How Recreation and Parks Contribute to a Healthier and Sustainable Ontario

The health, social, economic and environmental benefits of recreation and parks are well documented through evidence-based research. The benefits reach all facets of life in Ontario, from economic development to environmental sustainability.

Benefits Summary

1. Recreation, sport, arts, culture and outdoor/open space are essential to personal health and wellness and reduce reliance on health care and other social services.
2. Recreation, sport, arts, culture and parks/open space help build strong, safe and inclusive communities.
3. Recreation, sport, arts, culture and parks/open space contribute to economic development.
4. Parks, trails, open spaces, and natural areas promote environmental sustainability.

Benefits Statements

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<th>What Ontarians Say</th>
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<td>98% of Ontarians believe that recreation and parks are essential services that benefit their entire community</td>
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<td>97% of Ontario households use local Parks</td>
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<td>77% agree that recreation reduces crime and vandalism</td>
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Personal Health and Wellness. Participation in both structured and unstructured recreational, sport and cultural activities improves physical, psychological and emotional health. It can reduce rates of some types of chronic diseases, including type-2 diabetes and heart disease. Recreation services foster social, intellectual, physical and emotional development. Participation in recreation, sport and cultural activities can reduce self-destructive behaviour and reduce a reliance on other social services.

Strong Communities. Parks, trails, recreation facilities, programs and community cultural and sporting events are key factors in strengthening communities through social interaction, volunteerism, civic pride and aesthetics.

Safe Communities. Through collaborative planning, recreational facilities, programs and services are designed to reduce criminal activity.

What is Recreation?

Recreation is an active, leisure-time pursuit that enriches the individual by improving health, developing a skill or building self-esteem.

Recreation includes facilities such as trails, parks, natural spaces and community recreation facilities and encompasses a broad range leisure pursuits including physical activity, community sport, heritage, artistic and cultural endeavours and those other activities that contribute to quality of life.

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7 Browne, Dr. G. et al. *When the bough breaks: provider-initiated comprehensive care is more effective and less expensive for sole-support parents on social assistance*. Social Science & Medicine. 2001.
Community Leadership. Recreation is the largest volunteer endeavour in Ontario. Volunteers and professionals work together to sustain services and facilities, thereby solving community problems and building leaders for the future.

Social Inclusion. Recreation increases cultural unity through experiences that promote cultural understanding and celebrate diversity. Equitable access to recreation for all citizens also fosters inclusive and vibrant communities.

Economic Development. Parks, recreation programs and facilities, community sporting events and cultural activities attract and retain businesses and families, as well as attract tourists, and increase property values. Recreation creates jobs and generates income for the community and for local businesses. Recreation also provides youth with opportunities for engagement, employment and skill development.

Environmental Sustainability. By acquiring, protecting and managing valuable open spaces, trails, natural features and culturally important assets, recreation supports environmental sustainability. Parks, trails and natural areas contribute to the reduction of greenhouse gases, improve air quality and lessen the effects of urban heat islands. In addition, research has shown that access to natural, undeveloped, spaces has a dramatic and positive impact on our physical and mental well-being.8