



CPRA ACPL

GENDER EQUITY IN RECREATIONAL SPORT

Success Story

Town of Oakville Virtual Classes Bring Sense of Community to Seniors

EVERY THURSDAY, OAKVILLE RESIDENT

Gail Berrigan logs onto Zoom and practices breathing, stretching and mindfulness. She's part of a community of women aged 55 and older who have been able to maintain their physical and mental health during the pandemic, thanks to funding from the CPRA's Gender Equity in Recreational Sport initiative, which is funded in part by the Government of Canada (Sport Canada).

With ongoing COVID-19 Public Health restrictions, the Town of Oakville jumped into action to offer free virtual programming to keep the community engaged and connected. From September 2020 to March 2021, the town hosted more than 100 free virtual classes geared toward women aged 55 and older, including social hours, mindfulness practice, and physical activities such as yoga.



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



Kristeen Sopeju, Program Instructor

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Daniel Ridsdale, Community Development Specialist at the Town of Oakville

Held weekly and led by qualified instructors, these programs were so successful that many of them, including Berrigan’s favourite mindfulness class, extended past March. “These virtual programs have broken down barriers for women who may not be able to leave their home or participate in a sports class,” explained Berrigan. “They encourage everyone to do what they can. My whole body gets a workout and I enjoy every minute of it.”

The Town of Oakville’s full roster of free virtual programs have welcomed more than 1,200 participants with 1,000 of those being older women, and some with mobility restrictions. “We truly feel this has been a lifeline for older adults in our community,” said Daniel Ridsdale, Community Development Specialist at the Town of Oakville. “I’ve had daily voicemails from older adults inquiring about our programs.”

According to Ridsdale, providing opportunities for older adults to engage without barriers has created safe virtual spaces and reduced isolation. “We have participants joining us from hospital beds and long-term care centres. There is a true sense of community and belonging that we are remarkably proud of.”

Kristeen Sopeju, an Oakville-based yoga instructor, leads the mindfulness class and said that the experience has also helped her own emotional wellbeing. “It’s the brightness in my week, and in my day. It’s just fantastic,” said Sopeju. “It’s become a community. This is what happiness and joy looks like for me.”

Caryl Hamilton, who also participates in the mindfulness class, agrees that the exercises and connections to other women have made a great impact on everyone’s mental health. “Stretching and breathing techniques have kept us positive,” said Hamilton. “It’s been a circle of friends coming together.”

Ridsdale described Oakville’s new virtual programs as “legacy projects,” and shared that programs like the mindfulness class will be an ongoing activity in the Town of Oakville for the foreseeable future.

Ridsdale also recognized that the funds allowed the town to offer something impactful for its female residents during such a critical time. “The use of these funds has opened up a whole new venture for our Community Development Division,” he said. “Without question, we will continue to grow these services, which will enable this population to stay connected well beyond the impacts of COVID-19.”

Visit active.oakville.ca for more information about the Town of Oakville’s virtual programs. 🍁