

Reversing a Trend

The Nechako Nordics is a small cross country ski club located in Vanderhoof, BC. Our club has been active for over 30 years and has produced both elite athletes and many more recreational skiers. However in the past several years the enrollment in our Bunny, Jackrabbit, and racing programs have been declining. As part of our plans to reverse this trend our club initiated a Ski S’Kool Program in 2017.

For 2017 we set a goal to provide all grade 3 students in the Vanderhoof area the opportunity to learn how to cross country ski. For a small club this was an ambitious and costly initiative, but one we firmly believed in as a tangible way to grow our sport among the youth of our community.

We initiated our Ski S’Kool Program by meeting with our local School District. From this meeting we agreed to offer a Ski S’Kool Program for a minimum of three years. The Nechako Nordics committed to provide Grade 3 students with four cross country ski lessons each. All lessons would be provided at our Nechako Valley Sporting Association (NVSA) trail system by NCCP trained coaches. Also as part of this plan the Nechako Nordics agreed to purchase 50 new sets of cross country ski equipment and to purchase and install a new equipment shed, shelves and racks to properly store it. School District #91 committed to supply all bussing to and from the NVSA trails and to provide volunteer ski helpers (one helper for every eight students).

We then met with each elementary school in the Vanderhoof area, including the Northside Christen School and their Parent Advisory Committees. Without exception every school fully supported the initiative.

Based on this positive feedback we applied and received grants from the 2016 IMAGINE Northern Health Community Grant, the Nechako – Kitamat Development Fund, Cross Country BC and the Northern Health Partnering for Healthier Communities Fund to help purchase our new ski equipment, shed, shelves and racks. We also applied and received funding for NCCP training for an additional eight cross country ski coaches from ViaSport/Northern BC Community Sport Development Fund.

We initiated our Ski S’Kool Program in January 2017. The response from all of the local elementary schools was overwhelming. We had over 120 children participate in our four lesson program.

Based on the success of our first year of Ski S’Kool we fully anticipate significant increases to our Bunny/Jackrabbit Programs in the 2017/18 ski season and have already been busy planning more Ski S’Kool opportunities in the future.

Our long term Ski S’Kool goals include:

- Year 1 (2018) goals: 540 student visits with 8 coaches (4 lessons for all Vanderhoof Grade 3 students and ski day field trips for all Vanderhoof Grades 2 and 4 students)
- Year 2 (2019) goals: 900 student visits with 10 coaches (4 lessons for all Vanderhoof Grade 3 and Grade 4 students and ski day field trips for all Vanderhoof Grades 2 and 5 students)
- Year 3 (2020) goals: 990 student visits with 10 coaches (4 lessons for all Vanderhoof Grade 3 and Grade 4 students and ski day field trips for all Vanderhoof Grades 2, 5, and 6 students)

Our plans to achieve these goals include:

- Maintaining good communication and trust with School District #91, principals, teachers and Parent Advisory Committees
- Continuing to offer quality ski instruction programs
- Continuing to recognize our program supporters

By Richard Burkholder, Nechako Nordics