

## Unique running program helps to build healthy community

Born from an idea and a fundamental grant made by the Victoria Foundation, Every Step Counts is a unique running program developed for people experiencing barriers and challenges with poverty, housing, mental health, addiction and other related issues.

Drawing on the wide-reaching and long-lasting benefits of running, the positive and innovative program provides a team environment that fosters self-esteem, confidence, energy and positive growth.

Designed as an inclusive support network, Every Step Counts is mentored by the Victoria Foundation in partnership with Victoria Cool Aid Society and Frontrunners Victoria. Through these key community partners the goal is to improve both health and self-reliance for all participants through a guided running program. Participants receive peer and mentorship support to positively enhance their lives through starting and sustaining physical activity.

After kicking off in February 2009, Every Step Counts has drawn a diverse group of enthusiastic individuals who come out regularly to build their fitness, fun and friendships. Some are new to running and exercise, while others are established athletes. All are welcome and new runners join on an on-going basis. Participants have cited benefits such as longer sleeps, reduced anxiety, weight loss, increased energy, improved moods and new friends from their experience.

Gently used running shoes are supplied for all new recruits, and after participating in 10 sessions, runners are awarded a certificate and t-shirt. After 15 sessions, their achievement is recognized by custom-fit runners, courtesy of Frontrunners. Ongoing donations of running wear and other incentives such as fanny packs are always gratefully appreciated.

Since its inception, the Every Step Counts team has had great success participating in events such as the TC 10K and the Canada Day 5K in Sid-



ney. Coming up, the team will be running and walking the Royal Victoria Marathon, taking part in the 8K, the 1/2 marathon and the full marathon Oct. 11. The Royal Victoria Marathon is of great funding importance to the program, as Every Step Counts is listed as part of the Marathon's charity pledges. This provides the larger community an opportunity to support this valuable program to help ensure its future and continued success.

Anyone can help raise awareness and/or funds for Every Step Counts. Every

dollar counts and you don't have to be a Marathon participant to collect pledges. The goal is to raise \$5,000 for the program, so whether you're a runner or cheering from the sidelines, you can make a difference. A full 100 per cent of all pledges collected go directly to Every Step Counts. Visit [www.CoolAid.org/esc](http://www.CoolAid.org/esc) and find out more or call Gillie Easdon, Every Step Counts Program Coordinator, at 250-595-8619 or [geasdon@coolaid.org](mailto:geasdon@coolaid.org)



Runners participating in the Every Step Counts program have participated in events around the region, reporting benefits ranging from weight loss and improved sleep to increased energy and reduced anxiety.

Since 1936, the Victoria Foundation's permanent endowment has had the power to connect people who care with causes that matter. If you wish to make a difference in your community – one that has lasting impact, start here. Call Sandra Richardson, CEO for information at 250.381.5532. [www.victoriafoundation.bc.ca](http://www.victoriafoundation.bc.ca)



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