

BACKGROUND

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

BUILDING STRONGER, MORE INCLUSIVE AND VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

Contributing to quality of life in communities

- Sport's benefits are not limited to individuals. Sport can also help to strengthen communities by building social capital and fostering greater inclusion of marginalized or excluded groups.
- This view is supported by 72 percent of Canadians who believe that sport is a key contributor to quality of life in their communities.
- When asked to indicate specific ways in which sport contributes to their quality of life, over 85 percent of Canadians surveyed by the Conference Board of Canada pointed to sport's ability to:
 - Provide a place for people to meet and interact;
 - Encourage people from different backgrounds to work and play together;
 - Provide community volunteer opportunities;
 - Teach people responsibility and respect for other people and property;
 - Get people of all ages actively involved in their communities;
 - Give people a sense of purpose;
 - Provide families with opportunities to know each other better; and
 - Help prevent youth crime.

Building social capital

- Sport can help bring individuals and communities together, create a sense of community, encourage active citizenship, and foster trust, reciprocity, and a sense of security among community members. Together, these elements are the *social capital* of every community.
- Places with more social capital are generally safer, better governed and more prosperous than those with less, and people with more social capital are more likely to be happier, healthier, safer and employed than those with less.
- International research has shown that a nation's level of sport participation is closely linked to its levels of social trust and wellbeing. People who participate in sport are more likely to vote, contact a politician and sign a petition than the average citizen. They also show higher levels of social trust, trust in institutions, and life satisfaction and are more likely to express the view that immigration enriches the cultural life of the nation.
- Research from Australia indicates that residents of small rural communities feel sport can also help to keep their communities together, promoting community trust, cohesion, pride and loyalty. In some cases, sport clubs are the last remaining social infrastructure in declining rural towns.
- Because sport can help individuals to both enhance their capacities and participate in broader social networks, it offers an important way to build more inclusive communities. This has important implications for many groups in Canadian society who are currently not full participants in Canada's social, economic and cultural life.

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Helping newcomers to integrate more quickly into Canadian society

- There is strong evidence that newcomers to Canada are experiencing greater difficulty integrating into their new communities and the Canadian labour market than their predecessors of 20 years ago.
- UK research on sport and the inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers shows that sport can help to break down barriers between newcomers and local host populations, improve relationships among asylum seekers of diverse ethnic backgrounds, and build their self-esteem and self-confidence.
- Sport is also being used successfully to link newcomers to key community services and supports such as health centres, recreation programs, ESL courses, childcare, and local universities.
- The *Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants* has identified sport and recreation as important tools for the integration of immigrant youth and developed an inclusive recreational model for immigrant and refugee youth to serve as the basis for partnerships between sport and recreation organizations and immigrant serving agencies.

Fostering greater inclusion of people with disabilities

- People with disabilities face many forms of social, economic and political exclusion. Even in the absence of negative stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes, people without disabilities may underestimate the capacities of people with disabilities and feel unsure about how to accommodate and include them in day-to-day activities.
- True Sport helps to remove these barriers by changing community perceptions of people with disabilities, focusing attention on their abilities rather than their disability.
- Sport also changes the player with a disability. As a result of exclusion, people with disabilities may have fewer opportunities to acquire important social skills and to fully develop their physical and mental potential. Through sport, they can:
 - Access opportunities for positive social interaction with peers with and without disabilities, make friends, and build social networks vital to their health and wellbeing;
 - Learn vital social interaction skills such as communication, cooperation, teamwork, the importance of rules, goal setting, and self-discipline;
 - Become physically stronger with improved stamina, coordination, flexibility, posture, muscle tone, balance, strength, and movement;
 - Enhance their social-emotional development and capacity for self-help, acquiring greater emotional control, social awareness, self-confidence, self-esteem, self-concept, motivation and independence; and
 - Become empowered to advocate for themselves and others.
- Many of these skills can be transferred to the employment realm, further helping to build self-sufficiency.
- But we know that it needs to be true sport – sport that is founded on positive values of fun, fairness, inclusion and excellence.

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WHAT SPORT CAN DO

THE
TRUE SPORT
REPORT

Renewing Aboriginal culture

- Higher rates of illness, premature mortality, school leaving, unemployment, poverty, and incarceration among Canada's Aboriginal population reflect the significant disparities between the social, economic and cultural opportunities available to Aboriginal Canadians and those available to Canadians on the whole.
- Sport has been identified by Aboriginal people and by Canada's federal and provincial/territorial governments as an important means of helping to reduce these disparities, particularly as they affect Aboriginal youth, the fastest growing segment of Canada's population.
- There is growing evidence that cultural continuity is critical to restoring the social, economic and spiritual health of Aboriginal communities. As an important cultural feature, true sport has a role to play in this process.
- Sport and games centred on traditional skills and culturally based principles have always played an important role in North American Aboriginal culture. This is reflected today in the popularity and success of sport and cultural events such as the Arctic Winter Games, the North American Indigenous Games, and the World Indigenous Nations Games.
- Research from Australia confirms that sport offers particular benefits with regard to Aboriginal communities in terms of building cultural pride, social cohesion, self-esteem, and transferable skills among participants and volunteers.
- Sport carnivals can also help reduce drug and alcohol use on a short-term basis, with related reductions in family violence.
- Sport and recreation programs offered with other supports have also helped to increase school attendance and achievement levels, and reduce the incidence of youth crime and suicide.
- Once again we know that it must be sport founded on the positive values of fun, fairness, inclusion and excellence – true sport has the power to help.

Download **WHAT SPORT CAN DO: The True Sport Report**

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