

# Hockey Fans in Training (Hockey FIT): Using CSR in Sport to Improve Fans' Health

Brendan Riggin (PhD Candidate) & Dr. Karen Danylchuk

Researchers at Western University are teaming up with local hockey teams to address a growing social need – the health of overweight male sport fans. In Canada, 62% of men self-report as being overweight or obese (compared to 46% of women) and despite evidence that lifestyle programs can help reduce the risk of chronic disease, men are often under-represented in such programs (Gavarkovs, Burke, & Petrella, 2016; Statistics Canada, 2016). Sport fans, in particular, are at an even greater risk for chronic disease as they tend to weigh more, eat higher fat foods, and have worse general health habits than their non-sports fan counterparts (Sweeney & Quimby, 2012). This represents a large number of men in Canada, where 80% of the population considers ice hockey to be a key part of what it means to be Canadian and two-thirds of adults follow the sport as fans (The Environics Institute, 2012).

In an attempt to utilize this knowledge, researchers developed the Hockey Fans in Training (Hockey FIT) program as an interdisciplinary project that leverages the passion male ice hockey fans feel towards their favourite Major Junior team to motivate them to join a 12-week healthy lifestyle program. The program was adapted from a successful program previously implemented within the UK called Football Fans in Training (FFIT). Each weekly session lasted 90 minutes and took place at the team's arena or a local fitness facility. The sessions included off-ice hockey-related physical activity and education on evidence-based behaviour change techniques, healthy eating and physical activity, and setting lifestyle prescriptions for physical activity (steps/week). Participating fans got a behind-the-scenes look at their favourite team's facilities and certain sessions were attended by team personnel including current and alumni players, trainers, coaches, and staff to help motivate the men and encourage their continued participation.

Hockey FIT was designed and implemented through several cross-sector partnerships including a non-profit charity organization that provided funding support (the Movember Foundation), a for-profit fitness organization that provided access to their facilities, and two local Major Junior hockey organizations (the London Knights and the Sarnia Sting). In addition to focusing on the participants' health, this program offered the two hockey organizations the opportunity to demonstrate their corporate social responsibility (CSR) and commitment to the health of their community.

Following the 12-week program, the men lost approximately 4.44 kg of their body weight and were ten times more likely to achieve a weight loss of at least 5% (versus men in a comparator

group). Furthermore, the men reduced their body mass index by 1.39 kg/m<sup>2</sup>, their waist circumference by 3.96 cm, their systolic blood pressure by 10.0 mmHg, their diastolic blood pressure by 5.45 mmHg, their fatty food intake, and improved their overall healthful eating and physical activity. The research team then followed up with the men one year after the program had been offered and found that most were able to maintain or improve their positive changes.

The program offered a context for sport management researchers Brendan Riggan (PhD candidate) and his supervisor Dr. Karen Danylchuk to assess the social impact of a corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiative implemented within a sport context. Furthermore, the two have examined how an initiative such as Hockey FIT can be used to create shared value, a concept which “enhances the competitiveness of a company while simultaneously advancing the economic and social conditions in the communities in which it operates” (Porter & Kramer, 2011, p. 6). Evaluating the design and implementation of CSR-related programs is a process that is often overlooked both in the literature and in practice. This served as the focus for Riggan and Danylchuk’s third study which aimed to optimize current social programs, tailoring them to the specific needs of stakeholders, and influencing the development of future initiatives.

The Hockey FIT program was recently awarded funding through the CIHR Project Grant to be implemented across the Canadian Hockey League (CHL). The interdisciplinary research is headed by principal investigator Dr. Robert Petrella and includes faculty from Kinesiology (Dr. Karen Danylchuk and Brendan Riggan), Family Medicine (Dr. Dawn Gill and Dr. Merrick Zwarenstein), Health Studies (Dr. Shannon Sibbald), Epidemiology and Biostatistics (Dr. Guangyong Zou), Brescia’s Nutrition and Dietetics (Dr. Danielle Battram), Fowler Kennedy Sport Medicine Clinic (Dr. Lisa Fischer), as well as individuals from the University of Glasgow (Dr. Sally Wyke, Dr. Kate Hunt, Dr. Cindy Gray, and Dr. Christopher Bunn), the University of Massachusetts (Dr. Catrine Tudor-Locke), the Canadian Obesity Network (Dr. Arya Sharma), the Middlesex-London District Health Unit (Dr. Christopher Mackie), and St. Michael’s Hospital (Dr. Wannudee Isaranuwatjai).

For more information, check out the program’s website at [www.hockeyfansintraining.org](http://www.hockeyfansintraining.org)