



# Warm Up to Winter: Encouraging Winter Activity Among Refugee and Immigrant Youth in Maine

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# Physical Activity among Youth

- Essential for promoting lifelong health → recent trends show decreased physical activity among youth<sup>1</sup>
- Immigrants at increased risk of obesity and sedentary behavior<sup>2</sup>
- Somali refugee women have decreased activity and increased rates of obesity<sup>3</sup>

# Maine Immigrants from Somalia

- Approximately 1100 Somali students in Portland and Lewiston, Maine (vs approx 500 immigrants from other African countries)<sup>4</sup>
- Arriving from Kenya or other parts of US
- Little participation among winter sports among Somali youth in Maine
- Winters can be long (receive snow from October – March)
- → long time to be physically less active

# Exposing Youth to Outdoors Activity

- WinterKids (Maine based non profit 501c3), is dedicated to increasing outdoor winter activity among youth in Maine.<sup>5</sup>
- Many programs aimed at increasing outdoor activity among all Maine kids
- Focus on refugee and immigrant populations through *Welcome to Winter* -- 2-3 days focused on playing in snow and educating parents and children about winter
- Several outreach programs at local schools as well for parental education



WinterKids



Get healthy. Get fit. Get outdoors.  
This winter, be a WinterKid!



# Key Informant Interviews

- Somali parents and key community leaders report need for more information.
- Preliminary data suggests:
  - Parents do not want to let their children outside for concern of getting sick in winter
  - Many Somali community athletic opportunities for both boys and girls happen indoors (indoor kickball and soccer games)
  - Somali parents do not indicate cultural or religious reasons that children should not go outside in winter

# Hypotheses:

- We hypothesize that potential barriers include:
  - Lack of warm winter clothing, equipment
  - Lack of transportation to outdoor activity parks
  - Language as a barrier to organized sports participation sign up and information process
  - Concern that Somali girls should focus more on learning how to run a household, and should not be physically active<sup>6</sup>

# Long-term goals:

- Develop programs that specifically target barriers faced by immigrant and refugees youth outdoor activity in the winter
- Continuously monitor and “tweak” this program through ongoing study and analysis of participation
- Improve the overall health of (Somali) immigrants

# Specific Goals:

- To determine the level of winter activity among Somali youth (14 y/o and under)
- To determine the physical and educational barriers to winter activity among this group
- To identify possible solutions to these barriers.



# Methods

- 6-8 Focus Groups with parents of Somali children in the Portland, Maine region
- 2 Focus Groups with Somali children – one for children 12-15, one for children 16-18
- Specific questionnaire for the focus groups developed
- Cultural broker/interpreter and Medical Anthropologist to conduct focus groups

# Focus Group Details

- Neutral location: FPC Conference Room
- Food cards from a local grocery store will be offered as incentive to participate
- Administered via trained assistant in focus groups, as well as an interpreter
- All sessions will be recorded, and translated into English, use of interpretive software for analysis
- The focus group administrator, as well as the PI and secondary investigator, will go through all transcripts to identify themes

# Recruitment

- Recruiting poster at community centers and clinics
- Maine Medical Center – Housekeeping dept
- ESL classes
- Word of mouth

Si caruurta Soomaaliyeed ay u helaan caafimaad iyo firfircooni joogto ah sanadka oodhan!



# Questionnaire for Immigrant and Activity Project

- How old are your children?
- What is (are) the sex(es) of your children?
- Do you think it is important for children to be physically active?
- Are your children physically active in the wintertime? How are they physically active?
  - Are these activities formally organized (i.e. sports teams)?
  - If they are not physically active, do you think your children would be interested in participating in winter sports?
- What are some of the barriers to your children participating in more winter activities?
- What would make them (or you) more interested?
- What resources would help increase your activity in the winter?
- Have you heard of any programs that you can participate in to increase wintertime activity?

# Progress to date:

- Excitement of community members
- Active involvement of *Welcome to Winter* program
- Delays in IRB approval:
  - Refugee populations vulnerable, required full review
  - Translation and back-translation of all written documents into Somali and English
  - Written consent – waiver desired

# Resources:

1. Boreham C, Riddoch C. The physical activity, fitness and health of children. *J Sports Sci.* Dec 2001;19(12):915-929.
2. Magnusson MB, Hulthen L, Kjellgren KI. Obesity, dietary pattern and physical activity among children in a suburb with a high proportion of immigrants. *J Hum Nutr Diet.* Jun 2005;18(3):187-194.
3. Guerin PB, Diiriye RO, Corrigan C, Guerin B. Physical activity programs for refugee Somali women: working out in a new country. *Women Health.* 2003;38(1):83-99.
4. *Maine Department of Education Enrollment Information.* Augusta Maine: Maine State Department of Education 2006.
5. [www.winterkids.org](http://www.winterkids.org)
6. De Knop P, Theeboom M, Wittock H, De Martelaer K. Implications of Islam on Muslim girls' sport participation in Western Europe. Literature review and policy recommendations for sport promotion. *Sport, Education and Society.* Oct 1996; 1(2): 147-164.