



NEWS LOCAL

'Playbox' brings outdoor toys to parks

By Michael Mui, 24 Hours Vancouver
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A Playbox set up at one of Abbotsford's parks. Submitted

A B.C. Children's Hospital program meant to combat childhood obesity by installing "playboxes" of toys at community gathering spots is coming to the Lower Mainland.

The idea began in Abbotsford in 2014, when community partners set up three lockable boxes of toys at parks around the city to be provided free of charge for children to borrow.

The program has since spread to other areas in the Fraser Valley, including Hope, Chilliwack, Agassiz and Boston Bar. Nanaimo recently got Playbox, and Comox Valley is now in talks to get one.

Just last week, New Westminster was the latest city to sign on after Delta received one last year.

Dr. Shazhan Amed, an investigator with the Child and Family Research Institute, which runs out of the children's hospital, said the idea is to bring kids away from electronic screens and back to playing together.

“Children and families have forgotten how to play actively. When we learned games and songs, songs we used to jump rope to, for example, was the older kids that taught me that. But because kids have stopped playing, it sort of became obsolete,” Amed said.

Inside the boxes are not just toys — hoola hoops, balls, rackets, skipping rope, to name a few — but also instructions for many of these classic children’s games, such as Simon Says or What Time is it Mr. Wolf?

Amed said the boxes are also maintained and cared for by the community — one partner in Chilliwack, for example, has agreed to replace all worn down or missing toys with new ones. By involving the community, she said, partners can help spread the broader message of promoting healthy lifestyles.

“(We’re) using this as a way to launch a much larger community-wide, all-of-community approach to promoting healthy behaviours among children,” Amed said.

The Delta Playbox is located at the Delta Gymnastics Society, while the New Westminster box is located at the Pier Park. Both boxes are unlocked during the daytime.

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