

CIF FEATURE STORY:

The Zone; City of Swift Current



August 2018

The ZONE is a drop-in program offering free recreation, physical activity, arts, and cultural programming, between 4 - 9 p.m. Monday to Thursday and between 7 p.m. - 12 a.m. Fridays and Saturdays for youth between the ages of 11-18 who reside in and around Swift Current. Youth of all genders, race, socio-economic background, or sexual orientation are all welcome to participate in the programs, free of charge! The program is delivered as a partnership between The City of Swift Current and The Swift Current Community Youth Initiative (SCCYI) based out of their youth friendly facility "The Center." **"Many of the kids participating in this program are 'at-risk' and through planned activity we provide the opportunity to nurture positive, healthy relationships,"** shared Kelly Schafer, Community Recreation Coordinator. **"This program inspires youth of Swift Current, one relationship at a time, to make positive life decisions and to become a respected part of the community and society."**

Program leaders and mentors are trained in 'HIGH FIVE' principles of healthy child development as well as 'Safe Places - Youth Certified,' a new community driven initiative which ensures that people working with minors have relevant background checks and training on bullying, abuse, and harassment.

Programming focuses on developing healthy relationships with peers and adults through recreation, physical activities, healthy nutrition, arts, and cultural activities. The program provides a fun, safe, and youth-relevant place for teens to hang out and be part of the community. The program has evolved tremendously over the last 5 years as The City and the SCCYI have partnered to offer more programming. The SCCYI organizes free guitar lessons and school tutoring, a nutritious snack, and two hot meals during the week. Offering cooking classes and homemade meals not only ensures that kids are nourished but also to learn basic skills and have the knowledge to prepare food for themselves in their own environment. Nathan Wiebe, Executive Director of the SCCYI explains **"we also provide various education and training to our youth and invite many special guests to talk with our group on youth-friendly topics such as fire and safety, babysitting basics, drugs and alcohol, mental health, and more. Our referral system to counsellors at the center ensures that in the event of suspected mental health or abuse cases we provide extra support."**

The ZONE looks to support improved social, physical, and emotional development amongst this target group, understanding that there are many factors that predispose youth to risky behaviors: low parental monitoring, lack of family support, poor neighborhood quality, and lack of healthy relationships with non-parental adults. **"Youth encounter many unhealthy options every day. Creating a safe place where they are welcome anytime and providing them with wholesome nutritious snacks and hot meals, supports their desire to choose a healthier lifestyle. Our leaders and mentors show them that they are not alone; they are given the opportunity to reach out, breaking the isolation of being alone or worse, abuse and addiction,"** expressed Wiebe.

"Communities benefit from responsible youth who have a skillset to integrate positively within our community. Through the provision of trained leaders and mentors, we can provide a platform for these youth to learn and grow into proud, strong and respectful adults. The youth attending this program are also provided the opportunity to familiarize themselves and make connections with the community in a way that wouldn't necessarily be possible, as we introduce them to some of our service providers and activities available to them within the community. This program allows youth to be heard, to have a voice, and to actively belong to something. Overall we hope to nurture positive behaviors that support healthy development," shared Schafer.

“Sorry I’m late. My mum told me she doesn’t have time to drop me off here anymore and that I have to stop coming, I told her that it’s the only fun part of my life and that I’d walk here myself if I had to. She didn’t think I would, I didn’t think it would take me 40 mins but there’s no way I’m staying at home.”

– 13 year old participant

