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Connecting Recreation and Resiliency in Children

For Immediate Release

Toronto, November 20, 2014 – Recreation has always been known to make a difference in children’s physical health. Now there’s a link to their emotional health. A study by Resiliency Initiatives and Parks and Recreation Ontario released on National Child Day shows an improvement in children’s resiliency during recreation programs.

The study, which involved a questionnaire and more than 200 children in recreation programs across Canada, showed improvement in core character traits such as adaptability and social connectedness.

“These traits, when fostered, can make a big difference in the way children develop and can have a huge impact on positive mental health,” says Dr. Wayne Hammond, President and CEO of Resiliency Initiatives, co-author of the study. “A child’s success does not depend on avoiding crisis, but rather to be able to come through it stronger. One of the findings the study revealed was the enhanced capacity of the children to develop positive social relationships – especially with a caring adult which research clearly identifies as one of the more critical protective factors enhancing the development of positive mental health in children.”

Parks and Recreation Ontario, through its national HIGH FIVE standard, partnered with Resiliency Initiatives on the study to look at the effects of recreation on child resiliency. The study had children aged 6 to 12 fill out questionnaires at the beginning of their recreation program, most which lasted at least 10 weeks. Then they filled them out again at the end of the recreation program. Some of the afterschool programs went on for 8 months. Only programs that completed pre and post questionnaires were included in the report.

“This is just the beginning of our work in this area. We have learned a lot through this process and while it has further substantiated the research on which HIGH FIVE was based, we want to continue to study these trends. We are in a great position to ensure the findings in this study are reflected in new resources that we can make available to organizations working with children across the country,” says LJ Bartle, HIGH FIVE National Director. “Front line leaders have a real opportunity to impact kids’ lives by developing meaningful relationships with them and helping them to develop their core character traits. That nurturing is what will really make a difference.”

BACKGROUND

National Child Day marks the day on which the United Nations General Assembly adopted the *Declaration of the Rights of the Child* in 1959 and the *Convention the Rights of the Child* in 1989. The Convention spells out the basic human rights to which all children under the age of 18 are entitled. In 1993, the Government of Canada enacted legislation to designate November 20th of each year as a national day of the child in order to promote an awareness of the Convention in Canada and to encourage child-related organizations to raise awareness of child rights.

HIGH FIVE is Canada's only comprehensive quality standard for organizations providing recreation and sport programs to children aged 6 to 12. Recreation and sport activities make a significant contribution to how children develop. HIGH FIVE is based on the belief that all children deserve to have sport and recreation experiences that support their healthy development both physically and mentally. HIGH FIVE is available through Authorized Providers across Canada in French and English.

HIGH FIVE National is a division of Parks and Recreation Ontario (PRO). PRO is an all-inclusive member-based association dedicated to enhancing the quality of life of the people in Ontario.

Resiliency Initiatives is the research branch of Meritcore, Inc. Through our consultation, presenting, research and assessment methods, we engage with individuals and or organizations to develop a strengths-based culture of practice where capacity is identified and nurtured towards positive change.

Resiliency Initiatives presents the Core Competencies of Character framework as a viable model to understanding the major components that contribute to the resiliency development and well-being of child, youth adults and aging-adults in our communities. The Character Competencies represent fundamental elements found to be essential to cope effectively with life challenges and to become productive and responsible members of society.

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