

Appendix D

Update to the Leisure Involvement for Everyone (LIFE) Financial Assistance Program

BACKGROUND

The Leisure Involvement for Everyone (LIFE) program has been designed to provide healthy lifestyle opportunities for the residents of Esquimalt who are on limited incomes offering access to recreation services. In 2019, the regional public recreation departments, led by Saanich Parks and Recreation, partnered to hire a consultant to conduct a review of the LIFE program. This review involved consultation and engagement with LIFE pass holders, local social service organizations, recreation administration and programming staff, and other key stakeholders in the Greater Victoria region. The results were released just prior to the Pandemic closures which halted many similar initiatives tied to traditional ways of accessing public recreation services as these were greatly impacted by Public Health Orders. As such, the recommendations from this review are being implemented gradually across the region. The City of Victoria was the first in the region to adopt changes to their LIFE program although the City's program has traditionally been offered in a different manner than the rest of the region. The District of Saanich approved the changes in June 2023 for implementation in 2024. The District of Oak Bay recently implemented the changes in January 2024.

Developed in the late 1990's as a regional program offered at all public recreation facilities in Greater Victoria, the Leisure Involvement for Everyone (LIFE) program has been designed to provide healthy lifestyle opportunities for the residents of the region who live on limited or low incomes. The LIFE program is available to residents of all ages and abilities. Residents apply for this program with their "home" municipality and must qualify under the federal government's "Low-income cut-off" (LICO) guidelines. In 2019 Esquimalt Parks and Recreation had 695 residents who accessed the program. This number fell significantly during Covid with 473 residents enrolled in 2023. To date in 2024 we have 260 residents enrolled.

Currently, qualified individuals and families choose between the following options with their LIFE program registration:

Option 1:

- A regional access pass with 52 free drop-in visits pre-loaded for use. The resident may use these drop-in visits at any participating recreation centre in Greater Victoria, to a total of 52 visits per year. Visits are non-transferable.
- Coupled with 4 program registration coupons worth 50% (up to a maximum of \$50 per registration) off each registration to a maximum of \$200 per year. Each coupon provides either 50% off a course which is \$100 or less or \$50 off a course over \$100. If one uses all 52 admissions, they can then use one of the four discounts to purchase a regular punch pass or time limited pass and receive 50% off (up to a max. of \$50) a punch package which is \$100 or less or \$50 off a punch or time limited pass over \$100 with Esquimalt.

Option 2:

- Instead of the option 1 package, residents can choose to purchase a full Esquimalt annual pass or a full regional annual pass at a 50% discount, which represents approximately \$200 to \$250 in savings per pass. Both pass options come with unlimited drop in visits per year. The regional pass is

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more expensive overall but allows for unlimited drop in visits at any participating public recreation facility in Greater Victoria.

PROPOSED CHANGES

The following changes were recommended in the LIFE Program Review Report and are recommended by staff to be adopted and implemented in Esquimalt for the 2025 intake of LIFE patrons:

1. Eligible Esquimalt residents to receive unlimited drop-in access to Township of Esquimalt Recreation facilities and to participating public recreation facilities (i.e. where the unlimited LIFE pass has been adopted).

2. The approval term be increased from one to two years before expiry. The two-year cycle begins upon approval date, not limited to January application (easing the burden on administrative staff and clients alike).

3. LIFE pass holders will also receive two full years of credit on their accounts at the time of issue, replacing the current annual practice of offering four 50% off discount coupons. The amounts for credits, for the two-year cycle, will be as follows: \$80 per preschooler (0-4 yrs.) \$80 per adult (19 yrs. & up) and \$120 per child/youth (5-17 yrs.) These rates are aligned with the City of Victoria, District of Saanich, and the District of Oak Bay LIFE programs. NOTE: The change to a credit system on an individual's account facilitates online registration opportunities.

4. Expand the LIFE program to include post-secondary students who qualify under the same requirements as all other residents such as the income thresholds outlined in the LICO guidelines. Post secondary students are currently not eligible as they are considered to have had access to gyms and weight rooms through their tuition and enrollment at a postsecondary institution. This context has changed as most local post secondary students have to pay a considerable fee now to access fitness facilities on campus.

CONCLUSION

The changes above have been included in the annual fees and charges update for 2025. These changes support access to recreation programs and services and address challenges and to focus participation opportunities on drop in options over registered program as this reflects the general usage trends of LIFE patrons to date. Township of Esquimalt will continue to participate as a regional partner in the service.