

'State of Play' Report Released on Youth Sports in the Region

The Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation and Rochester Area Community Foundation released *State of Play*, an independent assessment conducted by the Aspen Institute's Sports & Society Program that examines access, quality, and participation in youth sports in Livingston, Ontario, Monroe, Wayne, Seneca, and Yates counties.

"Research shows active children do better in life," said Tom Farrey, executive director of Aspen Institute Sports & Society Program. "They're healthier, more often go on to college, and as they move into adulthood are more likely to raise active kids. So how do we get more kids off the couch, without running them into the ground?"

Farrey said answering that question starts with a clear-eyed account of how well a community is currently serving kids through sports. "We hope this report – the first of its kind nationally – provides valuable insights that can help mobilize stakeholders."

Among the 40-plus findings in the report:

- **Not Enough Kids Active at a Healthy Level:** While 81 percent of local parents believe it's important to have their children regularly involved in sports, only 12 percent of youth across Greater Rochester and the Finger Lakes are physically active one hour a day, the level recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- **It's About More than Sports:** A Johns Hopkins University analysis projects that if stakeholders in the region can get and keep just 25 percent of youth active daily,

6,989 fewer youth would be overweight and obese, saving the region more than \$243 million in direct medical costs and workplace productivity losses.

- **Where Have the Neighborhood Games Gone?:** The sports experience has changed dramatically over the last generation or so, with children participating in fewer sports and activities near their homes. Casual/pick-up play has become far less common, with more youth primarily playing in organized team settings.
- **Many bright spots, but we can do better:** An online survey of youth sport providers and other stakeholders said Greater Rochester and the Finger Lakes region deserves a C+ in getting kids active through sports. The grade aligns with research by the Aspen Institute, which found many innovative organizations and grassroots champions dedicated to youth, but also gaps in program access, especially in low-income and rural areas.

“Our vision is to have a Greater Rochester community in which all children, regardless of ZIP code or ability, have the opportunity to be active through sports,” said David O. Egnor, president and CEO of the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation. “The *State of Play* report identifies the challenges we face as a region, but more importantly, it also shares the opportunities that all of us in the community – parents, educators, funders, and leaders – can pursue for improvement.”

In *State of Play*, sport refers to all forms of physical activity which, through organized or casual play, aim to express or improve physical fitness or well-being.

The Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation commissioned the report and partnered with the Community Foundation to create and oversee a Youth Sports Task Force for the Rochester Region, comprised of more than three dozen representatives of youth sports, recreation programs, and local communities who provided insights, expertise and feedback throughout the

eight-month research process.

“For the first time ever, we have a clear picture of what the state of youth sports looks like in our region,” said Jennifer Leonard, President and CEO, Rochester Area Community Foundation. “*State of Play* is a playbook that will drive community conversation and action around how we can collectively and effectively address youth sports for years to come.”

More than 1,000 local adults and youth informed the State of Play report through interviews, roundtables, focus groups and surveys. The Aspen Institute analyzed the region through its existing framework of eight strategies, or “plays,” designed to increase sport participation with urban, suburban, and rural youth.

The eight “plays” include:

1. **Ask Kids What They Want:** Understanding the needs of kids and building their input into the decision-making process around sports.
2. **Reintroduce Free Play:** Making room for less-structured activity.
3. **Encourage Sports Sampling:** Exposing kids to a variety of sports, and not asking them to specialize early in any one sport.
4. **Revitalize In-Town Leagues:** Supporting community-based options.
5. **Think Small:** Being creative in the use and development of play spaces.
6. **Design for Development:** Delivering age-appropriate programs.
7. **Train All Coaches:** Training in key competencies in working with kids.
8. **Emphasize Prevention:** Preventing brain and other injuries.

While the *State of Play* report and an expanded local task force will help to inform grantmaking strategies for the Community Foundation and the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation, the broader hope is that the region's communities will begin to engage in this conversation and collectively rally around our youth. The two foundations are planning to host a series of community roundtables and discussions in the near future.

This fall, Rochester Area Community Foundation will announce grant opportunities for the new **Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Legacy Fund for Youth Sports**. The overarching goal will be to strengthen the quality, quantity, and accessibility of youth sports and recreation programs for children under age 18 in the region.

Greater Rochester and the Finger Lakes' *State of Play* is one of three regional youth sports and recreation studies commissioned by the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation, in partnership with community foundations in Greater Buffalo and Southeast Michigan. These are the Foundation's primary regions for investment and were the home and adopted home of the Foundation's namesake, the late Ralph C. Wilson, Jr., a Detroit area native and lifelong resident, and founder and long-time owner of the Buffalo Bills professional football team.

To receive updates and learn more about upcoming efforts to improve the local state of play, visit RCWJRF.org/StateofPlay.

Learn more about why youth sports and recreation are so important to the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation efforts here, in Buffalo, and Southeast Michigan by watching this video.