

Upper Valley Trails Alliance

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Upper Valley Trails Alliance

Norwich, VT

Kids, Families and Schools Weather the Pandemic with Passport to Winter Fun

Upper Valley Trails Alliance pulls kids away from technology and into the great outdoors

The Pandemic Winter of 2020-21 had parents throughout the Upper Valley asking, “How do we get the kids away from screens? How do we get them moving? How do we have some fun?!”

While this winter seemed longer and darker than usual, those are the same questions parents and teachers ask every year. There is an answer to all those questions. Passport to Winter Fun.

A program of the Upper Valley Trails Alliance (UVTA), Passport to Winter Fun gives teachers and parents a structured way to engage kids in kindergarten through 6th grade in outdoor fitness. Kids track their winter activity in a specially designed passport and receive prizes for logging 60 minutes of activity for 10, 20 or 30 days. At day 30, they become eligible for the Polar Bear Achievement Award and entry into the Grand Prize Raffle.

“Passport to Winter Fun is all about getting kids up off the couch and out into the fresh air,” says Kaitie Eddington, Program Manager. “By having regular doses of fun – skating, sledding, skiing, fort building, snowshoeing, hiking – with their families and friends, they enjoy themselves into healthy, often year-round, habits.”

Tracking their own progress towards incentives is the secret sauce for getting kids to shed electronics and venture outside. “My daughter took the challenge very seriously and loved drawing pictures in her passport,” said one Mom in a thankful email to UVTA. “The passport booklet is a wonderful way for kids to reflect on their hard work. Natalie was elated to receive her grand prize award today. She screamed and ran laps around the yard with the gift certificate in hand and is looking forwards to camping at Storrs Pond this summer.”

That happy kid was just one of 4,500 Passport to Winter Fun participants this year. “With COVID-19 restrictions in place, more parents were using the program to round-out homeschooling or remote learning routines,” says Eddington. “The schools that were in session continued to take advantage of the program to build out their own physical or outdoor education curricula.”

And the teachers agree, “We have participated in the Passport to Winter Fun program since its inception and the students look forward to it every year.” Says Lindsay Putnam, teacher at Marion Cross School in Norwich, VT and longtime participant of the Passport to Winter Fun. “The incentive prizes for things like cross country ski tickets or aquatic center admission are a great feature. Our students' enthusiasm keeps us participating!”.

For more information about Passport to Winter Fun, visit <https://www.uvtrails.org/programs-events/passport-to-winter-fun/>