

Regional L.I.F.E. Review 2019

Recreation Oak Bay – Feedback from Staff and Community Stakeholders

Gathered via one Focus Group February 26 (staff), Several Phone Interviews and Email Responses from Community Stakeholders

February and March 2019

Questions asked in **bold**.

1. What do you feel is working well with the LIFE program?

a. What are the benefits to clients and customers? What “feel good” stories do you hear from people that utilize the program?

b. What works well in terms of registration and use of the program?

- The obvious benefit is the reduction of barriers (financial) for people to access rec and leisure
- We have a number of clients who obtain a LIFE pass after our program to support their integration into their community
- Real lifestyle changes have been made towards living more active, well lives
- On-the-spot approval (usually). It is my understanding that City Of Victoria has an average two-week turnaround. People who have lived in both municipalities really appreciate this.
- 52 free drop-ins. They are so easy to use all over the city.
- ‘Feel good’ stories I hear are generally little remarks about how nice it is to be able to go to the gym/pool free of charge, when patrons might not otherwise be able to afford it.
- Overall quite positive reception from LIFE pass users who find it helps incentivize them getting out to the gym and drop in programs.
- Registration is fairly straightforward once you go through it a couple times, just quite a bit longer than other registrations (particularly when setting up a whole family). Like that there is the option to get a half price annual pass instead if they want.
- I have encountered a lot of clients that are newly on disability and are very appreciative of the program. Their whole life has changed and catching a break and being able to come use the facility free of charge is a huge weight lifted for them. I recently had a patron come in who suffered a massive heart attack and couldn’t work. His income had decreased immensely and we made it work for him. He was in rough shape, and really needed to slowly get back into exercise to literally save his life. He was so grateful for this free program he almost started to cry.
- It gives the opportunity to all people, families to keep healthy, and enjoy the facilities. Lots of feel good stories about being able to use the facility with limited budget. Especially elderly.

- A 'feel good' story came from a single mom who was overwhelmed by life circumstances. She was incredibly grateful for this program and found exercise to be a fantastic stress management tool. Having the pass allotted her the workout she craved to maintain a healthy body and mind.
- This is a VERY valuable program and a fantastic tool patrons can use to make healthy choices regardless of income.
- Option to access registration form from home (internet) helpful for those who may be anxious about registering in person or have issues with transportation
- Adjudicator form and process simple to complete for the support person
- Easy to find on website
- Process well explained on website
- Marking off the 52 drop-in boxes is quick & easy. Patrons simply scanning their half-price annual is even easier.
- When patrons have proper supporting documentation in hand, approval & issuing is simple.
- I do like the fact that we pre-approved clients in December for January, it really does make the transition in the New Year much easier.
- A simple google search gives you all the information you need if you are already aware of the LIFE program
- I can imagine that if you are not familiar with the program that information may be hard to come by, as it's not really 'advertised' per se nice that it's listed on the 'rates and schedules' page of OBR website
- Inclusion in programs like badminton for children whose parents don't have much money and therefore these kids can play with kids whose parents can afford it.
- Mostly I see the drop in use with the 52 sessions.
- It was great when Kindergym was added to the 52 drop in sessions. It would be nice if the number of visits was extended to 104 or twice a week.
- Benefits I have found that customers who have more recently moved in to the area and are looking at getting to know the community and what we offer. We don't sell them that often at Henderson, but the one I have personally done was a woman who was so thankful that we offer this program.
- Offering the registration process at multiple centres. It's great to give people the option to come to what centre works well for them (as long as they live in the District), as likely that will be the centre they will be returning to.
- Also having the option for the 52 sessions or ½ price annual pass is great. Patrons get the option of what they are looking to get out of the

program. Typically though I see way more of the 52 drop in than the ½ price annual pass.

2. What are the main challenges or barriers of the LIFE program?

a. From a registration perspective what challenges do you see in offering this program?

b. What complaints do you hear from clients or patrons when registering or using the program?

- There are several steps involved in obtaining the information required to apply: this could be discouraging and/or challenging for some
- Unique circumstances not accounted for i.e. young adults on disability living with family that are not supported financially by their family
- Because of our geographic location, we have a lot of City of Victoria and Saanich residents wanting/attempting to apply in Oak Bay. It is generally not well-received when explaining that patrons must apply elsewhere, often quite a distance from where they live. Many LIFE program applicants do not have their own vehicle and must navigate the bus system which can be inconvenient.
- It can be difficult to verify how many people are truly in a household. The opportunity to omit info which would bump patrons out of eligibility is there.
- Patrons are often confused about where to apply & documents required. It is true that there's an explanation on the application form, but there is constant confusion regarding which year's tax assessment they need to present, and often patrons come with a statement of disability or welfare payments hoping that will suffice.
- When patrons use their 50% discounts, it can create confusion if they then withdraw or their program is cancelled and they want to apply the discount to a future registration. It is do-able, but requires more managing.
- Wish more folks had the form we have at reception that needs to be filled out before arriving.
- None (but I don't encounter many up at Henderson).
- I've worked for Recreation Oak Bay for more than 30 years, mostly at Monterey Centre, working on a casual basis at this time. We do not have a huge LIFE program participation rate at Monterey however the ones who do have expressed what a wonderful program it is. They appreciate the 52 free visits at any of the recreation centres. Personally the only complaint I've heard was when, say they have a Victoria pass they cannot use it for a 1/2 price course at Oak Bay. Once I've explained the program they certainly understand.
- The major challenge I encounter is District boundaries. A lot of clients feel they should be able to apply at the facility they want to use as opposed to going to their district area.

- A lot of patrons feel that they shouldn't have to provide their information every year. They often get annoyed when we ask for income again and proof of residence. Often patrons don't receive mail as they do online banking in paying their bills.
- I've had many patrons over the years wanting to use their 50% Discount applied everywhere, not just limited to where they applied. I.e: Mom wants to register her child for programs at Oak Bay not Crystal as this is the facility that they use.
- The issue with being a resident of oak bay and if they are not, having to go to their municipality even though they only come here.
- Also to determine whether a student qualifies for the life program. Have had quite a few come through trying to get one and are not able to.
- Common complaint is having to do it every year or provide documentation of where they live.
- Many give up on applying or need a lot of support/prompting when they are faced with having to gather info necessary
- It is really quite challenging to describe the LIFE Program verbally, as there are different options and several steps involved, this may put some people off from applying
- We often have clients that cannot afford even the half membership and would like to attend more frequently, and those that get the 52 drop in passes and barely use them. We wonder how this could be accounted for and rectified?
- Confusion/frustration as to why an ID card/drivers license is not an insufficient proof of address. Had a few incidents where patrons have come to the centre with all other necessary documents and we are unable to process pass because of this etc. Based on these incidents, and my personal opinion, it would be convenient for a valid government issued ID to be sufficient for proof of address.
- Registration can be a bit lengthy. So it helps when you have more than one receptionist on. When it's just you alone and you are sorting out the paperwork for this it can take some time.
- Students wish they could have the option to register for the pass.

3. What changes or possibilities should we consider for the future of the program?

- a. What requests do you hear from clients and patrons for the program?**
- b. What do you think is missing from the current program offerings?**

- Even a full membership at half price is quite expensive for those on disability
- Being able to attend more often for free (of course!)

- Patrons from other municipalities would like the option to purchase an Oak Bay half-price Annual pass. It is true that they have the option to purchase a half-price Regional pass for just a few dollars more per month, but because of our location many would prefer to just come to oak Bay, and are hesitant to part with a few extra dollars.
- Many have expressed they wish it included the buddy pass or some sort of bring-a-friend incentive.
- Would be cool if it came with a fitness orientation (maybe a few group sessions offered for free that happen a couple times of year for folks just starting out). A lot of folks renewing say they didn't use the previous year's pass even once and I think a lot of that has to do with gyms being intimidating until you're acquainted with the space.
- Maybe an option for universal program discount. Patron's can choose which they would prefer. Or give both?
- It would be nice if it was straight across the board to obtain a life membership. Doesn't matter where you live, just apply to where you most frequent. That would eliminate the proof of address.
- Would be fabulous to have some playtime (childminding at Oak Bay) tickets included in pass.
- Payment plans available for option B
- Same discounts across rec centres to avoid confusion
- Perhaps include a one time orientation to the rec centre at no cost
- Perhaps a better system for managing the registration discounts, or in lieu of discounts perhaps a credit/slush fund on the account? (I understand City of Victoria has something along these lines? Not sure if it's easier/better for all parties involved?)
- It appears (or so I have heard from patrons) that Saanich has a separate kindergym section on their 52 visit passes. This might be something beneficial, having some spots for children's passes dedicated to kindergym.
- People wish there was more than 52 visits on the card. Patrons have also requested to use the pass for golf at Henderson.