

# **Demand for Youth Recreation in Muskoka Lakes Township**

Includes:  
**Final Research Report**  
**Bibliography**

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## Abstract

### Demand for Youth Recreation in Muskoka Lakes Township

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Recreation is a much more important aspect of children's lives- today than previously. Today's children are not leading the active lives that young people did fifteen or more years ago. This phenomenon is happening for a number of reasons; barriers to participation appear to be preventing children from staying active and healthy. The role government institutions play in implementing recreation programs has changed over the most recent years because of downsizing, cutbacks and lack of transfer payments from higher governments. This study examined whether there was demand for youth recreation in Muskoka Lakes Township, Ontario. In fact, there is a demand for recreation in the Township. Surveys, a town meeting, and informal discussions with respondents proved there was a demand for recreational programming. Muskoka Lakes Township should take an active role in administering recreational programs. In order to take on such tasks, a director of child and youth services should be employed. In addition, the number of parents taking their children to programs and facilities outside the study area must be examined to determine how many people would directly benefit from local in-township programming.

## Introduction

Recreation and leisure activities are growing fast although the time set aside for activities has decreased. Many people in our society are becoming more aware of the importance of physical, social and mental health. More specifically adults in our society are growing concerned about the health of their children. Child obesity, lack of motivation and little social interaction occurring outside school are all issues that concern parents. This was made evident in the results of this study. Sixty percent of respondents considered it "very important" for their children to participate in recreational activities. Parents are looking for recreation and leisure activities for their children to participate in.

Research and studies that have been completed on this topic of recreation yields exceptional results although few studies have been completed. Studies conducted by the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture & Recreation and Sport Research Communiqués have proven that current demand of leisure and recreation activities will stay steady and possibly even grow. Baby Boomers, the generation that was born in the late 1940's and up until just before 1960, consider recreation important and this is proven by their participation in recreational activities. (MTCR, 1992) Improving fitness and physical health is clearly important to older generations including the Baby Boomers. This study goes on to explain the need to provide service to a wide variety of participants. Both young people and older generations are in need of recreation especially because of the less and less active lives we lead.

A large, eight part study conducted by the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation (OMCCR, 1998) called Children, Youth and Recreation gathered information about the recreation activities that children and youth participate in. More

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All the respondents of my survey are commended for providing me with valuable information. I hope that you will benefit from the findings and recommendations found in this report.

Finally, thank you to my professor John Marsh and Frances from the Trent Centre for Community Based Education. The guidance and helpful hints both John and Frances provided were excellent.



specifically this study identified barriers to participation. An estimated 1.85 million children participated organized sports and recreation. Thirteen percent of these children's parents identified unavailability of programs or information about programs as a major barrier to participation. The majority of children (39%) participate in activities provided by municipal/local organizations. (OMCCR, 1998)

The Ministry of Small Business, Tourism and Culture of British Columbia (MSBTCBC) conducted a study called Youth Recreation, Make It Happen. This study outlined the benefits of recreation including promoting healthy lifestyles. The provincially funded youth forum indicated recreation was important to youths because of its ability to help youth, "meet people and socialize with peers, overcome shyness, laugh and just fool around [it also] teaches us discipline, team work and conflict resolution."(MSBTCBC)

In 1998, SMC a service management company and Grassroots Enterprises prepared a paper for the Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation. This report, Developing a Recreation Framework for Children and Youth, was conducted to examine the state of youth recreation and clarify the role the Ministry plays in implementing programs as well as creating a framework for future programs to follow. Respondents expressed concerns about the ability of government agencies to provide adequate recreation activities for children and youth. These same respondents felt it was necessary for government to provide leadership in the area of recreation. (MCZCR, 1998)

Some of these studies mentioned above were part of a consultation process conducted for the Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation. Every study completed under this collective research plan indicated the importance sports and

recreation play in the healthy development of children and youth. It was stated that recreation programming should be provided to all children across Ontario regardless of their location, parent's income or any other barriers that may come about. (MCZCR, 1998)

A large amount of information, past studies and relevant research was reviewed, including the information above. As this above material was being examined, the researcher began to see the important role recreation should play in the lives of children in Muskoka Lakes Township. Programs, frameworks and recommendations have been created by a number of groups, social scientists, and stakeholders over the years and it was important to the researcher to attempt to implement these new ideas and practices.

**The goal of this study will be to examine the demand for youth recreation in the Muskoka Lakes Township.** More specifically, there are a number of objectives to this study. Primary data was collected from a sample of adult residents in the study area. The value they place on youth recreation, the ideal frequency of youth recreation, the reasons why children should be involved in recreation activities, the barriers that stop individuals from participating as well as the activities that need to be implemented were determined using a questionnaire. In conjunction with this primary data the researcher will determine whether there is a demand for youth recreation in the study area. Another objective of this study will be to outline the benefits youth recreation brings to the people and communities within the study area. Finally, three to five recommendations were brought to the councilors of Muskoka Lakes Township based on the findings of this study.

Muskoka Lakes Township has a unique make-up; nearly 6,600 residents live year-round in the area, plus nearly 40,000 seasonal residents who cottage in and around the Muskoka Lakes. (Refer to Appendix 2) This area, by many people's standards, is classified as rural. Only one elementary school can be found in the township yet there have been a number of recreation facilities built around the Township including a new library and separate community centre in Port Carling. Twelve functional community centre buildings are scattered throughout the Muskoka Lakes Township although not all of these facilities house organized recreation activities. With these great facilities, it is important to provide organized activities for the residents of the area. The conclusions made by this report should be useful for those working for the Township as well as those that live in the Township. Little to no research has been conducted for the Township of Muskoka Lakes concerning the issues of recreation, youth, and demand. The growing population in this area is believed to have limited recreational activities to participate in. Between 1991 and 1996, the population of Muskoka Lakes Township jumped by over ten percent. (StatCan website)

In order to confirm the suspected demand for recreation in this area the researcher must use a variety of data collection methods. Informal interviews were conducted with survey respondents as surveys were completed by a wide variety of residents with children between the ages of 5 and 12 years. Finally, a focus group was held to gather valuable information on the recreation situation. It is believed these methods of data collection were most useful and reliable because of the Township's small population spread out over a large geographic area. Surveys are often used for broad scale research projects, in this instance the research itself is not necessarily large but the people

required to complete the surveys are found in a large area. Other studies, such as the British Columbian Youth Recreation, Make It Happen project, used a youth forum to question children, youth and teens about their perception of what is needed in the way of recreation. That study was a successful provincially funded forum that brought a number of stakeholders together to discuss recreation. Unfortunately, the study at hand does not have the funds or resources to conduct such a large-scale project. Most notably, the British Columbia case dealt with a wide range of issues including youth at risk, the implementation of recreational activities among other things. Although youth at risk is a major motivation for studies today the current researcher strictly examined the demand for youth recreation in the Township of Muskoka Lakes. Much of the information and methods used in other studies are excellent sources of information. Many communities across the country will find these studies valuable tools. Muskoka Lakes Township, in the researcher's opinion, is a unique place. The study area requires its own studies and programs specifically geared towards a rural, seasonal population with existing facilities; the following study will attempt to do just that.

## Literature Review

There were a number of issues and topics discussed in the articles reviewed for the research conducted on demand for youth recreation in Muskoka Lakes Township. Three areas of recreation have been reviewed in this literature section: the benefits of recreation, the barriers to recreation as well as the partnerships that are needed in order to implement programs and activities.

Many of the studies conducted by the Ontario government examine the importance of the "Healthy Child". The concept of the healthy child encompasses the social, physical, and mental health of a child. Communities often provide just one space for children to exercise, interact with peers and build friendships and self-confidence, school provides another. By providing a number of recreation facilities and activities for children and youth at a young age their future will more likely be healthy and productive. Recreation is an excellent way to provide for these children outside the classroom. Additionally household recreation will add another venue for youth to grow into Healthy Children.

The Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation (MCZCR, 1998) explains that resilient children turn into healthy youth and eventually successful integrated teens. A resilient child refers to those individuals that are able to, "effectively cope, adjust and respond to the problems and issues they face in everyday life." (MCZCR, 1998: pg. 11) Resilient children must be given a number of opportunities. Building self-confidence as well as providing healthy alternatives to hanging around the streets is an essential way to build resilient children that prove to be healthy children as

well. Healthy child development is an essential part of growing up and the Ontario government is dedicated to providing all children with access to recreational activities and facilities because they acknowledge the importance of recreation in the healthy development of children. The Ministry's report explains the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child outlined that all children in the world have the right to recreation opportunities. (MCZCR, 1998)

The direct human benefits of recreation are clear. Economically, the benefits of recreation may not be so clear. Often the best way to show municipalities and other stakeholders the importance of recreation is to provide adequate economic background. Implementing a sports club in any area will pull other clubs to the area because of tournaments and inter-club mixing. These people need places of accommodation, will eat meals and spend money in restaurants and businesses throughout the host city or area. In Burlington, two students from the University of Waterloo completed a paper on the economic benefits of public recreation in the city. (PRD, 1993) Although the main purpose of the paper was to show the dollar value benefits of recreation in the area, Lisa Sailor and Bryan Smale, students from the University of Waterloo, also outlined many social benefits that come along with the economic benefits of public recreation. Cities that are able to provide adequate recreational activities to their youth will benefit financially and socially for years. "Youth and children that live in neighbourhoods with good recreational facilities and programs have more positive feeling towards those neighbourhoods." (PRD, 1993: pg. 24)

The economic, social and physical benefits of recreation are proven repeatedly in a number of articles. The article, Youth Recreation, Make It Happen, explains, "It is

cheaper to prevent a youth problem than to rehabilitate it, jail it, or bury it." ( OMCCR, 1998: pg. 2) By providing activities, programming and interactive learning for children and youth, communities are building up strength against the possibility of youth problems. Prevention of youth problems is very much like the prevention of the disease osteoporosis for example. By drinking milk, eating right and taking calcium supplements bones in the body slowly become strong and are able to prevent breaks and fractures. Preventing youth problems by providing adequate programs, facilities and activities throughout the child, youth, teen and young adult years is key. Many programs are being implemented in a variety of places although by adding simple drop in centres and minimally structured activities to more places will be beneficial. Society is becoming aware of what our youth need implementation is the next step. Implementation should be simple, especially when a number of studies, many mentioned in this literature review, outline what youth want to see in recreation as well as those activities and programs that help youth stay out of trouble.

Barriers to youth recreation seem to be the one main reason for the lack of participation in recreation. Barriers encompass many aspects from transportation and cost, to motivation and availability. Lower income families find it difficult to place their children in recreational activities. There is a general perception that organized recreation is for middle-class children, those who can afford it. (MCZCR, 1998) The Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation indicates that there are growing numbers of children that want to participate in recreation programs, especially camps and day programs. There are a number of barriers that prohibit children from participating in recreation activities - cost, scheduling problems and unavailability of programs or

information about the programs. Thirty-five, 35 and 13 percent of households respectively have indicated issues of participation. Out of the 1,144 families surveyed by the Ministry, the majority of respondents currently participating in recreation activities want to become involved in more activities. (MCZCR, 1998)

Peggy Edwards, in her paper on Evidence-Based Strategies for Increasing Participation In Physical Activity in Community Recreation, Fitness and Sport outlines a number of barriers to participation. Canadians in a survey conducted by the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute identified motivation, access to facilities, time and cost as barriers to participation. (Edwards, 2000) More than 3 billion dollars was spent by Ontario residents spent more than 3 billion dollars on goods and services related to fitness and recreation in a single year. Despite 38 percent of Ontarians getting the appropriate amount of physical activity to benefit health, this billion-dollar figure seems high. Edwards explains that if the price of an activity dropped and the accessibility of an activity became easier a large amount of participants would become active. It is clear that some of the barriers are difficult to overcome especially the financial barriers.

Financial cutbacks, amalgamations as well as pressures from various levels of government are impacting local Municipal Recreation Departments. Provincial transfer payments to municipalities are not as large as they once were. Municipalities have to do more with less. Often parks and recreation facilities and activities are cutback sooner than other departments since recreation does not appear to hold the same value as such aspects as water, sewer and transportation. (MCZCR, 1998) Of course many of the barriers mentioned above cannot be dealt with on a local level, the goal of local



facilitators is to tackle those barriers such as transportation, accessibility and lack of information and programs.

The final topic for discussion is implementation. Many of the studies cited in the literature review have discussed issues such as what children and youth want to see in recreational programming, the benefits of recreational activities as well as the barriers to accessing the programs. A 1992 study on sport and recreation proceeded to examine what Ontarians will want to do in the future with respect to leisure and recreation. The Recreation Research Communiqués works in conjunction with the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Recreation Ontario. Conclusions indicate, "the leisure industry will be challenged to provide services for both the traditionally active younger generation as well as a new physically active older one." (MTCR, 1992: pg. 5) Implementing programs will be difficult because of cutbacks, changing demands and interests as well as unique needs of communities. The Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation indicate, in their study on Developing a Recreation Framework for Children and Youth (MCZCR, 1998), the need for frameworks or planning guidelines to implement recreation programs.

Canadians lean towards established organizations such as their local municipal government and sports organizations to provide appropriate recreation activities and programming for children and youth. Larger populated areas also rely on organizations such as the YMCA or boys and girls clubs as well. In the eyes of Ontarians, leadership opportunities as well as coaching clinics need to be implemented by local professional agencies to ensure the best teachers are leading our youth.

Communities and residents of Ontario see their local governments as the primary provider of recreation activities. (MCZCR, 1998) Thirty-nine percent of children in 1,144

families participated in municipal or local government programs where only 18 percent of these children participated in privately run organized activities. Local professional groups such as the government are seen as effective providers of child and youth recreation programs. Further studies show the need for collective programming. This means government agencies, non-profit organizations, volunteers as well as other stakeholders should create partnerships to promote recreation and implement recreation programs. Changing roles of municipal recreation departments require the support of a number of stakeholders not just one. (MCZCR, 1998) Logically, when more than one agency is involved in providing recreational programs more people benefit. Larger, all encompassing activities and programs will be a result of a variety of people planning these programs and activities.

There are an endless number of studies relating to the demand for youth recreation. This literature review has simply gathered the most important information relating to the issues of implementation, barriers to participation as well as the benefits of youth recreation. A number of useful studies have been conducted on recreation, demand and youth although due to time restraints only a sample of those reports were examined in this literature review.

## **Methodology**

The main reason for conducting research is to gather information or data on a subject. In many cases, the researcher wants to probe further into research that has already been completed by earlier studies. Examining a topic or issue in more detail is often the goal of many research studies. Research studies are often conducted because a lack of information on the topic or issue. There are a number of standard methods used in geographic research (see Flowerdew and Martin, 1997); more specifically, human geographers conduct either qualitative or quantitative research. Both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection will be used in this study.

As was outlined in the Introduction, the study area is unique geographically and socially. A variety of methods were used to gather primary data in the Township in order to retrieve the necessary information. The methods used in this study have also been used in a number of studies up until now across Ontario and Canada. Little or no information has been gathered for the Township of Muskoka Lakes concerning recreation or youth or demand. This study will be the first academic study to be completed on the topic of demand for youth recreation.

Originally, a "town meeting" setting was to be used to gather data and information from parents of children aged five to twelve paying taxes in the Township of Muskoka Lakes. This method of data collection appeared to be appropriate considering the time, money and travel restraints felt by the researcher. Trent University and Muskoka Lakes Township are nearly 2.5 hours apart. Conducting meetings and gathering background information would be difficult for the researcher. Due to travel

time to and from the study area, the "town meeting" method saved a great deal of time. By conducting surveys time must have been allotted to distribute the surveys, convince people to complete the surveys as well as to return them.

The study that was conducted did not have any budget. Fax and copy services were covered by the Muskoka Lakes Township office. The office contributed no money for travel and gas expenses incurred by the researcher. The researcher was required to pay for paper advertising or donations for the use of meeting rooms. Entering this research project the researcher knew these limitations. The supervising professor and the researcher decided to use the least expensive method for data collection. The town meeting was advertised sixteen days in advance with posters, phone calls and word of mouth. A variety of locations were used to capture the attention of parents with children between the ages of five and twelve living in Muskoka Lakes Township such as grocery stores, hardware stores, the library, public school and arenas.

Due to snow, freezing rain and rain on the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> of February there was a very small turnout for the town meeting. Only four people were able to attend because of the poor weather conditions. Despite the weather downfall, an excellent discussion was had with these individuals. However more primary data were still required.

A short, five-question survey was created to deal with specific issues surrounding recreation in the study area. (see appendix 1) One hundred-twelve surveys were handed out at the local elementary school on March 4<sup>th</sup> and collected on March 8<sup>th</sup>. Additional return locations were indicated on the survey in case surveys could not be returned in the time allotted for completion. Four bundles of 28 surveys were created; one was given to the grade one class, one to the grade two class and so on up to grade four. The researcher

targeted these grades because the children in these classrooms were between the ages of five and twelve. No special instructions or directions were given to the classroom teachers; the surveys were handed out just as a newsletter would be. Friday afternoon, March 8<sup>th</sup> all surveys were collected by the researcher.

The survey included five questions that were designed to take only a short amount of time to complete. Simply checking boxes or writing a few single words was all that was necessary to complete this survey. The questions placed on the survey were gathered from a variety of sources. Survey questions were gathered from the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation in conjunction with York University as well as Parks and Recreation Ontario and Active Ontario.

The researcher had parents rate the value of their child(ren)'s recreation as: very important, quite important, important, somewhat important or not so important. It was discussed in many papers, most notably in the paper by SMC Inc. & Grassroots Enterprises Developing a Recreation Framework for Children and Youth 1998, that placing recreation high on a person's needs list was helpful in the implementation of programs.

Next, in order to determine when and how often programs should be run the survey asked what the ideal frequency and season to participate would be. Also, there are a number of purposes to recreation; the researcher asked what the benefits of recreation are in order to determine what the ideal activities would be. Based on why parents want their children to participate in recreational activities appropriate activities could be offered or provided.

Children, Youth and Recreation, the seventh study completed in an eight-part research project outlines the barriers to participation. More often than not barriers are the “things” stopping children from participating in recreational activities. The fourth question on the current survey asked respondents to indicate all barriers they saw to their child(ren)’s participation. This information helped the researcher determine what the largest barriers are to participation in recreation and came up with recommendations to get rid of these barriers.

Finally, the fifth and last question asked respondents to create a list and check off the activities that they would like to see implemented. This information helped the researcher put together recommendations for the Township indicating the most popular activities and those that would get the most participation based on the information gathered.

A spot for the respondent’s name, phone number, and address was placed at the bottom of the survey. This area allowed those interested in learning more about the study add their name to a contact list. The researcher and Township employees may find this list useful in the future.

The researcher also stood inside the grocery store in Port Carling between 4:00pm and 7:00pm on Friday March 8<sup>th</sup> distributing surveys to be completed and collected on site. Only eight surveys were passed out and completed at this time. The same night the researcher went to the Port Carling arena, during open public skating, to have the parents of patrons complete surveys. Approximately 12 surveys were completed on-site at the arena. Parents of Can-Skate participants completed a portion of these twelve surveys the following day Saturday March 9<sup>th</sup>. Informal discussion took place

with parents during these two days of face-to-face survey distribution. Information was gathered during this time that was helpful to the researcher. More specifically, the researcher was able to gain valuable knowledge on what organizations are used a great deal for recreational purposes and gaining knowledge about the tax base and expenditures in the study area.

As was mentioned in the Introduction, there are a number of new facilities in Muskoka Lakes; committees, organizations and individuals are attempting to make these places more self-sufficient. More specifically, the Muskoka Lakes Hall Board and Recreation Committee conducted its own survey. During the local Winter Carnival in the first weekend in February of 2002 the new Community Centre was open to the public and a table was set up to complete surveys. Fifty-three surveys were returned to the Hall Board. The information gathered from this survey was used by the researcher of the current study to help determine demand for youth recreation in the area. A number of network connections between the researcher and members of the community have been made over the years. These connections proved to be an excellent method of data collection including the use of the survey conducted by the Muskoka Lakes Hall Board and Recreation Committee.

## Results

### Introduction-

The survey yielded fifty-five responses. This section will outline each question in the same order they were presented on the survey. The results will be illustrated in this section and their implications will be evaluated in the Discussion.

Question #1-Rate the value you place on your child's recreation activities.

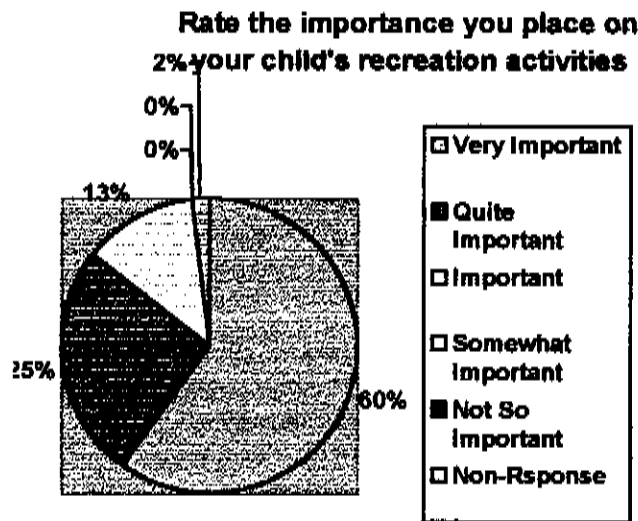


Figure 1

Question #2-What would be the ideal frequency and season for your child to participate in recreation activities? Circle any that apply.

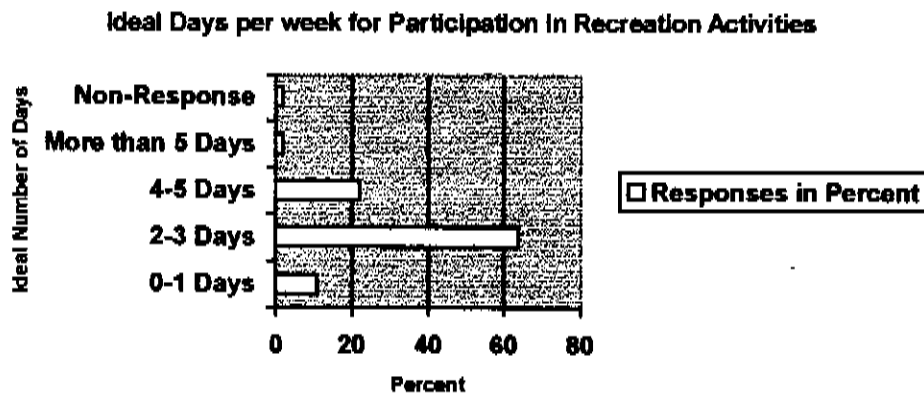


Figure 2



Of 55 respondents:

21.8% (12) chose to check off one season -- of these twelve, the most preferred season was Summer (June-August) the next most popular season was Winter (January-April)

14.5 % (8) chose to check off two seasons -- of these eight, the most preferred season was summer and the next most popular season was Spring (April-June)

12.7 % (7) chose to check off three seasons -- of these seven the most preferred seasons were Winter and Fall (September-December)\*\*tied\*\* and the next most popular season was Spring. There was only one vote for Summer activities.

43.6 % (24) chose to check off four seasons -- all seasons were checked off by these respondents

7.3 % (4) did not respond at all. --

Overall, most respondents checked off all four seasons (43%)

January-April 69.1 %

April-June 63.6 %

June-August 65.4 %

September-December 65.4 %

Question #3- Why do you want your child(ren) to participate in recreational activities?  
Check all that apply.

	Total Number of Responses	Total Number of Responses in Percent
Social Benefits	50	90.9
Health Benefits	45	81.8
To Feel Part of the Community	35	63.6
To Have Fun	53	96.4
To Build Self-Confidence	52	94.5
To Manage Stress	17	30.9
To Increase Energy	21	38.2
Meet Others	1	1.8
Exercise	1	1.8

Table 1

Actual ranking based on percent for each answer (top three most popular answers):

1. To have fun
2. To build self-confidence
3. Social benefits

Respondents' ranking based on written answers on space provided:

1. To have fun
2. Social Benefits
3. To build self-confidence

**Question #4 –What barriers do you see to having your child(ren) participate in recreation activities?**

	Total Number of Responses	Total Number of Responses in Percent
Time Restraints	32	58.2
Child's Motivation	9	16.4
Parent's Motivation	3	5.4
Fear of Injury	5	9.1
Lack of Social Support	4	7.3
Lack of Awareness of Activities	14	25.5
Transportation	12	21.8
Child Care Difficulties	12	21.8
Access to Programs	22	40
Location of Current Activities	29	52.7
Safety	6	10.9
Affordability	28	50.9
Age Restrictions	3	5.5
Lack of Activities	1	1.8

**Table 2**

**Actual ranking based on percent for each answer (top three most popular answers):**

1. Time Restraints
2. Location of Current Activities
3. Affordability

**Respondents' ranking based on written answers on space provided:**

1. Time Restraints/Affordability
2. Location of Current Activities
3. Access to Programs

Question #5 – Please compile a list of activities that you would like to see implemented in the Township of Muskoka Lakes

	Number of Responses	Number of Responses in Percent
After School Programs	25	45.5
March Break Programs	33	60
Youth Drop-In Centre	21	38.2
Drama Classes	16	29.1
Sports	34	61.8
Homework Sessions	18	32.7
Art Classes	25	45.5
Summer Day Camp	31	56.4
Youth Dances	18	32.8
Soccer	3	5.5
Baseball	7	12.3
Swimming	2	3.6
Hockey	1	1.8
Basketball	2	3.6
Night Activities	2	3.6
Tutoring	1	1.8
Cooking	3	5.5
Brownies	1	1.8
Dance Classes	3	5.5
Gymnastic Classes	5	9.1
Pool	3	5.5
Music Lessons	1	1.8
Volleyball	2	3.6
Tennis	1	1.8
Camping Day Trips	1	1.8
Canoeing Day Trips	1	1.8
Skiing Day Trips	1	1.8
Nature Interpretive Programs	1	1.8
Outdoor Skills Programs	1	1.8
Sports Complex	1	1.8
Youth Group Programming	1	1.8
Non-Response	4	7.2

Table 3

## Discussion

A large amount of information and resources were discovered during this research project. There were a number of obstacles that necessitated a change in the original data collection methods used in this research paper. This discussion will outline both the downfalls and accomplishments of the research project.

The beginning of this project came with a number of issues. To begin with, this research project was chosen and outlined by myself. Usually, clients of the Trent Centre for Community Based Education propose the geography projects undertaken by students of Trent University's Research Methods in Geography course. In this particular case, the researcher felt research on youth recreation would benefit Muskoka Lakes Township. The researcher has lived in Muskoka Lakes Township for over 17 years, has experienced the lack of programs for youth in the area as well as seen the recent progress with new programs. The need for research was evident after the first contact with Susan Pryke, the Mayor of the Township. Susan Pryke saw the importance of conducting research on Demand for Youth Recreation in Muskoka Lakes Township. She was able to convey the need for studies to determine the demand for programming in the area. Susan understood there were a number of great facilities in the township but did explain that the increasing population would likely benefit from a study on youth recreation.

Initial contact was simple yet follow-up contact was difficult because of communication issues. Clearly, the Township of Muskoka Lakes office is an extremely busy place; this made it difficult to contact Susan and another individual to confirm the contract and follow-up on changes to the contract. In hindsight, it would be better to take

on a project outlined and approved by the Trent Centre for Community Based Education rather than attempting to create a project from scratch.

Although a number of downfalls have been discussed in the paragraphs above, there are some benefits as well. By creating a project from scratch, the researcher was able to design and implement the ideal project. My supervisors both at Trent and in Muskoka were very flexible and encouraged me to create a project that would meet the needs of my University course as well as the interests I held. The project that developed allowed the researcher to tackle a topic that was of great interest to her and would have excellent impact on the members of the community. Many people the researcher talked to expressed deep appreciation for me taking on this project. A number of residents assured the researcher she would find a demand for recreation in the area even before the project began.

Once the project was underway and background research was being collected, the researcher quickly began to understand the politics within the town. Initially through e-mail a member of the Muskoka Lakes Hall Board expressed concerns on behalf of many other residents. The Hall Board was also undertaking research about recreation in the Township and was concerned that the Township of Muskoka Lakes hired this researcher to do recreation research. Once this issue was clarified, an additional concern was expressed surrounding the goal of the research project. Apparently, some residents of the community were under the impression the researcher wanted to conduct minimal research in the Township and proposed to hold a full-time position to fulfill the recreation needs of the Township. At this point the "town-meeting" was three weeks away and posters were

up all around the town, the researcher was becoming discouraged because the politics were getting in the way of simple, straight forward data collection and research.

The researcher was able to put many of her concerns to rest after talking to the Mayor. She assured that the research was appropriate, and understood that the contract was being followed. Susan explained there were a number of hard feelings in the community when the Library Board was funded to build a new facility but the Community Centre was not. Eventually both boards built new facilities although issues and problems between the two boards persist. The researcher was assured that the town meeting to be held at the community library had the support of Council and the Mayor despite the push from other boards to hold the meeting in the community centre.

Wednesday February 20<sup>th</sup> arrived with snow, rain and later freezing rain.

An excellent discussion ensued despite the freezing rain and small turnout. The information collected was valuable for the research project. The four ladies in attendance were able to voice their opinions in detail without having to compete with a large crowd. Suggestions were made for the researcher to work in conjunction with other organizations such as the Muskoka Lakes Hall Board because of the information they were gathering. Furthermore, each person in attendance encouraged the researcher to examine the possibility of providing day camps for the youth in the area. One resident explained she took her children to another day camp during the summer months because of the lack of programming in Muskoka Lakes Township. In later conversations at the public arena many other residents also explained they too took their children to Bracebridge, a nearby community, for day-time recreational programs such as gymnastics, arts and crafts and most importantly day-time summer camp.

During the small town meeting, another one of the four attendants explained the role she felt the municipal government should play in youth recreational programming. Furthermore, she went on to explain the current programs being provided by the Township were limited. The soccer, hockey and skating clubs are run as sports clubs, not through the municipal government. The swim program was the only program she knew that was being directly provided by the Muskoka Lakes Township. The municipal government as indicated by the Township's Recreation Handbook from 2000-2001 was implementing very few recreation activities or programs. Private individuals, clubs and associations were providing the majority of programs found in the Recreation Handbook.

The researcher decided to create and distribute surveys because of the lack of participants during the town meeting. Residents of Muskoka Lakes Township returned 55 surveys. Thirty-nine surveys were returned to the local public school. The return rate for the youth recreation surveys was better than the return rate for the survey handed out to evaluate dress code at the public school. Considering the time allotted for this survey, the return rate was considerable. In the future, more time should be set aside for survey distribution, completion and collection. This case was unique since a survey method was not the original choice for primary data collection.

Since the Township was not willing to contribute money for the distribution of surveys by providing gas money the researcher decided to go ahead with a town-meeting data collection method. In future studies it would be encouraged to get funding from your host organization and stress the importance of survey distribution and collection. It is clear that the survey is a much more suitable method of data collection in this study area. The residents of Muskoka Lakes Township are geographically spread over a large

area so future studies would benefit from a longer than usual survey period. Handing out surveys in spaces where groups gather would be beneficial.

Moving on to the survey, this section reviewed each question in the survey and provided analysis of the results.

- It is clear from the results of questions one and three in the survey that the residents understand the benefits of recreation.
- The majority of residents feel recreation is very important for their children to participate in.
- These same residents see that the benefits of recreation are broader than physical health alone.
- Self-confidence and social benefits rank in the top three reasons for participating in recreation.
- In order to fulfill the needs of the study area both physical activities as well as artistic and mentally stimulating activities must be provided.

The results from questions one and three on the youth recreation survey are strongly supported by other research completed in the field. The idea of the healthy child is discussed many times in the literature review for this paper. Healthy children grow from positive recreational interaction with other children and when self-confidence can multiply.

By providing a variety of competitive and non-competitive sports in addition to less structured activities, a large number of children will benefit. All children learn and



grow in different ways although the research shows socialization with other children in safe caring environments is key to the development of healthy children.

As was discussed in the Literature Review, barriers are the main reasons why youth and other children do not participate in recreation activities. **Time, Location of Current Activities as well as Affordability were indicated by survey respondents as the largest barriers to participation.** The first barrier may be overcome quite easily by reiterating the importance of recreation in the lives of youth. Advertising the importance of investing in the future of youths and children by providing them with recreational activities was clearly stated by a number of government funded research projects reviewed in this study. Barriers such as time should not come into play when looking at recreation activities for children and youth. It is suspected that parents refer to time as to the amount of hours that are already occupied by work, travel, and household duties. Time for children, on the other hand is not overly filled with recreational activities, especially in the months not filled by school. Implementing programs in conjunction with a variety of organizations can easily overcome the barrier of time. For example, after-school programs would provide recreation and childcare – similarly summer day camps would provide excellent opportunities for youth and children to socialize, build self-confidence as well as provide a number of health benefits.

Recreational activities within the study area are found in more densely populated areas such as Bala, Port Carling, Milford Bay and occasionally Walker's Point among others. Considering there are only two arenas in the Township, location is definitely going to be a factor. Children may have to travel by car for 20 minutes to get to the arena to play hockey or participate in figure skating.

In addition to the location of existing activities within Muskoka Lakes Township, survey results may also point towards those activities that are offered in neighbouring communities such as Bracebridge, Gravenhurst or Parry Sound. Many people discussed the programs regularly accessed outside the township because of the lack of programming within the study area. In further discussion with one resident in particular concerns were raised about the neighbouring communities limiting outsider access to municipally funded recreation activities. The researcher was given the example that registrants must have a local address and phone number in order to participate in recreational activities. This gentleman raised the issue in order to explain the strain the study area is placing on other nearby areas by not providing adequate recreational activities and programming. After this conversation, the researcher also heard that other areas had actually implemented this strategy. Simcoe County, one of the fastest growing areas in North America, had to start implementing a tiered system for its recreation facilities. Only a certain number of spaces in recreation programs were allocated for non-residents. (FM 95.7-Barrie, Ontario)

Finally, affordability seems to be an issue everywhere. It is becoming increasingly expensive to provide recreational activities for children and youth. As studies indicate, recreation seems to be set aside for the middle-class who can afford to pay for it. By providing programs in conjunction with a number of organizations such as the municipal government, private groups, sport associations and the help of volunteers and professionals in the field, the cost will not be carried by one group alone.

This study completed in Muskoka Lakes Township shows the importance of overcoming the barrier of affordability. Many residents that live in the Township year

round are not overly wealthy as many may think when visiting the area between June 1<sup>st</sup> and September 1<sup>st</sup>. The seasonal residents in this area are much wealthier than the year round residents. The average total income of a married or common-law family in Muskoka Lakes Township is \$50,143. The average total income of a married or common law family in Ontario is over \$14,000 higher at 64,434. (StatCan website) One of the respondents explained to the researcher that Muskoka Lakes Township's tax base is one of the largest in all of Ontario because of the wealthy cottagers that are attracted to this area. Affordability would not appear to be a problem when examining the tax base this Township is working with. This is not the case; a large amount of money is allocated to roads, water and sewer as well as the general upkeep of the large township. Recreation appears to rank low on the list of departments to allocate money to. Many politicians feel there are many departments in need of money before a recreation department is funded. These politicians may have to be reminded about the benefits outlined in Sailor and Smale's research on economic benefits of recreation activity as well as the future benefits that arise when providing recreational opportunities to today's children and youth. It would be in the best interest of the future of Muskoka Lakes Township to provide more extensive recreation programming for the youth and children living in the area.

The survey asked area residents to list as many activities and programs they wanted to see implemented in the Township. **Respondent's distinguished sports, summer day camps and March break programs as the top three programs requested. Art classes, youth dances and drama classes ranked high on the list as well.** There are a variety of both organized and less-organized activities being requested by the parents of children and youth in the study area. Although sports ranked high on

the list of activities to be offered art classes, a much less competitive activity, was also a popular choice. By implementing a wide variety of activities, the Township will influence a larger group of children, not just those interesting in playing active and competitive sports.

There are downfalls to question number five that should be discussed; a partial list of activities was outlined in the survey. These activities could simply be checked off directly on the survey, no writing was required. There were also spaces provided for respondents to add their own activities and programs. The survey should have had either all blank spaces to fill in or all previously typed words to simply check off. The words that were printed right on the survey before distribution had the highest rate of selection. It is believed that if many choices were given to the respondents and all they had to do was check them off the list would have been more conclusive. Despite the downfalls of mixing blank spaces with pre-selected activities to check off a substantial number of activities were provided by the respondents. Even those activities and programs that only received one, two or three responses should be considered when deciding which programs to offer to area residents.

Overall, the survey was conducted with success. The questions were simple, concise and to the point. When surveys exceed two pages and become difficult to complete in 10 minutes non-response rates begin to rise. The non-response rate was considerably low; it was the highest on question two at 7.27 percent. Question number two was a double-question asking how often and in which seasons should recreation be provided. If the second survey question was separated into two questions then more people may have answered it.

This topic of demand for youth recreation in Muskoka Lakes Township is larger than was expected. Future work should be conducted in the study area to gather more information on supply of recreation in Muskoka Lakes Township. Learning what programs and activities residents have their children enrolled in would be useful to the Parks and Recreation Department of Muskoka Lakes Township. Additionally understanding where those parents take their children to participate would be vital information. Through the information gathered in the primary research and informal discussions of this project the researcher was able to determine that there are a number of people taking their children to neighbouring communities for recreational activities and programs. Knowing the exact proportion of Muskoka Lakes Township residents that take their children outside the township to participate in recreation activities would be very helpful. Future studies should follow the recommendations mentioned in this paragraph as well as those mentioned throughout.

## **Recommendations**

1. The Township should become the programmer of a variety of activities for children and youth in the area especially:
  - A. Sports during all season
  - B. Summer Day Camp
  - C. Programs during school breaks like March Break and Winter Break.
2. Determine, through primary research, the proportion of parents that take their children to neighbouring communities outside Muskoka Lakes Township for recreation activities and programs.
3. Create a position for a director of child and youth services. This person would be responsible for facilitating a number of programs for youth in the area. In addition it would be the director's responsibility to gather trained leaders and coaches for these programs and apply for grants and money so the programs can be run. One of the aims this person would have is to incorporate as many stakeholders such as police, volunteers, social services and schools to implement integrated programming for children.
4. Focus on frameworks and studies that have been completed by the Ontario Ministries in order to create successful programs for healthy child development.

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## Appendix 1-Survey

### The Demand for Recreation for Youth Aged 5-12 years in Muskoka Lakes Township

Hello my name is Lyndsey Baxter I am undertaking a survey about Youth Recreation in Muskoka Lakes Township for my Trent University Geography course on Research in Human Geography taught by Professor John Marsh. I would appreciate it if you would help me by completing this survey. However, you have the right not to participate in this survey, answer any particular question, or continue at any point. As all responses will be kept anonymous and only aggregated responses will be used in this study, I do hope you will participate. A summary of the results of this study may be obtained by contacting me at 27 Todholm Drive, Port Carling, ON. POB 1J0. (705)-765-1101 after May 16th 2002. Thank you.

**Please return this survey to your school by Friday March 8<sup>th</sup> 2002 OR drop it off at the following locations: Port Carling IGA, The Fun Store.**

1. Rate the value you place on your child's recreation activities:

Very Important    Quite Important    Important    Somewhat Important    Not so important

2. What would be the ideal frequency and season for your child to participate in recreation activities? Circle any that apply.

DAYS PER WEEK

- 0-1  
 2-3  
 4-5  
 more than 5

SEASON

- January-April  
 April-June  
 June-August  
 September-December

3. Why do you want your child (ren) to participate in recreational activities?  
Check all those that apply.

- Social benefits                       To build self-confidence  
 Health benefits                       To manage stress  
 To feel part of the community     To increase energy  
 To have fun                               Others \_\_\_\_\_

\*\*\*\*Of those you have marked above which are the three top reasons?

1. \_\_\_\_\_, 2. \_\_\_\_\_, 3. \_\_\_\_\_



What Barriers do you see to having your child(ren) participate in recreation activities?

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="radio"/> Time restraints                 | <input type="radio"/> Transportation                 |
| <input type="radio"/> Child's Motivation              | <input type="radio"/> Child Care Difficulties        |
| <input type="radio"/> Parent's Motivation             | <input type="radio"/> Access to Programs             |
| <input type="radio"/> Fear of Injury                  | <input type="radio"/> Location of Current Activities |
| <input type="radio"/> Lack of Social Support          | <input type="radio"/> Safety                         |
| <input type="radio"/> Lack of awareness of Activities | <input type="radio"/> Affordability                  |
| <input type="radio"/> Other _____                     |  |

\*\*\*\*List the top three barriers to participation

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_ 3. \_\_\_\_\_

5. Please compile a list of activities that you would like to see implemented in the Township of Muskoka Lakes.

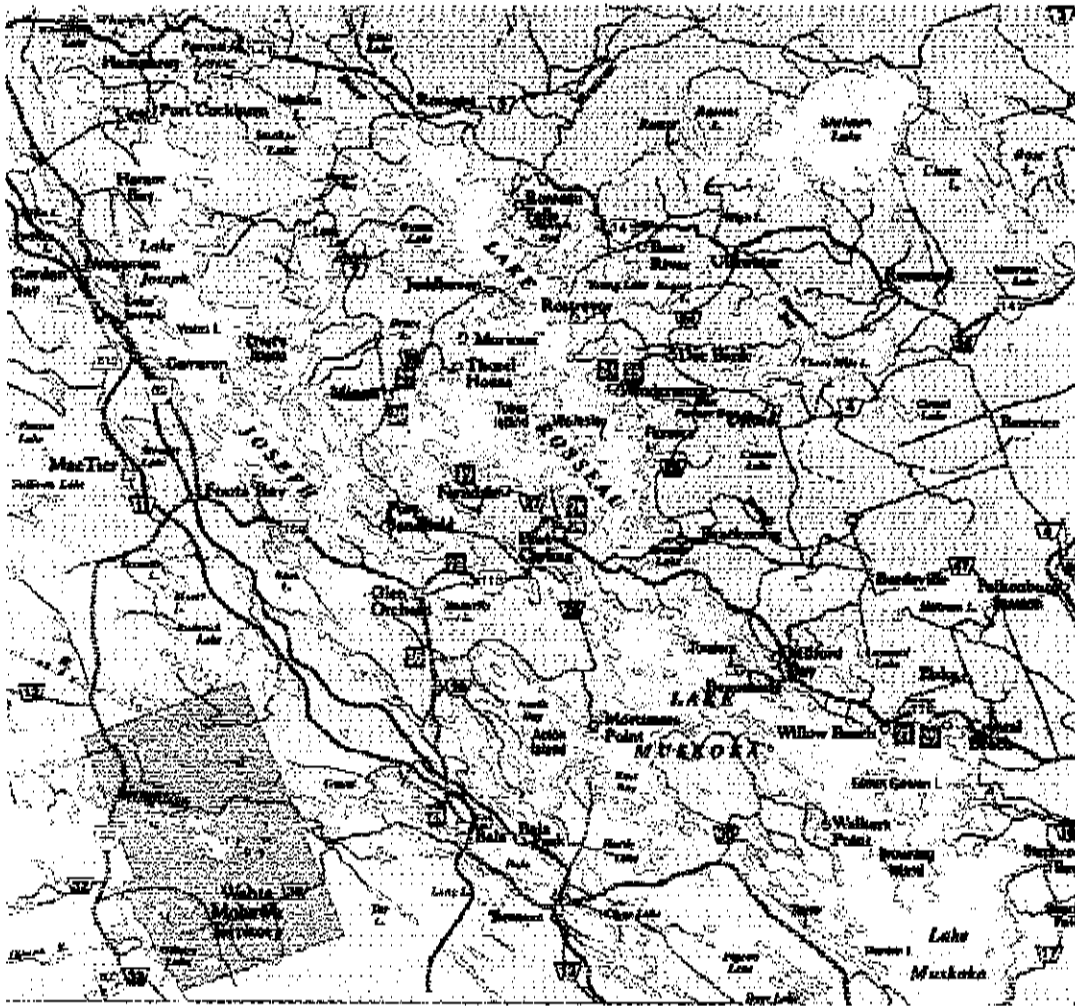
- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="radio"/> After School Programs | <input type="radio"/> Homework Sessions |
| <input type="radio"/> March Break Programs  | <input type="radio"/> Art Classes       |
| <input type="radio"/> Youth Drop-In Center  | <input type="radio"/> Summer Day Camp   |
| <input type="radio"/> Drama Classes         | <input type="radio"/> Youth Dances      |
| <input type="radio"/> Drama Classes         | <input type="radio"/> Youth Dances      |
| <input type="radio"/> Sports                | <input type="radio"/> _____             |
| <input type="radio"/> _____                 | <input type="radio"/> _____             |
| <input type="radio"/> _____                 | <input type="radio"/> _____             |
| <input type="radio"/> _____                 | <input type="radio"/> _____             |

\*\*\*If you would like to be part of a contact list to receive more information and updates on this issue please complete the following table:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Number of Children between 5 and 12: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 2-Maps

### Muskoka Lakes Township Maps



Source: <http://www.muskoka-tourism.on.ca/muskokalakesmap.htm>



Copyright 2000 Geography Division, Statistics Canada

This map measures 69 kms in height and 96 kms in width

Source: <http://www.statcan.ca/start.html>

### **Appendix 3-Resident Letter**

Hello Lyndsey

I saw your flyer in The Fun Store when we were up on a weekend. I realize your study or project has to do with the permanent residents and what they can provide for their children. I think you should consider the fact that in reality Port Carling and the surrounding area is very seasonal, hence transient. For your study to be true I hope you are considering the seasonal programming concerns.

I am an educator with two young children. We use our cottage year round. I'd like to voice my concerns.

You are right we have amazing facilities. Hannah Park is outstanding for all ages. Programs should include a Kindercamp program and swimming lessons. Perhaps also a youth sort of camp that would involve the hoops and volleyball area.

The new library is outstanding and I'm assuming normal library programs will be offered on top of the specialty events they already host. I'm thinking along the line of story hours, special interest group, workshops etc., for different age groups.

I think some event should have user fees and others should be free depending on the activity.

Use of the arena space could be arranged. The large space affords many opportunities.

There is a opportunity for some drama workshops on the beautiful new stage area in the community centre.

The programs at the Museum are great and well planned.

Advertising of these is probably as simple as posting them on a website or in town.

Good luck with your project.

Lisa Malisch



Attention Local Parents



## Youth Recreation in the Township of Muskoka Lakes

What is missing in your children's recreational  
activities?

Do you feel that your children are missing out on certain recreation  
opportunities because of your location?

What can we offer you and your children?

### “Town Meeting”

Hosted by Lyndsey Baxter

765-1101 lbaxter@trentu.ca

**Wednesday February 20<sup>th</sup> 7pm**

Norma and Miller Alloway Muskoka Lakes Library

This joint project between the Township of Muskoka Lakes and Lyndsey  
Baxter from Trent University will examine the demand for recreational  
activities for youth between the ages of five and twelve.

Often small rural townships are not able to provide for their youth because  
they do not have adequate facilities. This township has amazing facilities;  
we need to plan programs and systems for our growing youth population.