



WINTERKIDS--GET HEALTHY! GET FIT! GET OUTDOORS!
Portland, Maine

ABOUT:

WinterKids is a nonprofit organization in Maine committed to helping children develop lifelong habits through fun, outdoor winter activity.

GOAL:

WinterKids, helps children develop healthy lifelong habits through fun, outdoor winter activity, regardless of income background or experience.

HOW TO:

WinterKids started in 1997 as an initiative to encourage more children to get out and go downhill skiing and quickly evolved into a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to getting kids out and physically active during the winter. Because winter is generally a more sedentary time of year and lasts quite a long time in Maine, WinterKids provides children with the opportunity to be outside and active in different ways: downhill skiing, cross country skiing, snowboarding, ice skating, snowshoeing and tubing.

WinterKids serves over 8,000 kids through various programs, including:

- Passport- offers all Maine 5th, 6th, and 7th graders an entire season of healthy, outdoor winter recreation including cross-country and downhill skiing, snowshoeing, snowboarding, and ice skating, along with free or discounted lessons and rentals. The Passport also offers parents and siblings of all Passport holders free or discounted tickets, lessons, and rentals, ensuring that families develop healthy lifestyles together. The Passport costs \$25, but the majority of children enrolled in the program receive the Passport for free. Last year nearly 5,000 students signed up to receive a Passport.
- FunPass- offers Maine children in preschool through 4th grade the chance to try cross country skiing and snowshoeing for free.
- Guide to Outdoor Active Living (GOAL)- engages students with active and academically challenging outdoor winter lessons for grades K-12. Aligned with the Maine Learning Results and National Education Standards, and geared to a wide range of outdoor winter activity, the guide includes lesson plans, assessments, games, and safety information. Research has shown that small children learn best through play and have better retention when they are learning through movement.
- Active Academics Workshops- delivers outdoor, active, and academically challenging classes to schools throughout Maine. Based on materials in the *Guide to Outdoor Active Learning (GOAL)*, the Workshop is a hands-on opportunity to expose teachers and students to active learning and healthy, lifelong living habits. Through the 100 workshops planned for the winter of 2009/2010,

WinterKids is able to reach 120 volunteers, 2,000 children, and train over 250 elementary and preschool teachers.

- **SnowSchool-** brings the classroom to the ski area or the nordic center, enabling students to learn an academic lesson while having fun. The hands-on outdoor lessons are aligned with National Education Standards and are unique to the recreational facility.
- **Welcome to Winter-** introduces Maine's immigrant and refugee families to the joys and benefits of healthy outdoor winter activity. The program fights misconceptions about snow and cold weather and promotes positive perceptions about winter to show kids and their families how much fun winter can be.
- **World Class Athlete Tour-** takes a variety of winter sports champions from Maine to schools throughout the state to share their experiences and promote physical fitness through participation in outdoor winter activities.

FUNDING:

WinterKids is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that is entirely supported through corporate sponsorships, donations, and volunteers. Longstanding corporate sponsorships include: Hannaford Supermarkets, TDBank, TimeWarner Cable, LLBean and New Balance. WinterKids is able to utilize the strengths of their corporate sponsors to both support their efforts and also get out the word about the services WinterKids provides.

BEST PRACTICES:

- **Making outdoor, physical activity accessible to all children.** WinterKids addresses the many barriers to outdoor winter fun in several ways. Their outreach activities focus primarily on low-income children and schools who would otherwise be unable to afford the cost of many winter activities. Because outdoor activities require adult supervision, WinterKids partnered with Big Brothers and Big Sisters to donate free Passports and ensure that lack of parental supervision is not a barrier. The GOAL curriculum was completely adapted to address children with special needs. WinterKids also reaches out to immigrant and refugee populations and others who are new to Maine through their Welcome to Winter Program, which helps people unfamiliar with winter gain a basic understanding, increase their comfort and safety level and allow them to enjoy winter and have fun.
- **Creativity with funding.** WinterKids is a non-profit organization and relies entirely on the support of donations, sponsorships, and volunteers. An additional source of funding came through the tobacco settlement in Maine. By using the settlement money they were able to turn something negative and unhealthy into positive, health focused, and fun activities.
- **Strategic planning.** An aggressive strategic plan has allowed WinterKids to grow incrementally as they move forward. In the past three years WinterKids has seen a 50% increase in the demand for their programs.

OVERALL LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Work hard to develop a strategic plan.** It's incredibly important to gain an understanding of your organizations strengths and weaknesses so that you can better address them as you move forward.
- **Adapt to fit the needs of various population groups.** It's important to address all the barriers that exist, including physical, financial, and cultural, in order to have the greatest impact possible.

- **Collaboration.** Nobody is doing this alone. Other organizations can help spread the word. For example, Phys Ed teachers are great advocates for WinterKids, as is Big Brothers Big Sisters of America.
- **Utilize volunteers!** The help of volunteers has really allowed WinterKids to grow their organization and move forward.

CONTACT:

Fran Mullin, Executive Director

WinterKids

120 Exchange Street

P.O. Box 7566

Portland, ME 04112

pHONE: (207) 871-5700

fAX: (207) 879-9483

fmullin@winterkids.org