

Making something app-en

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Technology has become both a blessing and a burden in our society. On the one hand, it's hard to imagine just how people got anything done before computers, e-mail and smartphones. Yet, on the other, it's quickly become hard to imagine a person doing anything that doesn't involve some form of technology.

The number of kids riding bikes, playing street hockey or just generally enjoy a healthy active lifestyle is small, instead most are choosing more and more often to stay inside and play video games or watch TV. This obviously has led to a huge increase in the number of obese and overweight kids in our communities.

This was not something that was lost on Don Patterson, who notes "one of the huge challenges out there these days is that there are fewer opportunities for kids to be active and be healthy."

This becomes even more of an issue when Patterson goes on to point out that "every study out there shows that kids who are active do better in school. There's a lower rate of juvenile delinquency and they're better at time management."

Patterson joined with Janice Ryan and created *SpiritRunner*, a truly amazing app for your smartphone to help motivate aboriginal youth to keep active while also allowing them to keep track of their activities. This app is everything that technology should be. It has stunning visual art work, created by the incredibly talented aboriginal artist Jessica Desmoulin, which has a warm, comforting and inviting feel to it that draws the user in.

The app also offers rewards for achieving certain goals and even for simply participating and trying out various activities. One of my favourite aspects of the app though is that it allows the users to share their activities with friends or coaches. What better way to motivate other kids to be active than having their friends show them what activities they have been or are doing? Motivational quotes were also added after working closely with aboriginal communities.

"They told us that motivational quotes are really important to them," Ryan said. "That sometimes they feel a little down, there's nobody to talk to or they're just teenagers having an off day and feeling a little insecure."

What really separates this app though is the people behind it. Patterson and Ryan could have just stopped at the features above but they wanted more. They have actually gone out and are currently working with two-time Olympic cross country skiing medallist Beckie Scott and her program "Ski Fit North Alberta" to help promote an active lifestyle within the community. Patterson and Ryan also got former NHLer and founder of "Greater Strides Hockey Academy", a hockey school for aboriginal youth, Brantt Myhres on board with them as well.

This app is the essence of what technology should be. It engages the user in a fun and positive way, while also providing a link to a network of people able to provide support and encouragement.

For more information you can check out *Spirit Runner's* website at www.spiritrannerapp.com, or download the app for Free on your smartphone.