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MEDIA RELEASE

Inspired by the Pan Am Games two students develop the world's first bike libraries

While young Canadians, inspired by their heroes, cheerfully count the number of golds, silvers, and bronzes our athletes bring home, they are far less likely than ever to brag about their own physical merits. According to Statistics Canada, Canadian children spend 8.6 hours a day – 62% of their waking hours – in front of television, video games, computers or other mobile devicesⁱ. As a result of this inactivity more than 1 in 3 of Canada's youth are now considered obese, as rates have skyrocketed over the past decadeⁱⁱ. It is clear from these statistics that young Canadians may find turning Pan Am inspiration into perspiration through daily physical activity a real challenge moving forward.

Enter Charles Burke and Justin Hall, two graduate students studying active transportation at Hamilton's McMaster University. Several months before the kick off for the Games two were tasked with creating a lasting legacy for the Pan Am Path, a separated bicycle lane that crisscrosses Hamilton's downtown core. Over the course of their research they found that Toronto and Hamilton needed to encourage young people to use Pan Am infrastructure in order to generate a long term return on investment. How they went about providing that encouragement is a social innovation that is truly a world's first.

Canada can be proud to say that it is the first country in the world to allow young people to borrow a bike like they would borrow a book. 'Bike libraries' have officially opened in Hamilton in conjunction with the Games loaning youths from age 7-15 bikes free of charge with only their library card. The pilot program is currently operating out of two branches, and is a joint effort between the Hamilton Public Library, Canadian Tire Jumpstart, and Burke and Hall's own non-profit organization, Start the Cycle. The program will run until October and if successful the two plan on partnering with libraries across the country with a particular eye on the GTA as its next expansion target.

Burke, now a PhD Candidate, says, "as someone who plans on spending his life studying ways to get people walking and cycling throughout their city, I have learned that the key to active transportation is access. You have to make it so that the tools for activity are as easy to get to as the tools for inactivity", referring to the prevalence of computers, games, and television. Hall continues, "in 2015 young people have to learn physical literacy, they have to learn how to move. Libraries have met the challenge of reading literacy by providing us with the right tools, now they can tackle the physical literacy problem we have in Canada with bikes". Both agree, the librarians are the real stars of the program. And while we are currently admiring our athletic stars for inspiration, let us not forget our librarians, now facilitating perspiration for Canada's youth.

ⁱ Physical activity of Canadian children and youth: Accelerometer results from the 2007 to 2009 Canadian Health Measures Survey by Rachel C. Colley, Didier Garriguet, Ian Janssen, Cora L. Craig, Janine Clarke and Mark S. Tremblay. January 2011. http://www.phcanada.ca/sites/default/files/current_research_pdf/01-20-11/Physical_activity_of_Canadian_children_and_youth.pdf

ⁱⁱ Overweight and obesity in children and adolescents: Results from the 2009 to 2011 Canadian Health Measures Survey. Karen C. Roberts, Margot Shields, Margaret de Groh, Alfred Aziz and Jo-Anne Gilbert. September 2012. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-003-x/2012003/article/11706-eng.htm>