



YOUR HEALTHY CHOICE AMBASSADOR

Best Practices from MJKO

MJKO attributes many of our successes to asking the following questions regarding program delivery and the community we serve. The following questions were asked specifically when delivering our Blueprint program which ran from July 2015 until March 31, 2016 funded by the Ontario Sports and Recreations Fund.

We encourage both new and seasoned organizations to ask the same questions for the delivery of their programs to benefit all participants and be flexible to adapt proposed programming as required:

Who is the target community in need of services?

- What are the ages of participants and how will their life experiences to-date effect how they will respond to the proposed program?
- Does the proposed time and location accommodate target participants and volunteers?
 - Example: For youth under 13, we note that they will need be walked home by parents in the dark. Our timing has been adjusted accordingly for convenient travel times for parents and students.
- Do the religious and cultural practices of target participants impact the type of program being offered?
 - Example: MJKO has found that offering a “girls only” environment encourages more Muslim girls to attend programming, particularly for the first time participants in the class.
- Can we make additional accommodations for target participants who may be typically excluded from physical fitness activities?
 - Example: We seek out accessible spaces for programming when possible, and activity modifications are always suggested for students with physical limitations.
 - We seek out mentors or volunteers that are able to assist in the accommodation of different disabilities. Example: We have a few deaf athletes so we looked for support from individuals who knew American Sign Language (ASL). Having a Police Officer on our team who was fluent in ASL help build a sense of belonging but also create diversity within our team.

How can education be integrated into our fitness program? :

- MJKO believes every class should have an educational component for several reasons:
 - 1) Our target participants are interested in learning new facts, and they also truly appreciated learning new skills which can help them achieve success beyond the gym. Topics can include: what to do when you meet someone new and personal safety tips.
 - 2) Teaching new facts and skills allows MJKO to engage different community partners for our students. These partnerships broaden the support network for our youth. For example, we had a Human Resources Specialist from the Ontario Public Service teach students about how to successfully navigate a formal interview process.

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811-21 Grand Magazine St. Toronto, ON M5V 1B5
believe@mjko.ca (T) 647 352 3730 (F) 416 923 2221
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- 3) Although MJKO classes range from 1.5 hours to 2 hours, it is unreasonable to believe that a child can sustain physical activity consistently for that period of time. By offering an educational component to the class, we are offering a built in break for our youth.
- When designing educational programs, MJKO coaches strive to remember that: *Kids can essentially play anywhere – the problem is bridging the different classes and income gap where underserved kids with talent can develop more. This is where a true problem lies. Underserved kids need help with developing their skills and then moving up in the sports/sport systems – NUTMEG.*

How can the growth and successes of our participants be recognized?

- Example: A reward system became key component for recognizing the physical and educational achievements of MJKO participants, recognizing that students thrive when they are aware that adults are paying attention to their challenges and successes. Community Champion medals are now awarded to students who demonstrate leadership, initiative and positive attitude throughout a program.
- Example: MJKO is proud to have a large collection of letters of support from teachers, parents and partner organizations. These letters are kept on file as a record of our achievements and relationships.

How can we work with partners in our community for the betterment of participants?

- Example: MJKO is proud of their partnership with the Toronto Police. Plain clothed officers attend MJKO classes each week and work through the workout and educational stations with students. This type of interaction allows students and police to have shared experiences and recognize each other's learning processes, abilities and humour.
- How can we best recognize the contributions (monetary and time) of partnering organizations?
 - Example: Social media photos and comments, mentions in quarterly and annual organizational reports and acknowledgement through media interviews have assured donors of the importance of their contribution. All of these communication avenues allow for an understanding where the money is going.
 - Example: Personalized thank you notes for each individual donor, inclusive of a photo showing participants benefiting from MJKO programming.
- How do we continue to build relationships with existing and new partners?
 - Example: Word of mouth about MJKO is very important. Therefore, our team always looks forward to attending not-for-profit workshops in the city of Toronto such as Volunteer Toronto's Trailblazer Series, Vital Signs Toronto, and Diversity in Sport Summit so we can continue to connect with likeminded organizations.

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