

*The Ontario Paraspport Collective started with a simple belief: we must do better for individuals with disabilities in Ontario.*

Collective resulted in a successful 5-year investment made by the Ontario Trillium Foundation. The investment propelled the work of the Collective forward and set the stage for transformative research, program development and collaborations.

The projects, resources and research made possible through the grant is impressive. What was just as important was bringing like-minded individuals together, united by a common cause. The Collective became a network to share, support and learn from each other.

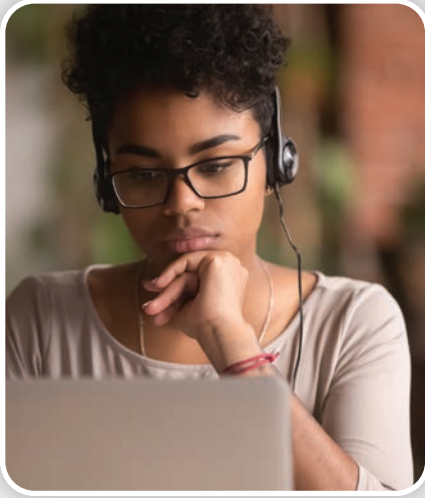
That Collective helped organizations and individuals through a pandemic and provided a place for support as we emerged from it. The bonds created and inspiration provided by the OPC is summed up by two quotes from Amy E. Latimer-Cheung, Professor at Queen's and Director – Canadian Disability Participation Project 2.0.

The 2015 Parapan Am Games and the Accessibility for Ontarians with a Disability Act provided an opportunity for a community of leaders to come together to focus on enhancing access and engagement to sport for Ontarians with a disability. A Games Legacy Initiative revealed the importance and value of moving forward as a united and committed group.

In 2016, that group developed a vision for collaborative action to guide, support and align efforts. The Ontario Paraspport Collective (OPC) was built on the contributions of willing partners and based on leadership and readiness.

These dedicated and diverse partners were committed to making parasport a priority. Partnerships with the Ontario Government (Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport) and its investments in equipment and programming helped further engage the partners in the Collective.

Working together as a group to develop key priorities which address the most challenging gaps in our system, the Collective identified four "pillars". These pillars guided our work together. The work and results achieved by the committed individuals and organizations in the



“The research we accomplished would have been nearly impossible without the OPC. The partnerships we forged to do the work opened gateways never previously available to our team. It was meaningful to do work that made a scientific contribution to create products with potential to impact change.”

Latimer-Cheung added: “The OPC membership lived a lot of life together – we survived a pandemic together on Zoom. Despite much of our interaction being online, we developed friendships that fed our souls in a time when we needed it most. I would venture to say that the OPC supported the wellbeing of some of Ontario’s most influential parasport leaders and it is because of this collective support that the sector is able to re-establish itself post-pandemic.”

The OPC wasn’t an organization that was looking to compete for funding or membership. It was a group of people committed to doing better. It provided the “table” for people to convene and share. It was the people and their commitment to individuals with a disability that was the magic that made the impact. We look forward to the ongoing work that these people and others will do, always striving to do better for individuals with disabilities in Ontario.

## LEADERSHIP PILLAR PROJECTS

*To develop the current and future capacity of sport leaders, including coaches, officials, classifiers, volunteers, and administrators who lead parasport in Ontario, priority focus areas were determined to be resources and inventories, and training and professional development.*



## NCCP Coaching Athletes with a Disability eLearning

All Ontarians have been able to access the NCCP Coaching Athletes with a Disability eLearning at no cost since September 2021. This resource continues to be available until March 31, 2024. Access the course at: <https://www.coachesontario.ca/programs-resources/coaching-in-parasport/cawad>.



## Volunteer Training Program and Resource

A module was developed to help volunteers effectively assist athletes, spectators, and coaches with diverse disabilities. Volunteers’ respectful interactions and communication are key to ensuring a positive experience for everyone involved in an event and/or program. Created by experts in the fields of disability, sport, and exercise, this module covers the following key topics:

- Defining and describing disability.
- Communicating respectfully and effectively with persons living with disabilities.
- History of Para sport and the classification process.
- Benefits of sport participation for persons with disabilities.
- How to facilitate positive, inclusive sport experiences for persons with disabilities.

Access the module at:

<https://cdpp.ca/sites/default/files/inclusion-module/#/>.

## Training and Managing Disability Sport Event Volunteers: Recommendations and Resources Course

A module featuring evidence-informed recommendations and tools to assist in planning for sport events, these resources were developed in partnership with knowledge-users (e.g., volunteers, athletes, sport administrators) in the disability sport community.

Developed by the Ontario Parasport Collective and the Canadian Disability Participation Project (CDPP) to support the effective training and management of event volunteers, the goal of these recommendations is to help sport event organizers develop a comprehensive volunteer program. Volunteer satisfaction and retention of trained volunteers for future disability sport events and programs were objectives as well.

Access this module at: <https://cdpp.ca/sites/default/files/event-managing-resources/#/>. A 22-page resource document (Evidence-Informed Recommendations for the Management and Training of Disability Sport Event Volunteers) was also produced by CDPP: [https://cdpp.ca/sites/default/files/VolunteerTrainingRecommendations\\_CDPP\\_June2023\\_PDF.pdf](https://cdpp.ca/sites/default/files/VolunteerTrainingRecommendations_CDPP_June2023_PDF.pdf).

Over 800 sport leaders have utilized the code for free access to the NCCP Coaching Athletes with a Disability resource in the last two years. More than 650 volunteers participated in Volunteer Training at the 2019 and 2023 Ontario Parasport Games – Durham Region.

The better educated that coaches are when it comes to working with athletes with disabilities, the more enjoyment athletes will experience which in turn leads to enhanced retention of participants.

## EDUCATION PILLAR PROJECTS

*To develop and leverage partnerships and build capacity for parasport at all levels within the education sector, priority focus areas included inclusive physical literacy, resource development and inventory, and research and knowledge transfer. Overarching goals were to ensure more youth are participating in quality parasport programs and that more teachers, schools and school boards are engaged and supporting parasport involvement.*



Phase II of the project featured a festival-style celebration at each school at the end of the project with the support of a visiting provincial sport organization. The pilot project, hosted in the 2017-2018 school year, welcomed 21 educators and 700 students. The Phase II events, hosted in the 2018-2019 school year, included 27 educators and 3,000 students.

Experiences from this project validated the need for classroom engagement and educator professional development to include parasport-specific activities in the classroom. Research within this project found that educators felt more confident and had the tools to incorporate parasport lessons in their programming following their participation in the project.

### Abilities Centre Durham

Initial projects focused on the development of physical literacy through parasport exposure and skill development using both a direct involvement and “train the trainer” approach. Participating schools had the opportunity to access adaptive sport equipment and followed the existing Canadian Paralympic Committee FUNdamentals resource for instruction. Educators and their students in the Durham Region were invited to spend a day at the Abilities Centre in Whitby to learn about parasports first-hand and left with resources to continue teaching skills in their classrooms. The project was focused on Grades 2-6.



Enhancing the knowledge of coaches also improves the technical abilities of athletes, leading to more athletes experiencing success in the sport of their choosing.

The CDPP volunteer trainings and resources will continue to be utilized by multi-sport events, championship tournaments and many other sports events. The recommendations from the resources can also be used in other sectors that involve inclusion of individuals with disabilities.

The OPC worked diligently over the past five years to enhance the parasport community for athletes, families, coaches, officials, volunteers, and community partners. The research, resources, and programming produced by the collaborative efforts of OPC members is a testament to the power of a shared vision and collective action.



*Submitted by Leadership Committee Leads Mercedes Watson and Darda Sales.*



## **Disability-Centred Movement: Supporting Inclusive Physical Education Resource**

In association with Ontario Physical and Health Education Association (OPHEA), a resource was developed with content tailored to two main audiences: Ontario elementary and secondary educators, and community organizations (including parasport organizations). The Disability-Centred Movement resource is organized by four main components: 1. Where Do I Start?; 2. Understanding the Individual Education Plan in Physical Education; 3. Physical Education Program Planning in Various Settings; and 4. Physical Activity Programming Outside of the Classroom and in Community Settings.

The content tailored to educators focuses on how to plan an inclusive physical education program for students with various disabilities. This information is important for parasport organizations as well, to better understand how inclusive physical education works in the school setting. Understanding the school system and what inclusive physical education looks like in the classroom is an essential first step in working with educators in the school setting.

Additional material provides physical activity leaders outside of the classroom (this can include community organizations, parasport organizations, recreation leaders, and intramural leaders) with information on:

- different settings, including self-contained and integrated settings, and considerations for engaging participants in physical activity in each setting;
- strategies to support participants with disabilities in physical activity programs when using a self-contained and/or integrative approach to physical activity, and;
- guiding questions for support with program planning, including attention to the physical and emotional safety of participants.

OPHEA's launch webinar for the resource saw the highest attendance rate of any of their launch webinars. There have been 11 in-person sessions for over 330 educators of the resource to date.

OPHEA is currently working with the OPC on a legacy project which includes professional development and resource support for educators, administrators and administrative staff from sport organizations to enhance relationships between the parasport and education sector.

*Submitted by Education Committee Leads Kirsten Bobbie and Christina Swett.*

## PATHWAYS 1 PILLAR PROJECTS

*This OPC Pillar was divided into two streams – Pathways 1 and Pathways 2 – and worked to align and integrate the para-sport pathway for Ontarians through three focus areas: 1) Participation Pathway, 2) Para Pathway Development, and 3) Ontario Excellence Pathway. Priority areas for the Participation Pathway included awareness and first-involvement, grassroots community participation and community transitions to sport. The primary goal was to improve entry and increase participation rates of children with disabilities in sports.*



### The Art and Science of Play

To achieve this goal, Pathways 1 developed several tools to help guide exploration of the complex area of grassroots participation and identify project priorities: i) values and guiding principles, ii) systems impact grid, iii) entry and participation mapping, iv) Pathway Ideas Incubator.

We identified six elements of the “entry and participation system” to concentrate our work on (Entry, Participation, Transitions, Pathway Development, Pathway Support and Sector Capacity) and four key strategies (facilitating entry, building connections and paths, strengthening community capacity and adopting innovation) to deliver a focused outcome: increased participation.

Through consultations and partnerships with OPC members, academic researchers, community development leaders, systems-change experts and the development of a “Pathway Ideas Incubator”, the Pathways 1 Pillar generated 18 projects aligned with the six areas of systems impact.

#### System Impact: Entry

- Entry Map
- Playgrounds to Podium

#### System Impact: Participation

- Community Clubs
- Post-secondary Institutions

#### System Impact: Transitions

- Transitions from Children’s Rehabilitation Centres (Empowered Kids Ontario)
- Try-it Conversions

#### System Impact: Pathway Development

- Blind Soccer
- Powering Forward (powerchair hockey)
- Para-Alpine Pathway (inter-pillar initiative with Pathways 2)

#### System Impact: Pathway Support

- 1:1 Community Volunteer Training
- Continuing to Play

#### System Impact: Sector Capacity

- Parasport Games Volunteer Training
- Disability Sport Event Volunteer Guide (inter-pillar initiative)
- Introduction to Social Return on Investment Training for Grassroots Sports
- Parasport Resource Hub (inter-pillar initiative)
- Community Inclusion Lab
- Active Start Incubator
- Inclusive Facilitator Training

The projects ranged from the “art” of design thinking to the “science” of advanced coach training and pandemic response to public health guidance. In addition, a number of other projects were generated by the Pathways team that will be implemented through the Quality Participation Lab in 2024 (eg. Children’s Storybooks).

### Project Highlights

The Powering Forward, Blind Soccer and Para-Alpine projects demonstrate the immediate impact of investment on entry and participation. Powering Forward surveys and research identified needs, gaps and interests of individuals who use a powerchair to participate in programs and activities across the province. A new powerchair hockey initiative is now available in the Durham Region.



The Para-Alpine initiative, delivered by CADS (Canadian Adaptive Snowsports), facilitated coach engagement, training and resources to support the growth of para-alpine interests in the Northern Region of Ontario. The Thunder Bay Adaptive Ski Workshop for example, engaged ski centres (Loch Lomond and Mt. Baldy), instructors, a para racer, five families with a child with a disability, Lakehead University and George Jeffery Children's Rehab Centre.

The Blind Soccer project consisted of OBSA-facilitated (Ontario Blind Sports Association) coach training, development, and recruitment to increase expertise and involvement in blind soccer. This project led to coaches and officials certification, and the expansion of existing infrastructure to include new grassroots programming and continued momentum for sport growth, resources and connections.

**University Campus as a Community Hub:** this post-secondary institutions project demonstrated the role that Ontario's universities can play as community leaders in participation. Pilot projects on campuses across Ontario have provided the opportunity to explore how institutional assets can be leveraged to create opportunities for students with disabilities to participate in campus recreation.

**Community Inclusion Lab and Active Start Incubator:** this project consists of several inter-related pieces – a Community Inclusion Lab for promotion of quality participation, an Active Start Incubator aimed at developing innovative entry programming, inclusive facilitator training and social return on investment for community organizations. It is designed to continue the work of the Pathways 1 team.

## Impact

**More Possibilities.** More opportunities are needed for children and youth with disabilities to enter and participate in a wide range of sports and to demonstrate the possibilities to parents. The blind soccer and powerchair sports initiatives impacted populations with fewer opportunities to play while the para-alpine project impacted northern populations with limited resources and unique barriers of geography.

**More Benefits.** Participation in the pilot projects delivered physical, social, emotional and health benefits associated with physical activity and socialization. New programs, new coaches and new resources offer a promising and exciting recipe for continued impact.

**More Perspective.** Working together with partners from different sectors provided fresh perspectives, shared solutions and reinforced the impact of lived-experience.

The importance of initiating connections, resources and contacts across the province has, and will continue to, create more opportunities for persons with disabilities to play and participate. Each charter (project) has recognized the need, interest, gaps and opportunities for persons with disabilities, volunteers, practitioners, coaches, and families to get involved in sport and recreation in Ontario.

## Path Forward

The five-year exploration allowed for a deeper understanding of parasport entry and participation and an opportunity to develop maps, uncover hidden assets, work with new partners, build new models and to bring the insights of innovation to the grassroots level.

We learned that:

- barriers to entry and participation are complex.
- participation is different than quality participation.
- critical research and knowledge is under-used.
- community support for participation differs from community investment.
- community development offers a valuable perspective.
- focused leadership in grassroots participation and entry is important for systemic change.

The path forward requires more inclusion of people with lived-experience, more validation of research in community settings, more training, more access to resources and more collective leadership, stewardship and creativity. The path forward combines the science of research with the art of community and lived-experience. We are much more aware of "what we don't know" but are confident we can build on what we learned. There is much more to do.

*Submitted by Pathways 1 Committee Leads Dave Sora and Archie Allison.*

## PATHWAYS 2 – EXCELLENCE PILLAR PROJECTS

*The purpose of this Ontario Parasport Collective Pillar was to facilitate the development of high-performance athlete planning and support specific projects linked to Gold Medal profiling. Success was determined by improved performance and results by Ontario parasport athletes.*



### Objectives

1. Support a deliberate strategy to engage Provincial Sport Organizations (PSOs), Multi-Sport Organizations, Disability Sport Organizations and National Sport Organizations (NSOs) in high-performance planning.
2. Support the effective use of sport science and sport medicine to underpin talent identification and confirmation, aligned with NSOs to support the search for new athletes.
3. Align PSOs with their respective NSOs in operational areas identified with the Sport Audit Framework.

### Project Scope

- 42 individual projects supported across 14 individual PSOs over a five-year period.
- 651 individuals impacted by enhanced programming.
- 75% success rate at achieving desired KPIs (Key Performance Indicators).
- 68% increase in direct investment from PSOs towards para-specific projects over five-year period.
- Total enhanced investment of \$375,000, ranging from \$10,000 to \$40,000 total allocation to each sport partner.

### Impact: Individual Level

The Pathways 2 Pillar created physical profiles on national and provincial targeted athletes:

- Identifying differences in capacity and areas for improvement.
- Setting standards for targets.
- Informing athletes on current and desired state to improve on-snow performance.
- Informing discipline-specific practitioners to modify athlete programming.

### Impact: Systemic Level

The Pathways 2 Pillar supported Cross Country Ontario in developing a Para Nordic Skiing Review, rendering a 48-page review that was structured in three phases:

1. Environmental Scan – examining eight organizations in 30-60 minute interviews, looking at pros and cons to shape the ideal model for Nordic Skiing.
2. Internal Review – included interviews with eight stakeholders.
3. Program Model Development – integrated findings into a roles and responsibilities matrix that refined and clarified roles of the Para Nordic Coach, District Development Coordinators and the Para Nordic Committee.

Four key recommendations were tabled, notably hiring a part-time Para Nordic Lead to focus primarily on the recruitment of volunteers, coordination of programs and management of logistics, and included:

1. Implementing staffing and job description changes.
2. Revising the terms of reference to align committees with the new model.
3. Increase club capacity to better serve athletes with a disability at a local level.
4. Integrate High-Performance.

Overall, developing and implementing a province-wide KPI into the Canadian Sport Institute Ontario's flagship program, the Ontario High Performance Sport Initiative, targeted sports are now encouraged to deliberately improve the number of Paralympic athletes with the goal to be one strategy that addresses the systemic gap of limited depth within the Paralympic athlete pool.

### The Potential

Canada is currently ranked 23rd in the world at the Summer Paralympic Games for medals won. Canada is currently ranked third in the world at the Winter Paralympic Games for medals won. To improve Canada's summer performance and sustain and improve its winter performance trends, Ontario must continue to focus on positioning deliberate support for parasport athletes and coaches aspiring to perform at domestic and international events.

*Submitted by Pathways 2 Committee Leads Murray McCullough and Gwen Binsfeld.*