

# active life

## City promotes unplugging and playing

**SIGNS UP** at playgrounds around Nanaimo aim to foster activity.

BY KARL YU  
THE NEWS BULLETIN

**W**ith the proliferation of smartphones, video games and tablets, ungluing youngsters from screens may seem impossible, but there are options to get them active.

The Greater Nanaimo Early Years Partnership was given the green light from the city in December to install Unplug and Play campaign signage at Nanaimo playgrounds. The get-out-and-active message is something the partnership and the City of Nanaimo Parks, Recreation and Environment department want to drive home.

One of the campaign taglines is '90 per cent of the brain develops by the age of five' and it is imperative to get children off the couch, especially in the early years, say officials.

"I have a teenager and an eight-year-old and definitely, as you see them progress to those years, you have less and less time to have an opportunity for them to unplug and engage in things," said Tracy Stuart, recreation coordinator for the city.

"Obviously, teenagers of this day and age are totally connected. They mostly text each other, so in those formative years, up until six, is a great opportunity to still be able to engage, physically play and enjoy," she said.

Stuart's children are involved in swimming and hiking and Amber Bruner, Children First Early Years community coordinator with the partnership, has her nine-year-old swimming, playing basketball and biking.



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**Amber Bruner, left, with the Greater Nanaimo Early Years Partnership, Emily Stuart and mother Tracy Stuart, with the City of Nanaimo parks department, hold Unplug and Play signs at Maffeo Sutton Park. The campaign seeks to get Nanaimo youth and children away from computer screens and out and active.**

"We live in such a beautiful part of the country, that we are so fortunate we can be outdoors and outside and playing year-round," Bruner said.

The Unplug and Play concept doesn't only pertain to children, either.

"When you're engaged on the playground, take the time to actually be engaged and enjoy the time with the kids and interacting, rather than ... checking our e-mails, checking our Facebook, those types of things," said Stuart.

"Sometimes, it's something you have to actively think about and do and actively not answer your phone when it rings and actively be not

thinking about your e-mail when you have the opportunity to be playing," Bruner said.

Coun. Ian Thorpe, chairman of the recreation commission which gave permission for the signs, knows first-hand about the value of getting children active as a former physical education teacher.

"This just encourages parents, especially with younger kids, to get them out of the house, and to get them in the habit early of enjoying some unstructured play time," said Thorpe. "Certainly even older kids and into their teens, they still enjoy outside recreational activities."

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## Awareness helps rid city of invasive plant species

For the last few years, May has been designated as Invasive Plants Awareness Month in the City of Nanaimo.

Some might question what the big deal is to have plants that are not native to this area growing and thriving. After all, some non-native plants are beautiful and add colour to local landscapes. Invasive plants like Scotch broom, English ivy, English holly, Daphne or Japanese knotwood, however, have few competitors and can quickly take over an ecosystem degrading the habitat for many native plants species.

Here are a few steps we can take to prevent these plants from overtaking Nanaimo's natural areas:

### ACTIVE LIFE

Tammy Toor  
Parks and recreation



◆ Be careful about what plants we choose for our gardens – nursery staff are very knowledgeable about the types of plants that are best for our climate and won't disturb our ecosystem.

◆ Refrain from dumping garden trimmings in parks

or other open spaces – this prevents trimmings from propagating in other areas.

◆ Observe parks for unfamiliar or foreign plants – if invasive plants are found early enough, they can be eradicated easier than when they are mature.

◆ Minimize disturbances to the environment – when soil is disturbed and vegetation is removed, ideal conditions are created for invasive plants.

The City of Nanaimo is organizing work parties in local parks where citizens and local stewardship groups come together to remove invasive plants while learning how to safely remove them from their own backyards.

Continued /23

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