

# VERMILION

## Vermilion Wellness Coalition more than ‘makes do’

It’s a “do” team. That’s how Community Services Director Shawn Bell describes the Vermilion Wellness Coalition, and it’s true in more ways than one. Not only does this group get things done, but it offers the entire community more healthy things to do.

“Our goal is to see people out and interacting rather than sitting at home. Not only children and youth, but adults. We support the whole family concept, and we do that by offering free activities for children and youth that parents can attend too.”

*Shawn Bell  
Director of Community Services  
Town of Vermilion  
Vermilion Wellness Coalition*

Initially formed by town and Alberta Health Services (AHS) staff in response to the Communities ChooseWell challenge, the coalition soon grew to include VIBE (Vermilion is Being Empowered), local schools, the public library, the Be Fit for Life Centre and Vermilion Provincial Park. With the motto “Live it Every Day,” it has become a force for change, earning multiple Communities ChooseWell awards. “Each initiative may be small,” Shawn says, “but they fit together like pieces of a puzzle to lead more community members to make healthy choices.”

Key pieces in the puzzle, and now highly anticipated, are free opportunities for families

and youth to get active on school PD days and other holidays. Free snacks that meet the Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth are part of the bargain, plus information on healthy eating. “Those are our go-to events, and they have made a significant difference,” Shawn says. “Families are now thinking they should get out and do something, even when a free event is not happening.”

The coalition recently surveyed students to find out what keeps them from being active. Top reasons include cost, but also insecurity about how to play certain games. In response, the repertoire of free offerings will expand to include activities such as Frisbee, golf, dance and yoga, with more emphasis on instruction. “We want to make that link between fun activities and learning skills,” Shawn says.

“We are mindful that there is a segment of the population whose needs don’t get met by equipment intensive activities such as hockey.”

*Shawn Bell  
Director of Community Services  
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Skill building events are already happening. In 2012, VIBE began hosting an annual skateboard clinic that has pulled in more than 50 kids and 10 parents, some of whom add their

## Vermilion in Brief

mark to a graffiti wall erected by the city as an invitation to take ownership of the space and add visual appeal. The town's Summer Fun Children's Day Camp also teams up with Be Fit for Life leader to teach physical literacy through an energetic multi-site "playground crawl."

Vermilion is fortunate to have a provincial park at the edge of town whose manager is fully on board with healthy living. In February the park hosts Fun Team Try-athlon, a coalition event that attracts all ages for tobogganing, snowshoeing, snow bowling and painting, games, bannock, apple cider and low-sugar hot chocolate. Twice a year, a crowd of 300 or more descends for "Movie in the Park" with healthy snacks, including water or milk rather than pop. The coalition has applied for a Blue Cross grant to put a fitness pod beside a new spray deck in the park to encourage parents to be active alongside their kids.

Longstanding local celebrations also have more action and healthy food, thanks to coalition members. On Canada Day, they've serve up free fruit smoothies, hosted street hockey and beach volleyball in the mall parking lot, brought in a magician and hired children's entertainers Lee and Sandy Paley for a "follow the leader" flash mob. They started a trend toward healthier giveaways during the annual parade by handing out Frisbees, cookbooks and safety swag rather than candy.

Next on the agenda: healthy concessions in the local hockey rink. "I use the Wellness Coalition as a tool to drive change," Shawn says. "It's not just me saying it but this coalition of people all concerned about the wellness of our community. That's really helpful."

<b>Population</b>	4,545
<b>Location</b>	190 km east of Edmonton on the Yellowhead
<b>ChooseWell Team</b>	Vermilion Wellness Coalition
<b>Key Collaborators</b>	Town of Vermilion, Alberta Health Services (healthy weights and health promotions), local schools, VIBE (Vermilion is Being Empowered), Be Fit for Life Centre, Vermilion Public Library, Vermilion Provincial Park
<b>Recognition</b>	Creating Healthy Opportunities, 2011; Overall High Achiever & Building Community Capacity, 2012
<b>Top Tip</b>	A united coalition can drive change in a way that a single voice cannot
<b>Contact</b>	sbell@vermilion.ca

