this age range prefer to spend time with their friends and choose to participate in physical activities with their peers.
- The majority of physical activities for both boys and girls take place at outdoor facilities such as parks, fields, courts, golf courses, streets, driveways and backyards.
- Indoor facilities such as schools, arenas, pools, bowling alleys and homes are used, but less frequently.
- Parent work-schedules and family commitments can place constraints on time and make it difficult for 10- to 13-year-olds and their families to be active.
- Lack of money is a deterrent, for some children, to participating in any physical activity that requires equipment, registration or travel expenses.
- Ways to get 10- to 13-year-olds to be more active include: encouragement from teachers, coaches and peers; increased variety of activities; and increased opportunities to participate.

What the 14- to 16-year-olds said…
- Their favourite physical activities are skiing, soccer, basketball, swimming, cycling and walking.
- The two most common reasons for liking a particular activity are: the activity is fun; and it helps them stay in shape.
- No activities are really disliked (although baseball and running were mentioned by some).
- Activities are avoided if: they are too slow-paced or boring; and if the individual feels they lack the skill-level needed to participate.
- The majority of students in the group are active every day.
- The most popular season for activities is winter; followed by summer, fall and spring.
- Most individuals are active after school; all are equally active on weekends and weekdays.
- Most activities take place with friends; to a lesser degree with family, teams, classmates and individuals on their own.
- The majority of students are most active outdoors, in areas such as fields, parks, etc.
- Some students take Physical Education classes at school every day; some not at all.
Some students feel they do not receive enough Physical Education class-time at school.

Busy schedules, parents working, and health concerns can inhibit both individual and family physical activity.

Ways to get 14- to 16-year-olds to be more active include: more affordable activities provided; increased awareness of activities in the community; and parental encouragement which would result in increased self-esteem and confidence.

**What the Parents of the 10- to 16-year-olds said...**

- The vast majority of families do not engage in physical activities “as a family.”
- If they do, however, then summer is the more popular season for activities.
- As their children get older they prefer to spend more time with friends and less time with family.
- Ways to help children and their families to be more physically active include: limits placed on television viewing and computer-time; activities made more affordable; more programs and activities offered at parks and recreation departments; children offered more facilities in the community for activities; increased awareness of activities; more activities offered with broader hours to increase accessibility; more emphasis placed on physical activity in schools; and children being taught the skills they need to participate.

**Implications for Planning**

With any focus group survey/discussion — such as the ones detailed here — there will always be certain responses that are based on misconceptions, unfounded personal biases, and negative personal experiences that are the exception rather than the rule. How else to account, for instance, for the response that some boys see soccer as unchallenging and slow-paced? Furthermore, some respondents clearly will not be completely truthful in all their answers, perhaps for reasons of embarrassment. How else to account for the majority in a selected cross-section of inactive as well as active students reporting that they are active every day? Or to account for parents neglecting to mention the importance of parental role-modelling to encourage physical activity in their children?

In spite of these unavoidable shortcomings, however, the findings of these focus group discussions are worthwhile. The information gleaned from this research is being used in program planning at the Durham Region Health Department. The following are implications to be considered when developing physical activity initiatives for young people aged 10 to 16 and their families:

1) The incorporation of physical activity into the daily routine should not place undue constraints on time.
2) Children want to participate in fun activities that are challenging and that offer opportunities to increase their skill level.
3) Encouragement and role modelling by parents, teachers, coaches and peers are important factors in determining youth involvement in physical activity.
4) Many young people aged 10 to 16 prefer to spend time with their friends as opposed to their families.
5) To be effective, program initiatives need to address issues of affordability, availability and accessibility.

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**OPHEA Spring Health Conference:**

**Involving Youth in Health Promotion**

featuring the national organization Youth Par-

Do you work or want to work with youth in health programming? Interested in strategies to engage and involve this important and sometimes elusive audience? This conference will be of interest to educators, public health professionals, high school, and university students eager to gain insight into this area.

For more information including workshop presentation and display opportunities, please call Jennifer Graham at the
## Physical Activity and Healthy Eating

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group Questions - 10-16 year olds</th>
<th>Focus Group Questions - Parents</th>
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<tr>
<td>(there were slight variations between the 10-13 and 14-16 groups)</td>
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</table>
| 1. Who do you think of when I say “physical activity”?  
(Prompt - can you give some examples? For this discussion physical activity refers to activities such as walking, cycling, swimming, jogging etc. ) | What thoughts come to mind when I say the words physical activity?  
(for this discussion physical activity refers to activities such as walking, cycling, swimming, jogging etc. ) |
| 2. a) What kinds of physical activities do you participate in?  
b) Which ones do you like the best/least?  
c) What is it about the activities that you like/dislike? | What kinds of activities do you participate in? |
| 3. How often are you physically active per week?  
Prompts  
-times per week  
-time of day  
-days of week, weekend  
-season | How often are you physically active as a family? |
| 4. Who do you do these activities with?  
Prompts  
-family  
-friends  
-self | Where do you and your family go to be active? |
| 5. Where do you go to be active?  
a) How often do you have physical education classes at school?  
b) How long are these classes? | How can we help children and their families to be more physically active? |
| 8. How can we help people your age to be more physically active?  
Prompts  
-at school  
-with your family  
-with friends | |

### APPLE ATHLETIC AD
(to be scanned and placed from Spring ‘98 issue)