



RIGHT TO PLAY

Gender Equity in Sports Project Implementation and Results

Right To Play
Indigenous Programs
2024

Report by Kieran Lucas and Alejandra Fandino

Acknowledgements

This report is the result of a collaborative effort between Right To Play Indigenous Program team members and the four community partners that implemented this project. It has also been made possible by the many other community partners whose years of experience implementing sport and play-based programming has informed Right To Play's knowledge and the development of this programming. We would like to thank Right To Play Community Partners' Kitselas First Nation, Elizabeth Métis Settlement, and Skeetchestn Indian Band for their dedication to this project and the positive impacts that they continue to bring to their communities. We also would like to acknowledge our fourth implementing partner that prefers to remain unnamed in this report.

This work would not be possible without the daily contributions and care from community partners and the Right To Play Indigenous Programs team that inspire the essential work of supporting Indigenous children and youth through play.

This project has been made possible, in part, by the Government of Canada.

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Introduction

In 2024 Right To Play (RTP) Indigenous Programs (IP) and four partnering Indigenous communities implemented the Gender Equity in Sport project (GES). Right To Play has been partnering and working with Indigenous communities since 2010 with the primary goal of supporting the health and wellbeing of children and youth. In 2018, we worked with Sport Canada to pilot a physical literacy project as a component of our Promoting Life-skills in Aboriginal Youth (PLAY) program. We have dedicated sessions in Sport for Development clinics to establish gender-specific spaces and address barriers to female participation in sports. This successful approach has led to an increased demand from communities seeking support to enhance girls' involvement. The importance of this initiative was identified by partner feedback and the recognition of barriers to sport faced by Indigenous women and girls. Our goal was to provide community partners with training and supports that increase capacity of Community Mentors (local youth workers) so they can deliver age-appropriate multi-sport activities, as well as increase confidence in adapting physical activities for the program. After piloting the first project, we integrated learnings into our training frameworks and used that to inform our 2020-21 Innovation Initiative – “Sport for Social Development Clinics to Improve Participation for Indigenous Women and Girls” as well as our 2021-22 Innovation Initiative “Traditional & Land-Based Quality Sport for Social Development Program.”

These projects led to the development of the 2024 Gender Equity in Sports project, implemented through funding from Canadian Heritage – Sport Support Program, which has built on the momentum of previous projects by continuing collaboration with Indigenous communities and organizations. The project included the implementation of a gender equity curriculum, aligning with RTP's play-based learning methodology, to foster discussions on female inclusion and allyship in sports. This initiative aimed to normalize conversations about gender equity and create safer spaces for female-identifying Indigenous children and youth to participate in sports, with the goal of contributing to a more sustainable and impactful approach. The project led to positive initial outcomes, including indications that female participants increased confidence with sports participation, and youth workers that have increased knowledge and passion to deliver gender equitable sports programming.

Gender-Based Barriers in Sport

Indigenous people in Canada, both on and off-reserve, have faced significant barriers to participating in structured sport opportunities. Research suggests that the location, availability, and nature of sport programming have reduced the opportunities for Indigenous people to participate in sport.¹ Many studies have identified racism in sporting spaces as a key barrier to Indigenous peoples' participation, particularly the way in which sporting values and traditions centre the white, Euro-Canadian as its prime subject.² Studies also suggest that financial costs are a barrier to participation in sport, noting that despite it being clear that Indigenous youth face higher levels of poverty than white Canadian youth, many young Indigenous people do not have access to subsidized programming.³ While there exists significant barriers to Indigenous peoples' participation in sport, Indigenous women and girls face a particular and unique set of barriers. As Hayhurst notes, "the impact of colonization and the intersecting politics of gender, race, and class that interlock to exacerbate the [sport-related] disadvantages experienced by Aboriginal girls in Canada..."⁴ It is important to note that due to key differences in experience and barriers, Indigenous women's sports should be given specific attention and not solely equated with general women's sporting history.⁵ It is argued that "Indigenous women occupy a unique place within sport history, and their stories and accomplishments have been commonly omitted."⁶ As this project attempts to address the barriers faced by Indigenous women and girls, it is important to discuss the unique challenges they face in sport programming.

Safe Spaces to Play

Across Canada, there are opportunities for girls and women to access female-only teams, leagues and games at all skills levels. However, Indigenous communities – particularly remote and on-reserve communities – typically have fewer opportunities for sport, and therefore fewer opportunities for gender-specific quality sport programming, which can positively impact female participation.⁷ With a lack of gender-specific sporting

¹ Julie Sutherland, *Indigenous Sports and Recreation Programs Across Canada: A Literate Review and Environmental Scan* (National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health, 2021): 13.

² Avery Holmes et al., "I keep forgetting them': Lacrosse, Indigenous women and girls and reconciliation in Canada," *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, vol. 59, no. 1 (2024): 7. And M. Ann Hall, *The Girl and the Game: A History of Women's Sport in Canada* (University of Toronto Press, 2016): 287.

³ qtd. in Sutherland, 15

⁴ Lindsay Hayhurst et al. *The Benefits and Challenges of Girls-Focused Indigenous SDP Programs in Australia and Canada* (University of Wollongong, 2016): p. 7. and qtd in Sutherland, 15.

⁵ Holmes, 5

⁶ Holmes, 6

⁷ Courtney Mason et al., "Urban Indigenous Youth Perspectives on Access to Physical Activity Programmes in Canada," *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, vol. 11, no. 4 (2019): 548-549.

opportunities, male-dominated sporting programs can be discouraging to women and girls. The community partners working on Gender Equity in sports identified the way in which competitive masculine sporting environments have harmed the participation of women and girls. One Community Mentor (CM) described how some male athletes tend to cause discomfort by dominating the space. They describe how, “especially with some of the regulars that we will occasionally have issues with them getting a little too... confrontational is the word, that they get a little competitive” (RTP CM). For women and girls who are looking to enter sporting spaces where they have not historically felt welcome, this kind of environment is a barrier. A CM described how some girls in their program did not enjoy participating in hockey program, as boys in the program who had far more opportunity to build hockey skills prior to the program were able to play at a higher level exclude others. This is representative of another barrier to women and girls' participation, that is, a lack of positive male allies. This has been echoed by our implementing partners, who have observed a gap in programming to address gender equity concerns, and a desire for capacity building on equitable program delivery.

Confidence & Self-Esteem

The history of discrimination and exclusion of Indigenous women and girls from positive sporting environments has contributed to another key barrier; many Indigenous women and girls lack confidence in their ability to participate in sport.⁸ This barrier is closely related to the lack of safe spaces for Indigenous girls to participate in sports, which exacerbate confidence and self-esteem issues. The implementing partners shared this perspective, indicating that shyness and a lack of confidence is a significant barrier to girls' attendance and full participation in sport programming. When we asked girls participating in the Gender Equity in Sports project what they thought was the biggest barrier to participating in sports programming, many indicated a lack of confidence in the safety of the space. The majority that we asked responded that the biggest barrier to participating in sports included shyness, fear of judgement, bullying, or not being good enough at sports.

Project Overview

Right To Play supported the delivery of sport programming and remote coaching to build the capacity of child and youth participants, as well as CMs, to create meaningful impact for female participation in sport. All modules focused on building capacity in quality sport by:

⁸ Leila Pfaeffli. *In Her Voice: An exploration of young women's sport and physical activity experiences* (Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity, 2009): 19.

1. Having qualified facilitators delivering each module
 - RTP trained CMs on the principles of safe sport and supporting female sport participation
 - CMs received training focusing on Gender Equity in Sport
2. Creating safe and ethical sport programming
 - Ground rules for inclusivity established at the outset with all participants
 - Inclusive games, drills and activities used to build a healthy, supportive environment
 - Inclusive, accessible, and developmentally appropriate programming
3. Removing barriers to sports participation
 - Increased access to sport equipment and facilities
 - Female participation and voice amplified
 - Gender-equitable role models for youth provided

Right To Play provided training, coaching and resources to each community partner to use the curriculum, guide module conversations, and implement a sport of their choosing.

During the implementation of the project, girl, gender non-conforming and boy participants were provided access to quality sport sessions and gender-specific conversations on allyship, communication, and barriers to sport, following RTP's play-based learning methodology. The games and drills led by the CM helped to define and establish safe sport space for female participants and introduce important concepts. This approach to the curriculum aimed to reduce barriers to accessing sport for female identifying participants, increase accessibility and retention, and enhance participants' physical literacy, while addressing social outcome goals.

As part of the GES project, partners received an additional \$1000 to their regular RTP program budget (\$6,000) to support equipment purchase, facility rentals, coaches, transportation, and other sport-related costs.

Project Objectives

The project aimed to achieve the following outcomes amongst participating community mentors:

1. Increased confidence in creating safe, trauma-informed sport spaces for female participants.
2. Increased confidence to engage children and youth in sport programming that teach life-skills.

3. Increased knowledge in program design and delivery of a gender equity sport program for children and youth.
4. Increased understanding of barriers that girls face when it comes to playing sports.
5. Increased confidence in their ability to help address these barriers.
6. Increased opportunities for Indigenous children and youth to participate in quality sport programs.

The project also aimed to achieve the following outcomes amongst participating children and youth:

1. Increased confidence to try new sports and continue participating in sports with their peers.
2. Improved knowledge of barriers to female participation in sport and how to address them (as female participants, role models or male allies).
3. Increased feeling of comfortability and acceptance as a result of an inclusive atmosphere in program.

Resource Development

A core component of this project was a comprehensive resource that provided youth workers with the tools to deliver gender equity program sessions. The resource aims to help youth workers implement a curriculum based on reflective discussion which fosters an inclusive space during sports activities, where girls and gender-diverse youth feel comfortable and accepted by their peers when participating. The curriculum aims to increase female-identifying children and youths' confidence in trying new sports and participating in physical activities with their peers, and to foster support and allyship in male-identifying children and youth. See the resources table of contents below (figure 1). The curriculum was developed in line with RTPs Play-Based Learning Methodology, as well feedback and learning from previous engagement with partners. The resource was particularly informed by the previous Innovation sport initiative ("Sport for Social Development Clinics to Improve Participation for Indigenous Women and Girls"). In this project, youth workers received training and a curriculum that prescribed an entire program structure. While this program led to significant outcomes, including sustainable sport programs that continue in partnering communities today, partners identified key challenges with having a rigid program structure; they often faced unique challenges in their programs and needed resources that were flexible and adaptable to their varying circumstances. The resource for Gender Equity in Sports 2024 maintained the play-based learning and curriculum elements that has proved to be successful in creating positive experiences with sports, while adapting the implementation structure to allow partners a greater agency in its delivery.

Using the resources, specifically the modules, CMs implemented sport programming using a sport of their choice. While partners could choose their sport, RTP offers resources for facilitating sports like basketball, hockey, soccer, lacrosse, and ultimate frisbee. This resource, and the modules within, serve primarily as a guide rather than prescribing an entire program structure; CMs own their program and know their communities best, they can adapt with any sport they choose or deliver the modules in the order they choose.

Each module follows the same general structure; there are stated learning outcomes, a play-based activity for life-skills building, the chosen sport to play, and a guide to reflective discussion following the session. The following modules were developed to support youth workers in delivering gender equity programming. Modules 5-8 were “Choice Sessions” meaning partners were to pick two of the four to deliver in program.

Gender Equity in Sport	
03	Introduction
04	Barriers to Participation
How To Use This Resource	
06	How To Use This Resource
08	Choosing a Sport
09	Sport Safety
10	Using & Adapting RCAs
14	Know, Believe, Do
17	Suggested Schedule
Life Skill Modules	
18	Introductory Activities
24	Self-Confidence
26	Positive Relationships
28	Setting Boundaries
30	Allyship
32	Teamwork
34	Conflict Resolution
36	Peer Pressure
38	Leadership

Figure 1. Table of Contents for the RTP Indigenous Programs' Gender Equity in Sports Resource

Modules

Introductory Activities

Before introducing the life skill modules, it was recommended that CMs facilitate one or more ‘Setting the Space’ introductory activities with the group. These activities help establish ground rules for everyone to feel safe and comfortable. CMs used their discretion as to which activities would be most appropriate for their group. Activities included “Creating Safe Space,” “Comfort Guidelines,” “Gender Box,” and the “Gender Privilege Walk.” These activities are playful and interactive ways to discuss the importance of a safe space at programming, determine how the children are feeling, and introduce the concept of gender equity.

Module 1: Self Confidence

In this module, participants play the “Self-Esteem Selfie” activity, which is a creative way to encourage youth to think about how their thoughts and feelings influence their decisions and actions. Using sport as an example, participants will have the opportunity to list positive traits that they have which can contribute to their participation and enjoyment. Figure 2 demonstrates this modules’ learning goals.

KNOW	BELIEVE	DO
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They can do challenging things • They can learn & develop new skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They can achieve success • Their skills are impressive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assert opinions & thoughts in healthy ways • Try new & challenging skills • Say what they are good at

Figure 2. Learning goals for module 1.

Module 2: Positive Relationships

In this module, participants played the “Spider-Web” activity. This activity encourages youth to name different characteristics of a healthy relationship. As the activity moves on, participants are encouraged to switch from listing traits to listing examples and people who exhibit these traits of a healthy relationship. Finally, participants can share characteristics they would like to practice or do more of. Figure 3 demonstrates this modules’ learning goals.

KNOW	BELIEVE	DO
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How positive relationships look/sound/feel • Different components of positive relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They deserve to be treated with respect and dignity • They should treat others with respect and dignity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate with others in a positive way, even when confronting conflict • Express their needs in a relationship • Seek help if a relationship is not healthy

Figure 3. Learning goals for module 2.

Module 3: Setting Boundaries

The activity in this module helps facilitate a discussion with participants about boundaries. Before we play a game or sport, the facilitator or coach usually tells us about the “boundaries” of the game. This activity aims to explain that boundaries in sport can help all players understand and follow the rules, allowing players to work together and help the game to go smoothly. It also connects the importance of boundaries in other parts of life, like relationships. Figure 4 demonstrates this modules’ learning goals.

KNOW	BELIEVE	DO
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boundaries are a healthy part of relationships with self & others • What a healthy boundary is • How to respond when a boundary has been crossed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are allowed to set up boundaries • Others are allowed to set up boundaries • Boundaries are healthy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate what they will & will not do • Say no when uncomfortable • Ask for help enforcing boundaries

Figure 4. Learning goals for module 3.

Module 4: Allyship

This module's activity is the "Wolf and Sheep" and will demonstrate to participants the importance of standing together against bullying. Participants will be tasked with protecting one of their peers from "the wolf." This is followed by a discussion on the importance of standing together and the power of allyship. Figure 5 demonstrates this module's learning goals.

KNOW	BELIEVE	DO
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They have an important role in helping others • Some behaviour is harmful • Standing by & doing nothing is also harmful 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyone deserves to feel safe • Their voice & actions can help affect others' experience & perspectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise issues to authority when they are aware of them • When safe & comfortable, confront or challenge peers who are behaving inappropriately • Help others when they need help

Figure 5. Learning goals for module 4.

Module 5: Teamwork (Choice session)

This activity will demonstrate and discuss the importance of working as a team. Participants are to stand all together on a blanket which they must flip over without anyone stepping off. CMs encouraged listening, sharing, and creativity throughout this activity. This is followed by a discussion about the importance of teamwork and listening to others. Figure 6 demonstrates this module's learning goals.

KNOW	BELIEVE	DO
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Others have skills that can help them achieve their goals • There is strength in numbers • How to work with others to achieve tasks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyone has strengths and weaknesses • Others can help them • It is okay to rely on others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with others to achieve goals • Help identify how the group can work together to find success

Figure 6. Learning goals for module 5.

Module 6: Conflict Resolution (Choice session)

This activity encourages participants to think about the things that cause them stress, fear, or worry. They are invited to write these down and put them into a bucket. Participants are then to move the bucket as a team, although with a set of restrictions. As the activity goes on, participants can name people, places, or things that they can go to for support. For every support listed, a restriction to moving the bucket is removed. This activity will help participants to think about and identify the resources that they can access. Figure 7 demonstrates this modules' learning goals.

KNOW	BELIEVE	DO
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict & problems are normal • How to identify conflict & problems • Strategies to resolve conflict 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working through conflict & problems in a healthy way is important • Conflict & problems are solvable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify & communicate in a healthy way when they are unhappy or disagree with something • Ask for help when a conflict or problem comes up • See the other side of a conflict

Figure 7. Learning goals for module 6.

Module 7: Peer Pressure (Choice session)

In this module, participants will play the “Limbo Pressure” activity. This game demonstrates to youth how it feels to complete an activity while hearing common peer pressure phrases, versus completing the activity with support and care. Participants discuss the negative impact of peer pressure versus the positive impact of uplifting and supporting peers. Figure 8 demonstrates this modules' learning goals.

KNOW	BELIEVE	DO
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What peer pressure is • How to identify peer pressure • How to respond to peer pressure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer pressure can impact our decisions • We can resist peer pressure and make good decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify their desires & comfort levels • Stand up to pressure from others • Ask for help if needed • Ask critical questions when others are pressuring us

Figure 8. Learning goals for module 7.

Module 8: Leadership: (Choice session)

In this module, participants will engage in an activity that encourages them to identify and list leadership qualities. While playing the game, they will identify leadership qualities that they see in themselves and in at least one other peer. Participants are then asked to discuss their choices. Figure 9 demonstrates this modules' learning goals.

KNOW	BELIEVE	DO
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They can influence others • There is power in collective voices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are important to their community • That others can support their visions • They have important visions and goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak up for themselves & others • Work with others to make decisions & pursue goals • Step out of their comfort zone

Figure 9. Learning goals for module 8.

Reflective Discussion Guides

Below is a sample of a reflective discussion guide that CMs would facilitate with participants at the end of the session (Figure 10). Figure 10 represents the reflective discussion included for module 8: Leadership.

Reflect	Connect	Apply
How do you recognize a leader? Name some leaders you can think of (ex. In community, from school, famous leaders, etc.)	What are some characteristics of leaders?	Which of those characteristics do you think you have? Which ones would you like to work on having?
How many of the leaders that we just named are female?	Why, in society today, are there less female leaders than male leaders?	How can the life skills we have been learning in program (self-confidence, allyship, teamwork, etc.) contribute to more female leadership?
<i>Add your own!</i>		

Figure 10. Reflective discussion guide for module 8: leadership.

Youth Worker Training

Youth workers participating in the Gender Equity program participated in two program related training sessions. The first 90-minute training session was delivered virtually and included all participating partners. This session was an introduction and overview of the project.

The second 90-minute training session was offered at the annual National Gathering, an in-person training that brings youth workers together from across the partner communities. This session included CMs participating in the Gender Equity program as well as other CMs that were interested in the topic. In this session, participants had the opportunity to engage in play-based and interactive activities that discussed gender-based barriers to sport, the importance of allyship, and the importance of physical literacy. After engaging with these interactive activities that promote reflection on concepts of gender equity in sports, participants had the opportunity to work in breakout groups with fellow youth workers to identify barriers in their programs and brainstorm solutions. The collaborative approach allows youth workers to share ideas and learn from one another's experience; in this session, an experienced RTP CM, who was part of the 2021 innovation in sport project, shared how they have implemented sport programming in their community. This session was also delivered virtually following the National Gathering for two partner communities who could not attend the National Gathering but were participating in the Gender Equity program. Between these three engagements, RTP directly trained 15 youth workers.

Project Timeline

<i>Project Start (2024)</i>	
April	Virtual Orientation for Partners
May	In-Person Training & Baseline Data Collection
June	Program implementation kick-off
July	Deadline to Complete Modules 1 & 2
October	Deadline to Complete Modules 3 & 4
December	Deadline to Complete 2 Choice Modules
December	Endline Data Collection
<i>Project End (2024)</i>	

Table 1. Timeline of Gender Equity in Sports project activities in 2024.

Methods

Partner Application & Selection

After our annual partnership application process, RTP approached community partners who expressed interest in receiving support for more gender-specific programming that will increase sport participation for women and girls. During the project proposal creation stage, RTP outreached to four partnering communities across Western Canada to confirm their interest in participating in the proposed Gender Equity project: Sport for Social Development to Improve Participation for Indigenous Women and Girls. While the selection of communities was restricted to current RTP partners to ensure a strong relationship exists prior to project implementation, the selection of participants was completely un-biased and open to all youth in the selected communities at no cost. Most participants will be between the ages of 6 to 18, while one partner has youth aged up to 20.

RTP Roles & Responsibilities

Team	Role
Training & Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Project development</i> • <i>Resource Development</i> • <i>Training development and implementation</i>
Programs Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Program Officers provide ongoing coaching & one-on-one support to community partners</i>
Monitoring, Evaluation, & Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Development of research & evaluation Plan</i> • <i>Lead data collection & analysis</i> • <i>Lead knowledge mobilization</i>

Table 2. Roles & Responsibilities of RTP team structure

Data Collection

To measure project outcomes, we used a mixed-method approach and engaged with both participants and the CMs that delivered programming. Prior to the project, participants completed a baseline survey to measure their experience and feelings toward sport. The survey included four multiple choice questions and one open-ended question (Appendix A). To honour data collection methods best suited for children, the survey was designed as a colouring-based activity. A conventional survey was also shared for participants that did not want to colour (Appendix A).

Throughout the duration of the project, implementing partners submitted regular monitoring data that covered the sessions completed, the attendance, and a summary of activities.

Following the completion of the project, participants completed an endline survey that measured their experiences and feelings toward sport following the program, as well as knowledge of gender equity concepts. These surveys appeared in the same format as the baseline. For CMs that implemented the project, we engaged in semi-structured group interviews. These interviews measured the learning outcomes and development for youth workers, as well as the outcomes that they observed amongst participants in their program.

Our sample size for participant survey activities was 39 for the baseline (22 girls, 13 boys, and 4 unspecified) and 52 for endline (28 girls, 20 boys, and 4 unspecified). Additionally, we spoke to three community mentors that led the implementation of the project in their RTP program. Endline results are included from three of four implementing partners, while all 4 partners implemented the project, one partner was on a delayed timeline and so endline data was not collected in time for this report.

Analysis

Data analysis for this project integrated both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative data was analyzed by comparing baseline and endline survey responses, allowing for a measurement of changes in participants' experience. Qualitative data, gathered from discussions with CMs, was analyzed using a thematic analysis. This involved an initial phase of familiarization with the data, followed by inductive coding, where codes were generated based on emerging themes rather than pre-existing categories. The coded data was then organized and interpreted in relation to the project's expected outcomes, ensuring alignment with the study's objectives (see Braun and Clarke 2019)⁹.

⁹ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Reflecting on Reflexive Thematic Analysis," *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, vol. 11, no. 4 (2019).

Project Results

In total, the Gender Equity in Sports project reached 413 participants and 15 youth workers. The table below represents the disaggregated reach for the project (table 11).

REACH					
Project	Youth Workers Reached	Overall Children Reached			TOTAL
		Girls	Boys	Non-Binary	
→ GENDER EQUITY IN SPORTS	15	198	214	1	428

Table 11. Participants and youth workers reached through the Gender Equity in Sports project.

Participants Demonstrated an Increased Comfortability and Confidence to Participate in Sports

At the project start only 22.5% of girls attending program felt good about trying new sports. Based on baseline results, female participants demonstrated greater uncertainty about trying new sports. When all respondents are taken together, about 15% (female, male, and non-binary) do not feel good about trying new sports, and female participants made up about 71% of this group. At the end of the project, 61% of girls attending the program felt good about trying new sports, representing a significant increase. Participants also indicated that they felt more included in sport programming. Prior to the project only 45% of female respondents indicated that they felt included when playing sports. After the implementation of the project, 79% of female participants indicated that they feel included when playing sports.

While these important outcomes were reported from participants themselves, CMs also observed them amongst their program participants. CMs described the way in which they saw certain participants increase their willingness and confidence to participate in a sport program. A key example of this outcome can be seen in the following example from one of the implementing partners. One of the young, inspired youth workers started a female basketball drop-in program. Prior to this, their co-ed basketball drop-in was rounding up to around 1% female participation. After just one month of hosting the female-only basketball drop-in, the program is now seeing around 10% female participants for the co-ed drop-in basketball time. As the CM described, “It’s literally been probably a 20x increase in female participants since that started and it’s only been going on about a month.”

Another implementing partner used their community's culture and history to introduce the importance of gender equity in their program. They discussed important roles of matriarchs and the crucial roles that women have played in the community's history. This

partner reports that a focus on the communities culture has helped to build confidence in girls at programming.

Participants Demonstrated Improved Skills for Building Healthy Relationships

CMs implementing the project reported instances where they observed positive changes in interaction during sport program and the building of healthy relationships that followed GES Sessions. This includes male allyship, leadership, and peer support. One CM described how:

”They (other youth workers) just saw these, these moments... where it really felt like it was connecting, you know, and they're using some different words that they don't typically use and they're interacting with others in ways that they typically wouldn't...”

Engaging in play-based learning activities that taught life-skills in association with sport led to clear positive outcomes for participants beyond simply learning the technical components of a sport. Participants were able to learn skills to build healthy relationships and spaces with their peers. One CM described the importance of the reflective activities:

“There was definitely that connection and engagement with like things like resiliency and empathetic responses and all these things that go into sports leadership that aren't just like, you know, here's how to throw a Frisbee. And those, I would say more so than the skills for sport, the kids were coming out with... these skills for navigating, you know their feelings, life struggles, their emotions, stuff like that, I think was was a bigger take away than than anything else.”

Improved male allyship was also observed throughout the implementation of this project. Prior to the project, 24% of male respondents indicated knowledge of barriers others may face to sport. At the end of the project, 65% of male respondents indicated that they understand the importance of including girls in sports.

Implementing partners observed examples of this awareness in their programs. They observed male participants ensuring they aren't taking up all the space during sports activities and are providing their peers more opportunity to participate. CMs observed youth being intentional about encouraging others and building them up. They see more empathy and understanding in their program and attribute a large part of that outcome to the gender equity sessions.

“I see that kids are taking more of a leadership role like before they were just real shy. But after like we went through the modules and activities and stuff, they're taking more of a leadership role... So like when we're doing like a sports activity, they're encouraging their classmates and they're encouraging mainly like the girls that are playing...” - RTP CM

Youth Workers Gained Confidence and Knowledge to Deliver Equitable Sports Programming

The CMs we spoke to describe the way that the training they received and modules that guided the GES project provided them with the confidence, knowledge, and guidance to implement effective programming.

“I feel like the training helped me feel more confident to present each module...” - RTP CM

Additionally, learning on the broader issue proved to be impactful for young youth workers delivering gender equity in sports programming. One CM described their team of youth workers' reaction to learning of the gender-based issues in sport.

“They've been definitely motivated now to make sure they're capturing and engaging more of our young female participants into the sports and physical activity programs that we have” - RTP CM

Significant learning took place among youth workers throughout the delivery of the project. Delivering each module in program and learning from reflective discussions with youth contributed to an increase in knowledge and confidence in youth workers to deliver equitable programming. A RTP CM described the impact that this project had on the youth workers that deliver this partners programming:

“I definitely saw an increase in confidence with our staff throughout the summer, like even the staff that have been around for a couple of years. When we brought this to them and said... ‘hey, this is something that we're going to be running.’ There was conversation around [how] ‘we're not trained to do this. We don't know how to do this.’ [I said] ... everything you need to know is right here... Especially as we entered into this school year, I saw these [youth workers] being more comfortable and more aware of how they're approaching these sports sessions and just programming in general... as far as like inclusivity goes.” - RTP CM

Working through the modules had a clear impact on the knowledge, confidence, and learning of those who delivered it. One CM said how in the start, they were nervous about

presenting the modules. They went on to describe how “... once I started to go through it, I felt like my confidence, my confidence was getting hot. It was like building higher and the kids were really interested in learning about each module...”

Another CM described the way youth workers in their program have demonstrated the ability to address barriers girls face in sport. They created an alternative space for girls after their hockey program was noticeably male dominant. They described,

“The fact that, you know, these pretty new staff were, thought about this on their own, had come to me with this idea like they identified the problem, came up with a potential solution, and then had the confidence to come and bring it forward to us to be addressed...”

The result of this increased confidence and knowledge is increased opportunity for Indigenous women and girls to access safe sporting environments. Youth workers involved in this project are demonstrably aware of barriers, challenges, and solutions to creating the necessary environment for equitable sports.

One CM described that with the amount of interest received for the program, they were able to form U13 Boys & Girls basketball teams, and a U17 Girls team. They have also established volunteer coaching opportunities and fundraising efforts to attend a tournament. Another CM described how,

“If we’re able to continue on this trajectory, I’d be really, really hopeful where we’ll end up this time next year.”

Short Play-Based Learning Modules Align with Sport Programming

Implementing partners found success from integrating the play-based module activities into existing sport programming. The module structure allowed partners the flexibility to implement on their terms and to fit with their program context, while still providing the necessary curriculum to facilitate gender equity learning. They appreciated that modules were short, clear, and easy to follow so that they could be delivered in a range of contexts. CMs told us: “It was very easy to follow, like they ended up being really nice, quick and simple.”

While accessibility of the modules made implementation practical, the content also proved to be effective in resonating with participants. The learning and reflective elements of the modules, mixed with the high energy of sport programming, allowed for CMs to focus on gender equity in sports while still delivering the high energy sport-based programming that participants expect. CMs described how they found success by implementing regular sport programming, slowing things down to complete the gender equity in sports activity,

then re-entering their regular sport programming to apply their learning. Generally, we heard that the program sessions that included gender equity modules created a positive environment and decreased instances of conflict.

“...initially I think we chose module six and eight as our choice sessions or choice modules, but they ended up doing all eight just because they were nice, really easy, simple things to pull from and they were really flexible with numbers like how many kids you had.” - RTP CM

Lessons Learned

The following lessons were learned during this through Gender Equity in Sports Programming.

Lesson 1: Play-Based Learning Activities Combined with Sport Yields Positive Outcomes

An effective way to include meaningful educational opportunities in sports programs is to integrate play-based learning activities into the program structure. Play-based learning activities placed in-between sports activities were effective as youth could release energy at the start, engage in a more focused and slower-moving learning activity, then return to sport to apply their learning. After each activity, participants also had the time to engage in reflective discussion which helped solidify learning.

Lesson 2: Flexible and Adaptable Curriculum is a Key to Success for Supporting Implementing Partners

Our implementing partners operate in a range of different contexts and have a variety of program demands. For this reason, developing a rigid curriculum that prescribed entire program sessions was not practical for implementation. Short, easy, and effective tools proved most applicable for partners.

Lesson 3: Training Youth Workers is an Effective Way to Establish Champions of Gender Equity Programming

Communicating the issues in a clear way motivated youth workers to address these barriers for their children and youth. The passion of youth workers was a clear driver of success for this project.

Lesson 4: Children and Youth Need Increasing Access to Safe and Consistent Sport Programming

While the funding and resources provided to these four community partners proved effective in supporting equitable sporting opportunities, there are many communities, with RTP partnerships and without, who are eager to implement similar projects if the funding and resources are made available. Efforts should be focused on providing resources and funding that are controlled and implemented primarily by Indigenous communities.

Lesson 5: Some Barriers Were Still Present in this Project

CMs reported that they faced barriers to attendance and engagement due to transportation challenges and weather. In some cases, CMs reported lower participation rates of teenage girls due to perceived shyness.

Conclusion

Ensuring that Indigenous children and youth have consistent access to safe, engaging, and positive sporting opportunities is an essential task for all organizations dedicated to sport or child and youth wellbeing. Calls to Action #89 and #90 put forth by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada highlight the importance of Indigenous inclusion in sport and the necessity to reduce barriers. While these calls to action are directed at the federal government, other organizations have the opportunity to promote these outcomes and support Indigenous communities. As gender-based barriers to sport are a clear barrier to Indigenous women and girls' participation in sport, gender equity is an important step in providing consistent and safe sport opportunities to all Indigenous children. RTP's Gender Equity in Sports project demonstrated the power that play-based learning and other resources can have to overcome barriers to sport. RTP will continue to pursue opportunities to support community partners with equitable sporting programs.

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Acronyms

Acronym	In Full
RTP	Right To Play
CM	Community Mentor
GES	Gender Equity in Sports

Appendix A

Participant Baseline Surveys

The surveys below were completed by child and youth participants at the start of the project. Surveys were administered by Community Mentors.



Gender Equity in Sports: Introduction Survey

Please fill out this information before completing the survey: Age: _____ Gender: _____

Please check the box that best represents your answer to the question:

- How do you feel while playing sports with your friends?

I feel good

I am not sure

I don't feel good
- How do you feel about trying new sports?

I feel good

I am not sure

I don't feel good
- Do you feel included when playing sports?

Yes

I am not sure

No
- Do you think that everyone has the same opportunities to play sports?

Yes

I am not sure

No

What things might stop children and youth from playing sports?
Please write your response.



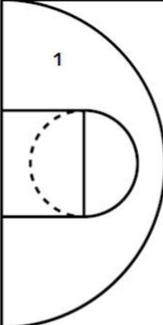
Gender Equity in Sports: Introduction Survey

Instructions
Answer each question by colouring the zone on the court with the matching number. The three colours (green, blue, red) each represent a specific answer to the questions. These answers and their matching colours can be found in the "answer key" on the right. Please colour each zone with the colour that represents your response to the matching question.

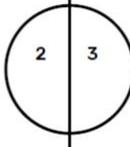
Questions

- How do you feel while playing sports with your friends?
- How do you feel about trying new sports?
- Do you feel included when playing sports?
- Do you think that everyone has the same opportunities to play sports?

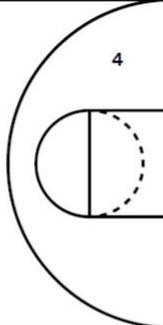
Gender: _____ Age: _____



1



2 3



4

What things might stop children and youth from playing sports?
Please write in your response

Answer Key Q1, Q2

Green: I feel good
Blue: I'm not sure
Red: I don't feel good

Answer Key Q3, Q4

Green: Yes
Blue: I'm not sure
Red: No

Appendix B

Participant Endline Surveys

The surveys below were completed by child and youth participants at the end of the project. Surveys were administered by Community Mentors.

Gender Equity in Sports: Closing Survey

Instructions
Answer each question by colouring the zone on the court with the matching number. The three colours (green, blue, red) each represent a specific answer to the questions. These answers and their matching colours can be found in the "answer key" on the right. Please colour each zone with the colour that represents your response to the matching question.

Questions

- How do you feel while playing sports with your friends?
- How do you feel about trying new sports?
- Do you feel included when playing sports?
- Do you understand the importance of including everyone in sport?
- Do you understand the importance of including girls in sport?

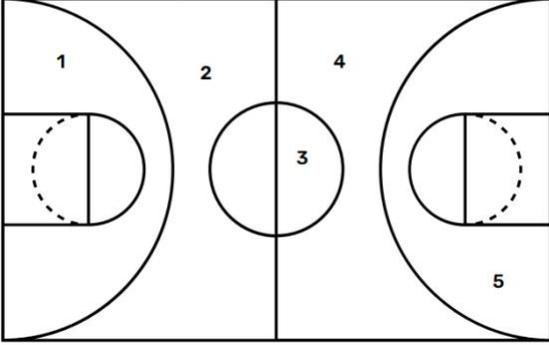
Answer Key Q1, Q2

Green: I feel good
Blue: I'm not sure
Red: I don't feel good

Answer Key Q3, Q4

Green: Yes
Blue: I'm not sure
Red: No

Gender: _____ Age: _____





Gender Equity in Sports: Closing Survey

Please fill out this information before completing the survey: Age: _____ Gender: _____

Please check the box that best represents your answer to the question:

- How do you feel while playing sports with your friends?
 I feel good I am not sure I don't feel good
- How do you feel about trying new sports?
 I feel good I am not sure I don't feel good
- Do you feel included when playing sports?
 Yes I am not sure No
- Do you think that everyone has the same opportunities to play sports?
 Yes I am not sure No
- Do you understand the importance of including girls in sport?
 Yes I am not sure No

Appendix C

Semi-structured Interview Guide

The interview guide below was used as the basis for discussions with Community Mentors following the project. As the interview was semi-structured, questions were not asked verbatim and, in many cases, follow-up questions were asked to draw out conversations.

Gender Equity in Sports 2024: Endline Evaluation of CM Outcomes

Intro

Interview/conversation framework

CM Group Discussion/Interview Question Guide

This group discussion will take a semi-structured approach; the questions in this interview guide represent the general themes that the discussion aims to cover. Questions may not be posed verbatim or in the order that they appear on the guide. During interviews, new information often arises, and unanticipated or probing questions may be asked to further investigate the information. However, all questions asked will correspond to a question or general themes that is outlined in the guide.

Consent Process

- Please provide a summary of the project and why the group discussion is important.
 - Explain the voluntary nature of participation
 - Discuss associated risks and benefits of participating.
 - Explain how data will be analyzed, used and stored and measures in place to ensure data protection/OCAP compliance
 - Give participants an opportunity to ask questions about what was shared
 - Collect verbal consent from respondents before proceeding Introduction and Background Questions
- How was your experience overall with GE in sports program?
- Tell me a bit about your program, the participants, the space, the activities they like etc.
 - Which GES modules did you run? How did the sessions go overall?

Modules

- How did you find the implementation of the modules? Were the instructions easy to follow?
- Did the activities provided (introductory activities and opening activities for each module) make sense for your program context?
- Which activities were most effective?
- How did you find the reflective discussion portion of the modules? Was the guidance on reflection questions relevant for your program context?
- Did you think the learning objectives of the modules were reached? Why or why not?

Program Outcomes (Community Mentors)

- How would you describe your confidence to engage children and youth in sport programming that teach life-skills prior to participating in the GES programming?
- Can you describe your level of confidence with program design that promotes gender equity in sport?
- Do you feel your confidence increased in these areas because of participating in the GES program? If yes, how so?

Training

- Did the training you received from RTP help provide you with the knowledge needed to successfully complete this project?
- Is there further training that you feel would better equip you to feel more confident in the areas we have discussed? Or, framed another way, what was missing from the training and/or resource that would have better supported you to run GE programming?

Program Outcomes (Child and Youth participants)

- What are some barriers to sports girls faced in your community and how did this project help them overcome these barriers?
- What are some of the approaches you implemented to make sports safer and more welcoming for girls?
- Did this (making sports safer and more welcoming) lead to any increase in interest and participation among girls in sports?
- Would you say you are able to identify and intervene whenever you see negative behaviors by boys that discouraged girls from playing sports?
- Would you say you were able to promote male allyship and encourage them to work with the girls more?

Funding

- How was the funding used to support your program?

Appendix D

Quality Assurance Process

The Quality Assurance Process for ensuring data integrity in the research process involves multiple steps to maintain accuracy and reliability. First, all transcripts are shared with participants to verify that their data has been recorded correctly. These transcripts are then uploaded into Dedoose for qualitative analysis. For quantitative data, large datasets are securely stored in SurveyCTO, while smaller datasets are organized on SharePoint. To further ensure data quality, the Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning team, relevant program staff, and community partners conduct data checks and reviews. This collaborative approach helps ensure that all data is accurately represented and that contributors feel the integrity of their data is intact.