

Introduction to Hockey and Football Pilot Project, August, 2009

Final Report

By Krista Taldorf and Marion Christensen, Project Organizers

Background:

Immigrant, or culturally diverse, kids in Canada are not participating in the sports of hockey or Canadian football. That was our feeling when we initiated the "Introduction to Hockey and Football Pilot Project." We, Krista Taldorf and Marion Christensen, began discussing this issue as colleagues; professionals who have worked in the immigrant sector and who have a sports background. It is well known the benefits of sports for children; any children who experience exclusion, intimidation, insecurity can find confidence and trust in themselves and others through team sports and the camaraderie that goes with it. Sports can prevent young people from taking a path that is harmful or destructive. We felt that these sports could specifically benefit immigrant children and youth based on concerns we had heard from families throughout our careers. To help these children who are trying to integrate, we felt that hockey and Canadian football, two sports that defined Canadian culture, could help make them feel more included.

What did we do?

We didn't want to start up a new sports league for immigrant kids nor did we want to re-invent the wheel. The existing sports associations do an excellent job of getting kids involved in football and hockey. What we came to understand though was that there needed to be a stepping stone to help immigrant children understand what these sports and associations were about. As well, there needed to be a process to help link these families and children to the associations. Furthermore we were hearing reports of reduced numbers in both the hockey and football associations as well as a need to engage immigrant families.

With this theory in mind we thought we needed to test how children would respond to these sports and if there was even an interest or need to help them. We wanted to hear from families on their concerns for their children related to integrating into Canadian culture. We also had to find out if there was an interest in having sports be the way to support their children; specifically these two sports that they were not familiar with.

However, it is difficult for children to get a feel for these sports without making the investment and commitment to sign up for the entire season, as well as purchase the necessary equipment. In addition, there are other barriers, especially for immigrant families, including a lack of awareness of the sports or associations, how to access them, registration costs and transportation.

Therefore, we felt we needed to introduce the sports by removing all barriers to participation. This meant there could be no cost for families – we had to find volunteer coaches, secure donations of ice and field time, supply equipment and provide transportation.

Once we had commitment from community partners to provide all these things free of charge we then approached the families. This was a key part in all this. Community support and understanding was necessary, but without the commitment from the ethnic communities and support for their kids to participate in this, nothing could go ahead. Our background in working with ethnic communities was where our experience in the immigrant sector paid off. Knowledge of sports and how associations work is one thing, but knowledge of how to engage immigrant families is also critical.

We were able to do this by connecting with key people/leaders in some of the African communities. It was these people who referred the families from their communities to us. With the help of the leaders, we held meetings with the families to explain the program and register kids. Both parents and kids were very excited; one parent articulated that he felt our program was “much more than a sports program, it was helping their children to really feel part of Canadian society.” And the kids knew they were being invited to something special.

The Program:

30 kids between the ages of 8 and 15 enrolled in the program and participated in both the football and the hockey. Parents committed to having their children dropped off at a specified location for each session. (Parents were also invited to attend if they wanted to.) The program consisted of a one day football camp to teach foundational skills and plays and five hockey sessions to help the kids learn to skate and gain basic hockey proficiency. Both camps took place in August 2009 with the help of many community partners. As a result, the football camp was hosted at the University of Calgary by the Calgary Dinos football team and the hockey camps took place at Erinwoods Arena coached by volunteers from Hockey Calgary and other community coaches. Other partners are listed in the appendix of this report. Our program also included an outing to McMahon Stadium to watch a Stampeders’ practice and meet the players, a field trip to the Saddledome, and an equipment fitting day. All of which gave us, the organizers, wonderful opportunities to get to know the kids/families.

After the program was completed, we met with the families to see if the children were interested in continuing by signing up with an association. Those that expressed interest, we helped. We are aware that most football and hockey associations work with volunteers to run all the sports. Many of whom might not know of issues for immigrants or the barriers they face. Since they are volunteers and their time is already full, to try to understand the complexities of language, culture, fears and even where to obtain financial assistance is too much to expect. This is where we knew we had a specific niche we could fill. We could “walk” the families through the process of finding their association, accessing financial subsidies, understanding how the associations and programs work, etc.

Four families actually enrolled in either a football or hockey associations. This number, we believe, would have been higher but the community football had already started and some of the hockey associations had already reached their registration limits by the time we were trying to link the families.

Learning:

Through evaluations provided, the children stated that they would like to see the camps continue and that they were excited to have an opportunity to be in these sports. Some participants indicated that it gave them “confidence and knowledge about hockey and football” and that it enabled them “to know new sports, make friends and improve communication with others.” Many said that they wanted to continue in one or both of the sports. The parents, also evaluated, shared that they wanted their children in our program to “cross barriers between cultures” and to be “introduced to the Canadian sports of hockey and football.” They felt that their children “improved their skills which would enable them to join into these sports and build new friendships.” One parent stated that the camps allowed their “community members to join the mainstream community of sports and got them to be more involved in the local culture, which will help to make more friends and open doors for opportunities.”

Our ability to engage 30 children to try out football and hockey, link 4 families to the associations, and the feedback reported above suggests to us that culturally diverse children/youth are interested in these Canadian sports and are interested in being part of the mainstream associations.

Furthermore, the response we had from the broader community/partners in the form of donations, volunteered time, commitment for future programs and media attention validated our efforts and has provided the impetus for us to formalize and continue the program. Through this process, we also learned more about minor hockey and football in terms of when the seasons begin; the various associations around the city; registration process, etc. This will help us in our planning in the future to ensure that more participants who are interested in continuing are able to be connected to an association.

Appendix

Community and Volunteers

- 1) Kevin Garvey
- 2) Gisele Ruel
- 3) Alex Garvey
- 4) Joel Garvey
- 5) Henning Christensen
- 6) Rick Appleby
- 7) Ken Appleby
- 8) Kyle Appleby
- 9) Stephen Deng
- 10) Jeremy Hexham
- 11) Ahmed Egail
- 12) Don Hollingshead
- 13) Trevor Morgan – Hockey Calgary
- 14) Kevin Tyson – Hockey Calgary
- 15) Chantall Menard

Community and Business Donations

- 1) NeighbourLink-Used equipment
- 2) B& P Cycle Donation-Brent Fasick – Hockey bags
- 3) Adrenalin Source for Sports -Ken - Jerseys
- 4) Safeway Northgate Village donation-Ahmad Abdallah – Gift Certificate for snacks
- 5) NASA Hockey Assoc-Teena Prevost – Hockey socks and water bottles
- 6) Calgary Stampeders Football Club-Alan Harvie Stamp Store, Melenee Mehler , Scott Ackles
President Stamps McMahon Stadium – Football contacts, tour of stadium, attending practice,
meeting players
- 7) Vocal Latitudes Choir-Frank Rackow – Cash for insurance donation
- 8) East Calgary Twin Arenas (Erinwoods)-Jim Kelly – Ice time
- 9) Cardinal Bus Lines-Barb Sanders, Jeremy Hexham – Bus, driver, gas donation
- 10) Ramsay Community Centre-Gisele Ruel – Donated hall for hockey fittings
- 11) CLVC Family Place at GW School - Marie McNaughton – Donated space for parent meeting
- 12) U Of C Dinos-Coach Blake Nill, Reed Alexander – Organized and ran football camp
- 13) Hockey Calgary-Trevor Morgan – Volunteer Hockey Coach
- 14) Kidsport Calgary-Esther Klippert – Partnered to provide equipment funding
- 15) CTV News-Shelly Makrugin – News item
- 16) Sport Mart-James Tynan – Fitting kids with needed equipment
- 17) Centre for Newcomers - Aaron Notland and Anna – Provided space for bus pick up and drop off
- 18) Calgary Sun-Jenna McMurray – News Article
- 19) CBC-Frank Rackow – Radio Show
- 20) Calgary Flames Saddledome-Julie – Tour of Arena
- 21) Global News- News item
- 22) Hockey Now – Peter Watts – News Article