



INCLUSIVITY IN COMMUNITY SPORT

Making Space One Community at a Time

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Introduction

As dialogue surrounding systemic discrimination, inequality and injustice dominate the public consciousness, there is a significant opportunity to investigate our systems and structures. At the core of dialogue addressing discrimination, social inclusion and equity is the concept of disadvantage. Inclusion can only happen when barriers and challenges that incur disadvantage are removed. In order to meet the threshold of equity, there is a need to investigate and understand the unique circumstances of individuals and groups to identify the causes of disadvantage and only then is it possible to take steps to minimize or ideally remove that disadvantage. When disadvantages are remedied, everyone has a fair opportunity to participate. No one has an undue advantage or disadvantage in any given setting (Ghildival, 2015). This is true for most of our social constructs, including organized sport.

According to the United Nations, sport contributes to well-being regardless of age, gender or ethnicity. (Lemke). Physical activity levels of Ontarians are declining while our most vulnerable groups continue to experience barriers that limit access and participation. Consequently, there is growing need to remove barriers and find ways for inactive populations to benefit from increased activity. All Ontarians can benefit from participation in active lifestyles. There are hidden opportunities to reach inactive, priority vulnerable populations to increase activity.

The purpose of the research has been to explore and test innovative ways to increase activity levels among members of priority populations, specifically but not limited to the geographical area of Pickering/Durham Region. Vulnerable groups, such as newcomers, people of colour, seniors, individuals with disabilities, those who identify as LGBTQ2SI, Indigenous peoples and others, are often not able to equitably access organized sport and are therefore inactive due to barriers beyond their control.

This research therefore investigates the promotion of active lifestyles for vulnerable populations by better understanding their needs. Insight brings the ability to create more accessible sport and recreational opportunities through more creative and thoughtful program planning, facility design/environment and being able to test new initiatives constructed directly from the feedback from individuals with lived experience in marginalization.

The project is needed to connect people, find new ways to engage and mobilize marginalized populations and optimize use and impact of community infrastructure by making it more accessible. The successful achievement of these goals will result in more active community members from all walks of life. Although the primary beneficiaries of new programs and ideas are targeted, vulnerable populations with structural barriers to organized sport – people with disabilities, seniors, Indigenous people, newcomers, residents of group homes and retirement homes, as examples – this knowledge is also of benefit to staff, coaches and volunteers working in sport, parents and families of the populations targeted as well as non-profit organizations and institutions serving vulnerable people.

This research, is undertaken with the intent to design and implement new programs that meet holistic community needs, to explore ways to make facilities/equipment more accessible and to ensure new programs targeting vulnerable groups are sustainable. The goal is to make the benefits of participation in an active lifestyle more accessible to vulnerable populations, consistent with the priorities and participation goals of Game On, Ontario's sport plan. Our focus is on how sport can address a serious need for change.

Covid Impact on Study

Our research began in November of 2019. The COVID pandemic beginning in March of 2020 altered our initial plan for this research in various ways.

Initial plans for methodology primarily focused on in person group discussions in the form of focus groups and pilot programming. With this methodology, groups and individuals had the opportunity to lead discussions in ways that were meaningful to their specific lived experiences. We began in this format until March of 2020, when the project was put on hold due to the crisis of the pandemic.

The research resumed with a different focus in August 2021. The momentum built at the beginning of our research waned throughout the course COVID 19 pandemic. We had, for example, groups from the Muslim and LGBTQ2SI communities engaged but were not able to sustain their engagement post COVID. In person focus groups were no longer a viable option. Individuals everywhere were experiencing virtual meeting and survey fatigue. Nonprofit organizations that provided contacts within the more vulnerable sectors of the population were no longer in the position to assist with projects that did not meet their core objectives. Many of the groups that we intended to examine in this research were recovering from tragic circumstances, both pandemic and non-pandemic related, that diminished their capacity to participate. Overall, there was considerable reluctance to participate in this study post pandemic. This study therefore pivoted to meet the new reality. Our research became more qualitative than originally planned, utilizing ethnography, grounded theory, narrative, phenomenology and case studies. Qualitative research is ideal for identifying relationships between variables, and results in descriptive data by content analysis.

Methodology

For the purpose of this research, the notion of "sport" is used in its broadest range of context. This included competitive and recreational sport, play and recreational activities, traditional and non-traditional games, exercise and other physical activity centered classes and activities, as well as individual physical exercise methods including but not limited to swimming, martial arts, running, hiking and walking.

Data for this study was collected in a number of ways. Given the broad range of vulnerable populations identified, and the reality of post pandemic timing, the approach to data collection in multiple methodologies would both improve inclusivity of stakeholder perspectives and improve the quality of the dataset.

We began by accessing local statistical data on population demographics through the City of Pickering and the Region of Durham to determine which vulnerable populations to target in this study. It is worthwhile to note that this area is primarily urban, as a metropolitan suburb directly east of Toronto, Ontario.

Focus groups were conducted, primarily pre pandemic, where groups were invited to lead the discussion in ways most meaningful to their lived experiences. Focus groups ranged from 10 to 25 people, and lasted from 2 to 4 hours, allowing us to engage in fulsome discussions that captured the realities from different perspectives.

Post pandemic, this research maintained a focus group approach limited by the reality of our new world. The research was also conducted through individual interviews, online zoom meetings, an online survey, academic research and through pilot programming at the Pickering Football Club (PFC).

Findings

All Abilities

The Pickering Football Club has exceptional programming for people with disabilities. This programming is well established, maintains solid relationships with other disability organizations in the area, is led by individuals with education in disability studies and is varied in design. PFC's All Abilities soccer programs offer children, youth and adults with intellectual and/or physical disabilities an opportunity to participate in specially designed recreational opportunities. Some of the programming available at the Pickering Football Club for individuals with different abilities includes soccer for the blind and visually impaired, programs designed for all levels of sport ability in children, and the Learn to Train program for advanced players.

These programs are fully inclusive, designed and adapted for children with any disability or level of behaviour. Whether they use a wheelchair, walker or wear orthotics, or live with an intellectual, communication (ASD) or developmental disability, we provide support, including 1:1 support as needed with all level of ability welcome all on the field.

PFC's All Abilities programs are at the forefront of development of not only soccer and recreational programs but also physical literacy programming, quality participation and recreation/socialization opportunities. The experience in inclusionary sport is both the inspiration for this research as a means to extend this type of programming to other vulnerable populations, and a channel through which we sought candid information for this research.

During the course of this project, we spoke with groups of participants with different abilities of all ages and with the parents of individual participants. Focus groups and individual interviews provided valuable information, while survey results substantiated the knowledge shared by these groups. It is worthwhile to note that participants were asked to speak to sport

for individuals with disabilities in a general context, and not specific to the programming available at the Pickering Football Club.

Both participants and parents told us that most mainstream sport are usually not a good option for people with different abilities. While there are some mixed abilities sports available without the issues typical of mainstream sport, such as bullying, exclusion, and poor coaching for accommodations/modifications, it is thought that this is only the case because those mixed ability leagues target mainstream individuals who have the explicit intention of being inclusive. The benefits of mixed abilities and mainstream inclusionary sports were commended, yet our participants were clear that there is a time and place for integration. As much as people with different abilities want to be treated like everyone else, mainstream sport is not always a recipe for success in doing so.

The parents of the different abilities' participants articulated that getting their children into sport at a young age was highly dependent on program availability. Options and availability are improving year by year. The parents almost all spoke of social networking with other parents of disabled kids in terms of how they find out about opportunities available in the region, and the caliber of those programs.

People expressed that they have participated in all abilities programming that were negative experiences, meaning that the quality of programming is more important than the simple existence of it. The kinds of experiences conveyed included aggressive behaviour by other participants without consequences, overcompensated programming, too much focus on ensuring that people do not get hurt and poor coaching/leadership. These experiences were damaging to both the children and to the parents; they, in some cases, led to a reluctance to participate in other available programs.

While all abilities programming is becoming more widely available for children, it was clearly expressed that there is a lack of adequate programming for adults of all ages. Participants told us that 'aging out' of programming with nowhere else to turn was normal in their experience. Programming often needs to be age limited, but next steps in sport offerings should be accessible to this population. It was expressed that the few programs available to adults with disabilities are expensive due to a lack of funding and had long waitlists. Our participants believe that a misconception in wider society exists relative to the possibilities of expanding sport to adults with disabilities; they want the public to know that it is possible and that it is needed.

Young adult all ability sport programs are meaningful in terms of learning, growing, leading others. They teach life skills as well as sport. Just like mainstream young adults, those with disabilities require programming that fills the gap to adulthood. Participation in sport teaches us how to focus, to set goals, leadership skills and provides the satisfaction of self-improvement that is of benefit to all. Increased programming for young adults and adults alike promotes the disabled being contributing members of society. As one mother stated, it is a great alternative to playing video games in the basement as a lifestyle. Furthermore, programming for disabled adults and young adults provides the possibility for more leadership opportunities through the

utilization of interested participants in working towards becoming involved in programming themselves.

It was clearly communicated that it is common for people to make assumptions about people of different abilities based on initial impressions. While how an individual presents themselves may be an indicator of what they are capable of, it often does not tell the whole story. People of different abilities and/or their caregivers want sport programming that understands that overcompensation in accommodation is harmful. They told us that there is often too much focus on ensuring that people do not get hurt while participating; everyone gets hurt sometimes during sport and people of different abilities need to be challenged. Over modification of sport is viewed as degrading. While a safe environment is important, so is letting players fall down. Most player are able to pick themselves up again. All told, we heard programming should have as few adjustments as possible while ensuring a safe environment.

Coaches, volunteers, referees and other sport organization staff that come into contact with mixed ability players need specialized training, according to our participants. With appropriate training, the players receive the same benefits from participating in sport as mainstream sport provides others. Some of the benefits our participants expressed were the physical aspects, development of strategic thinking, analytical thinking, leadership skills, goal setting, risk taking, a chance at feeling included, learning about teams and the skills associated with being a team player, making real friends, being exposed to different kinds of people both with and without different abilities and learning social skills. Sport brings value to the lives of participants who may not experience it in a lot of other ways. Specialized training for people working with individuals of different abilities was communicated to be a necessary means to successful sport programming.

The sustainability of all disability sport programming feels insecure to our participants. It was noted in several discussions that individuals and families want programs that they can be confident will remain in place to ensure stability for the participants. Other members of society do not have the same concerns about the precariousness of their sport options. This inequity leaves participants, their caregivers and families feeling even more vulnerable in a society that is already insecure.

To ensure the success of existing programming, our participants would like ongoing, structured evaluation of programs that is based in best practice guidelines. They would like to be able to be included in programming processes more often. Our focus groups facilitated a great deal of discussion on the need to better connect participants, families and caregivers with decision makers, ensuring that programs were designed with their feedback on what they need to be comfortable. A consistent theme emerged that clearly articulated the desire for everyone to be involved. One method for improvement in this type of involvement was the development of advisory councils through which participants, families, caregivers, outside experts in disability studies, other organizations with an interest in disability, etc could come together with decision makers to ensure that programs encompassed as much diverse perspective as possible.

The all abilities community told us that they would like to see a substantive increase in networking amongst sport programs and schools, community groups, non-profits dedicated to

disability assistance and municipalities. This networking would increase communication throughout the disability community in terms of options, availability and needs in each region. The current reliance on social networks for information availability was deemed to be insufficient and unsustainable.

Finally, these communities were clear that although subsidization from government is available, one must be persistent, articulate and aware to be able to access those funds. In order for individuals with disabilities to participate in sport, they must first overcome the same challenges that broader society faces in terms of cost, transportation, location, availability and social uncertainties. The disability community must also face the challenge of the 'administrative nightmare' of accessing funding that they are entitled to for sport. The challenges associated with funding access can include time, knowledge, ability of the caregiver to advocate and to fulfill all of the administrative requirements. Furthermore, when a caregiver is not fluent in English/French or is not proficient in filling out forms, articulating need, etc., access to funding is unattainable. Our participants want and need simpler, more equitable and straightforward funding models.

During the course of our research, it was evident that the disability community values participation in sport. There is a great sense of importance attached to participation for individuals with different abilities that includes physical, social and emotional benefits. The overarching theme coming from this vulnerable community was that social inclusion is a necessary phenomenon, and one that can and should be improved upon to better meet their needs.

Seniors

From the success of the Pickering Football Club's programming for individuals with different abilities, additional programs were designed and added for seniors with great success. Community programs designed for seniors have additional focus on health and wellness education, and social interaction.

During the course of this research, we spoke with groups of seniors that are current and/or past participants of PFC's programming as well as groups of seniors residing in retirement settings. Focus groups and individual interviews provided valuable information, while survey results substantiated the knowledge shared by these groups. It is worthwhile to note that participants were asked to speak to seniors' sport in a general context, and not specific to the programming available at the Pickering Football Club. It is also meaningful to note that the seniors we were able to include in the study were typically socio-economically comfortable and already active individuals, meaning the intersection of age and class is not represented in these findings.

Participants were vocal about the positive impact participation in sport and physical activity had on their quality of life. Seniors told us that in addition to the obvious physical benefits of participation, they particularly enjoy the social aspects of sport. They spoke of friendships

made, the motivating factor of participating in physical activity with others that they developed relationships with, the improvement in their emotional well-being, accountability to the group that they were participating with, the support they received from others, decreased loneliness and depression, and improved self-esteem.

Our participants told us that there is a great variety of options available to them as seniors in terms of types of activities to participate in and in terms of locations and schedules to do so, all of which is very important to them. Location was identified as key given that transportation is sometimes challenging. Seniors often are not comfortable driving in poor weather conditions, or do not drive at all. Public transportation routes should be accessible to a sport location to draw the senior population without access to their own vehicles. They enjoy the opportunity to try new sports, learn new skills and the joy they find in developing their minds and bodies.

A large proportion of seniors who participated in our research were very clear about their requirement for low or no cost sport opportunities as one of the most important drivers for participation. This could, however, be a reflection of our research population, given that many of these participants were drawn from PFC's In Motion program, which was funded and provided at no cost.

The seniors we met with in retirement setting were articulate about the vast array of physical activity available to them in their home setting. Retirement homes, long term care and other congregate settings that are government regulated provide practical and considerable opportunities for sport, exercise and activity to their residents.

Our groups were also vocal about wanting social and education time abutting the actual physical activity schedule. Socialization and education provision were drivers in terms of desire to participate. Seniors are interested in learning and socializing as a part of their physical activity routine.

Seniors had concerns about facility accessibility. It is important to ensure that accessibility features like ramps, for example, are available and well maintained. Concerns with respect to accessibility went beyond facility infrastructure; seniors also want parking lots and sidewalks to be cleared of any hazards for trips and falls.

Seniors told us that they worry when joining new sport activities or organizations that they will not fit in. They articulated concerns around fitting in, being able to keep up with others, being able to grasp new types of rules in games they are unfamiliar with and whether their physical and/or mental limitations will be of issue.

Finally, seniors told us that they would like to see other seniors in leadership positions in their activity programming and would like to have some interaction with youth in sport. Seniors do not want to be completely segregated from other groups, although they do want their own programming that meets the needs of older adults with more limited mobility/flexibility/balance, etc. Our seniors thought that if longstanding participants could be utilized as volunteer leadership in sport that it could make sessions more affordable and more inviting to newcomers.

Immigrants

Our research included conversations with immigrants to Canada. The people that we spoke with varied from relative newcomers to immigrants from various parts of the world who had immigrated more than a decade ago. There were consistent themes raised in terms of participation in sport from the immigrants we spoke with regardless of the longevity of time they had been here, where they immigrated from, and their socio-economic class at the time of our research.

The most common themes included barriers related to cost, time factors and language barriers. Newcomers are often financially strained with little ability to invest in recreational activities that can be expensive. Immigration in and of itself is a time-consuming process; acclimatization to a new culture is draining energetically and emotionally, leaving little momentum for becoming involved in non-essential activities. English is not always an immigrant's first language, meaning that barriers exist in terms of communication and lead to fears of not fitting in.

Immigrants often come to live in areas in which they have no social networks. The lack of community results in a deficiency of information on available options in sport and recreation. Formal newcomer organizations were identified as valuable resources for identifying opportunities, but many of our participants conveyed that many of these organizations were no longer operating, and where they were operating were not as well funded as they once were, diminishing access. Many immigrants utilized the formal newcomer organizations to seek out opportunities to participate in their new homelands, including within sport.

Social networks also provide opportunity for engagement by providing a sense of community. The lack of community means that immigrants often have little or no access to childcare required to participate in sport and/or that they have no support system in place to encourage and facilitate participation on an emotional level. Participation in sport, especially new sports, was therefore identified as intimidating.

Immigrants of colour articulated concerns with respect to racism. The question of 'will there be anyone who looks like me?' was raised consistently by this subsection of the immigrant population. Experiences in wider society in their new country of racism, language barriers and microaggressions prevented participation in sport for many of our participants until they were settled and fluent in English.

Some immigrants described a lack of familiarity with many Canadian sports. They identified that learning new sports at an older age is difficult, even with older children. Immigrants want to follow their passion in terms of the sports they know and love, which are sometimes not widely available to them in their new home. Furthermore, it was conveyed that if their 'home' sport was well established in Canada, that they felt obstructed from the more competitive levels of those sports. As an example, an immigrant from South America who had earned a graduate degree in coaching and spent more than two decades playing and/or coaching professional football

(soccer) was not successful in becoming involved in competitive soccer in Canada, despite years of attempts to do so. This individual and his family believe that his second language English and his global success were the most important determinants of his failure to translate his prior success to Canada.

It was widely acknowledged that sport can be a social avenue for newcomers to Canada. Sport was recognized as a way to develop social networks, to participate in their new society, to acclimatize. As one newcomer stated with a wink, 'sometimes sport isn't about the sport. It's about bringing people together'. Sport is recognizable as a means of providing some form of normalcy; normalcy that immigrants would benefit from immensely in their acclimatization to Canada.

People of Colour

People of Colour clearly communicated that their lived experience in suburban southern Ontario remains one where they remain always braced for racism, both blatant and subtle. Although they identified that geographical location matters in terms of the levels of racism they expect, no location precludes this reality as a part of daily life. Their lived reality is that racism is a daily occurrence.

Racism and micro aggressive behaviours are also a reality for children of colour. We primarily spoke with women of colour, who identified that although they want to provide opportunities for their children to be active and to promote the associated benefits that come with participation in organized sport, they also want to protect their children from racist attacks and the confusion of micro aggressive experiences. Mothers were articulate about their professed lack of power in society, which translated into fears related to child safety in mainstream sport organizations. Children of colour are considered to be more vulnerable to social exclusion, bullying, racism, and sexual abuse by families with histories of lived experience in racism and defenselessness.

Culturally, women of colour identified that they place priority on home tasks, children, work, and family before self-care. This information is corroborated by academic research. In black communities, "(o)ften women's work at home as providers of food and carers of the family (childcare as well as care of elderly people) is not considered "proper work". Consequently, those obligations which are "innate", regularly delivered and socially engrained do not seem to deserve leisure time" (Duncan, Stryker, Chaumeton & Cromley, 2017, pg. 160). Women of colour identified that there is a lack of available quality childcare that is within cultural comfort levels. Childcare availability is not structured to include cultural differences, but is rather homogeneous in nature. Furthermore, home childcare options are, at best, viewed as 'difficult'; their children are not wanted in many of these settings. The cultural expectations of women, therefore, puts them at a distinct disadvantage in terms of participation in sport.

People of colour have learned behaviours from their lived experiences of racism. When considering new social settings, the question of 'will there be others that look like me?' is front of

mind. As individuals, they tend to seek out networks of other people of colour to find opportunities to engage in group activities, including sport. The lived reality for people of colour is counteractive to joining new groups.

Another of the disadvantaging factors identified by people of colour in our research is that groups feel as though the relevant sport options are not advertised in a way that reaches their communities. These individuals clearly articulated a belief that they are not included or targeted in communications on an equitable level as compared to the white community. When further explored, our participants were unsure of whether the inadequate communication relative to the black community is related to individual reliance on segregated social networks or racism but felt deliberately exclusionary to our participants.

The people of colour interviewed all communicated that they would like to try 'white' sports like curling (which brought peals of laughter from groups) but believe that there are deliberate barriers put in place to exclude them. They provided examples of 'white' sport organizations that do not allow visiting participation and/or memberships starting in the multiple thousands of dollars with no opportunity to try the sport prior to committing. These situations were described by our participants as an obvious barrier and taken as a sign that those that don't meet higher socioeconomic, white Anglo-Saxon status are not welcome.

Furthermore, the costs associated with organized sport are often a mitigating factor in terms of participation. Many of the women interviewed indicated that they fall just above the cutoff for sponsorships and/or subsidized programming. Moreover, being a subsidized or sponsorship participant also comes with social costs. To truly engage communities of colour, organizations must find ways to mitigate the social cost of subsidization and to investigate sliding scale income-based fee structures. Other ways of providing less expensive inclusion could include subsidies dedicated to specific priority groups without the barriers related to income driven methodologies.

Finally, the stereotype of 'angry black women' was brought forward and redefined by our participants as, in fact, 'tired' black women. Women of colour are exhausted by the daily requirement of their lived reality in dealing with daily micro aggressive behaviours, of being the protector for their children/men of colour/families, and of their lack of power in society as a whole. The example of black youth and adults being less safe in the streets when engaging in training like running was used to explain the feelings of insecurity and powerlessness.

They are also tired of focus groups. Our participants indicated that they have been participating in focus groups and other social research for more than a decade with very little change to show for their efforts. This has led to the conclusion that most research is superficial, not based in intended action. Their sharing of lived experience and personal storytelling is valuable and needs to be recognized as such. That recognition is only demonstrated with actual change that is communicated afterwards and implemented on a level that is lasting.

Race/ethnicity analyses allow more meaningful conclusions to be made about the relationships between social variables and participation in sport among different populations. Hearing and accepting their perspectives have the potential to provide useful information about

how to promote activity within diverse cultural groups. Both built and perceived environmental factors may help or hinder inclusion, and these factors may differ by racial/ethnic group. The participants were clear in terms of their desire to be engaged through real relationships. They identified that formal relationships with organized cultural groups indicated to people of colour an inclusive space. If sport organizations are truly intent on creating inclusive spaces that promote participation by people of colour, these relationships will be invested in to demonstrate sincere efforts at inclusion.

Low Income

Participants in our research came from different socio-economic backgrounds. Although we were not able to hold specific focus groups for low income households due to the pandemic, participants from several of our other focus groups, interviews and in our survey spoke to the significant barriers they face in participation in sport when living in low income households.

Low-income families and their children face significant barriers to recreation. Key barriers in participation have existed for decades. One Canadian study completed in 1994 found that sport and recreation services had a variety of systemic barriers including socio-economic barriers (Harrington, Jarvis & Mason, 2017) that continued to be substantiated today in our research findings. Systemic barriers include but are not limited to fragmentation of services, a lack of priority funding, the historically ingrained racism and power imbalances “hidden or deeply embedded in our policies, practices and procedures” (Ontario Soccer, 2021).

Low income families face significant inequities in all facets of monetary requirements in sport. The monetary cost of participation in sport is simply prohibitive for most low-income families. Financial barriers include costs associated with participation, equipment, transportation and time.

Memberships and fees associated with sport are generally not dependant on income. Families living in low income households were candid about not being able to afford the participation fees.

Many sports require equipment to participate. This equipment, from shoes to apparel, to practice paraphernalia, to specialized gear, is expensive. Parents and individuals communicated that they actively avoided sporting activities that require expensive equipment; hockey, golf and skiing were used as examples in multiple discussions. Furthermore, children were identified as not as willing to participate in sport activities when their equipment would visibly demarcate them as ‘poor’.

Low income families may not own one or multiple vehicles required for transportation in many sports. They also face other problems relative to transportation. Public transportation is not always available or reliable at the times and locations required. Sporting organizations are not necessarily located directly on a bus route. Furthermore, the use of public transportation in suburban locations identified individuals as low income, which is not always welcome. Finally, participation in many sports requires substantive travel which can be costly.

Organizational barriers for low income individuals identified include a lack of supportive policies, facilities and financial resources, and should those financial resources exist there are barriers in communication. Put simply, information about recreation resources, services and subsidies doesn't reach low-income families. These families must do the work of searching for information to investigate the possibility of participation. This work can be time consuming; another challenge for low income individuals and families.

Subsidies and other monetary assistance are difficult to access. These financial assistance programs, when available at all, require considerable time and effort to access with no guarantee of achieving success. Low income families feel that the burden to 'prove' their need by requiring proof of poverty; a degrading experience in and of itself. Sport organizations do not work with other service providers that are familiar with the low-income families, thus making the process one that is more challenging than an integrated approach.

There was a general consensus from the low-income individuals and families we spoke with that the assumption that subsidies are available and that they work in the current form is false. These people communicated that subsidization is difficult to access and when available, is not permanent, indicating that the model of revenue generation is exclusionary to those that do not fit the mold of the middle-class family. This theme is one that low-income individuals feel on a societal level, with poverty being a condition that is largely overlooked by middle class Ontarians.

Finally, we heard that low income individuals are not entirely comfortable with settings primarily occupied by more affluent counterparts. Their inability to 'keep up' with others in terms of equipment, transportation, socialization costs within both the parent/child and individual scenarios puts low income people at a distinct disadvantage in terms of accessing organized sport. Financial barriers are simply too burdensome for meaningful participation.

Indigenous People

The Indigenous communities have faced considerable challenges in access to community activities for decades. It is important to recognize that the Indigenous community is diverse. This diversity is evident geographically, in terms of upbringing, environment, personal history, lived experience as a status holding or non-status person, and whether an individual lives on reserve or in the broader community.

Indigenous people more often live in poverty as compared to other Canadian people. These communities face all of the same challenges as low-income groups reported. Financial barriers identified include costs associated with participation, equipment, transportation and time as well as the organizational barriers that characterized the perspectives of those living in low income households.

Indigenous people also face significant disadvantages in terms of racism. The Indigenous experience of our culture is one of a feeling of explicit exclusion, including in the realm of sport. The perspective from individuals we spoke with communicated that they consider the racism that they experience to be intentional. From the Indigenous community's standpoint, sport in

wider Canada is based in white exclusivity while sport on reserve is disregarded and underfunded. The sport of lacrosse was used as an example of deliberate white exclusivity; a traditional Indigenous sport appropriated by white Canadian culture with little to no inclusion of Indigenous peoples in competitive organizations, coaching or teaching.

The Indigenous communities are clear that they would like to see real actions implemented to combat racism and microaggressions directed towards their people. Simple statements by sport organizations claiming that 'all are welcome here' are not sufficient. They want to see the same intentionality they observe in exclusion to be used to change the culture of sporting organizations on an internal level in ways that demonstrate commitment to understanding differences in people and experience, socio economic status, class and cultural barriers.

Some of the ways that Indigenous people believe sport organizations can intentionally make space for them include land acknowledgements, flags, thorough equity policies, recruitment of coaches and other participant facing/program development workers from specific vulnerable/priority populations with structural policy in hiring practices, in depth training for sport workers on how to identify and deal with racist and microaggressive behaviours in real time, building organizational relationships with Indigenous Friendship/Cultural centers, public inclusivity statements, Board of Director public list of commitments, Annual General Meeting discussion annually and sponsorships from the upper/middle class for priority populations with the commitment to ensure they remain in place that allow families and individuals to maintain their dignity. The Indigenous community wants to see consistent, systematic, planned effort in communication from sport organizations to the public that demonstrates a commitment to inclusion that go beyond the superficial.

Ultimately, the Indigenous community wants to participate in the broader sport community, but want to do so in a way that feels safe for them as 'other'. The Indigenous experience was communicated as one that is unique. Only other Indigenous people can truly understand their culture, life experiences and perspectives. Demonstration of commitment to understanding differences, including cultural barriers, is important to them. In order to truly hold space for the Indigenous people, sport organizations should listen to the voices of those that they are aspiring to be inclusive of.

Integration of Findings

Despite Pickering Football Club's success in evolving accessible programming for children and youth with disabilities and more recently older adults/seniors, it is evident that there are many inactive populations who face barriers in living an active lifestyle and participation in sport.

Distinct themes were identified within our research findings relative to barriers vulnerable populations face in participation in sport. Barriers take many forms, including cost, transportation issues, location, lack of available information, fears of not fitting in or being excluded, class, racial and other types of discrimination, communication barriers, appropriate programming requirements, and accessibility.

Achieving success in terms of inclusivity can take many forms. Likewise, there is more than one approach available to sport organizations in addressing the barriers that cause disadvantaged groups to be less participative in sport. Sport organizations are not in a position to remove all of society's inequities, or to dismantle social systems that have resulted in decades of oppression. Yet sport organizations can be on the forefront of assembling a new kind of reality.

Sport programming is rarely based on researched community needs assessments. Each community is different in terms of its population base and its existing sport resource availability. Investing in a community needs assessment can be a starting place for sport organizations to determine which populations to target in new programming. Closing the equity gap will mean different programs in different places.

The consistent theme throughout this research in all groups was that we are all more the same than we are different. We all want to participate. We all want to be able to participate safely. We all want our individuality recognized and appreciated. Most of all, we all want to feel and be included.

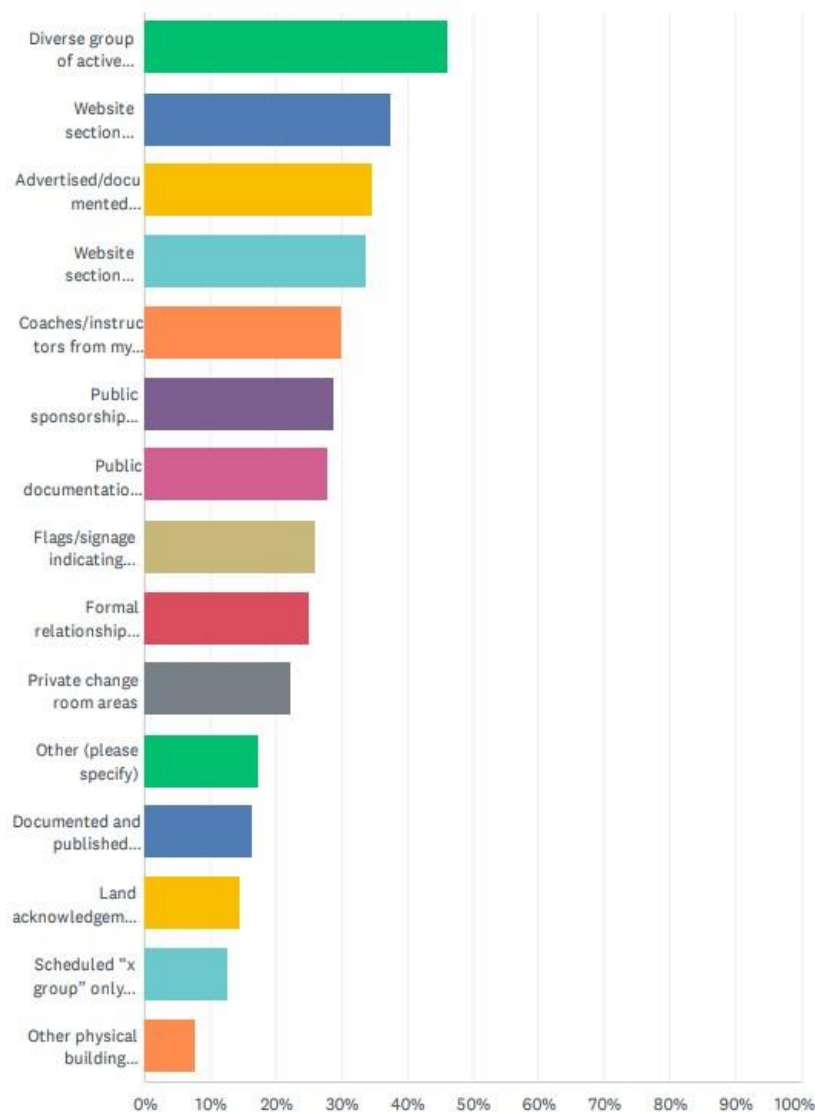
Recommendations for Sport Organizations

This research took the themes that were identified by our focus groups and utilized online survey methodology to determine which themes were most important to those that participated in our study. It should be noted that our findings may not reflect the ranking level of importance in any specific area, given that diversity takes many shapes and forms in different regions. It should also be noted that our survey respondent group does not necessarily represent a more fulsome section of Durham Region. Nevertheless, the responses indicate that change within sport organizations are necessary to mitigate the inequities that are apparent for the vulnerable/priority groups overall.

Our survey results showed the following, ranked in order of popularity by our respondents;

Q20 What can organizations do to make you feel they are a safe and inclusive? Please select all that apply.

Answered: 104 Skipped: 1



Inclusion in Organized Sport

| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSE |
|---|----------|
| Diverse group of active Coaches/trainers/instructors | 46.15% |
| Website section outlining policies pertaining to inclusion that include the organizations actions should racism/ableism/homophobia/ageism/not inclusive behaviour occur | 37.50% |
| Advertised/documented diversity training for all staff who come in contact with members | 34.62% |
| Website section outlining formal inclusivity structures and statement/public commitment to inclusivity/equity policies inclusive of intersectionality | 33.65% |
| Coaches/instructors from my identified population group | 29.81% |
| Public sponsorship programs led by the sporting organization that prioritizes equal access for my community | 28.85% |
| Public documentation by sport organization on measureable activity | 27.88% |
| Flags/signage indicating inclusivity | 25.96% |
| Formal relationship with community organization related to my background/personal circumstances | 25.00% |
| Private change room areas | 22.12% |
| Other (please specify) | 17.31% |
| Documented and published public Board of Directors list of commitments | 16.35% |
| Land acknowledgements | 14.42% |
| Scheduled "x group" only classes | 12.50% |
| Other physical building amenities (please list) | 7.69% |

The 'Other' category in our survey included written responses from more than 17% of respondents. The written responses, however, were representative of the other answers included to choose from and were most often duplicates or extended commentary with respect to those answers.

It is clear from the responses to our survey, which corroborate our findings in our interviews and focus groups, that priority populations are more likely to participate in sport when there are coaches, referees or other sport employees who are representative of diversity themselves.

Priority populations want clear, documented, public policies available to all that demonstrate the sport organization's commitment to inclusion that include real action plans for mitigating behaviour that does not meet with the premise of inclusion. Our respondents want to know that they will be safe, included and supported when they choose to participate in a sport, and want non-priority individuals to be fully aware that inappropriate behaviour will not be tolerated in any form. They want ongoing, public documentation by sport organizations that specifies their measurable activity related to improving inclusivity on an ongoing basis that is easily accessible.

Priority populations want to work and play with sport organizations that have invested in them. This investment should take the form of well researched organizational equity policies/

structures that are transparent, programs that prioritize access to equitable participation by individual priority group, annual equity training for all staff that includes measures to deal with racism/microaggressions/exclusionary behaviours in real time as well as in time spent networking and partnering with other community organizations that are dedicated to working to improve circumstances for their particular group.

This research calls for a safe process for athletes of any age, colour, gender, ability or other characteristic to have available a publicly accessible system for reporting any discrimination, unresolved acts of microaggression or treatment concerns without fear of reprisal. All sport organizations that are serious about inclusivity must have strong equity and harassment policies/ reporting systems that are easy to access, utilize and understand.

Additionally, it would be ideal for sport organizations to not only train staff and volunteers in how to deal with racism, microaggressive behaviour and equity but also to start each sport participant group with a training session that includes the club's expectations for inclusivity and the documented consequences of not doing so.

As a methodology for inclusion, it is recommended that sport organizations spearhead drive sharing programs for their clientele. While this can be an administratively heavy task, it does not need to be. Organizations do not need to coordinate all parts of a ride sharing program, but putting the system in place and educating members on the importance of participation can mediate some of the transportation issues that vulnerable populations face.

Finally, it is recommended that all programming relative to addressing the inequities our vulnerable populations currently face in sport be sustainable. For real progress to occur, these populations need more than time limited funding-based opportunities in sport.

Limitations

Limitations of this study include our challenges associated with the COVID pandemic. Furthermore, there are limits to generalizability that we would like to acknowledge. Finally, we did not reach some vulnerable populations in sufficient numbers to include them in our findings. These groups include low income seniors, LGBTQ2SI people and our Muslim population.

Conclusion

Interested sport organizations are able to make significant impacts in social inclusion of vulnerable sectors of our population with well thought out policy, programming and training programs. It is possible to reduce barriers and inequity in sport and significantly increase opportunity, participation and activity. In order to do, sport organizations must be willing to invest time, money and human resources in the process to be effective.

What makes sense for one geographical region, or for one specific vulnerable population will not necessarily work in others. Partaking in community needs assessments and immersing an organization's culture in equity are first steps necessary to truly make significant impact.

Once a needs assessment is complete, there are tools available to help with next steps that can be of great benefit to sport organizations. “Within the Canadian sport system, sport administrators are increasingly required to design and evaluate initiatives (e.g. new resources, programs and policies) in a way that determines if the right people know about them, if they work, and if they are being used in an appropriate manner - all while advancing the organization’s mission and objectives” (Lawrason et al., 2020). One of the tools available to sport organizations to use in sustainable program design is the RE-AIM tool that can help us to make the impact we intend to.

Tackling the issue of inequity does not have to be managed independently organization by organization. We, as sport organizations, can choose to share our knowledge and experience with each other to make accessibility more than a fantasy. Sport organizations can come together, regardless of differences, to make a real difference in the lives of our fellow Canadians who are equally as different in their needs. Direct, positive impact on our most vulnerable people’s ability to access sport is possible if we choose to work for it.

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