



CPRA ACPL

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE

Success Story

An initiative to expand access and enhance the quality of community sport and recreation

COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS FUEL MUCH OF the sport programming in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, as is the case for most communities. Local not-for-profit organizations run by committed and passionate volunteers organize and operate leagues that include badminton, softball, minor hockey, basketball and more, for a range of age groups.

It all amounts to an energetic sport community offering multiple opportunities for families living in the County of Antigonish, which includes the Town of Antigonish. However, with each organization essentially “doing their own thing” to promote and schedule activities, and register participants, the system was putting a heavy burden on each sport group and making parents work hard to assess the options for their children.



MUNICIPALITY OF THE COUNTY OF ANTIGONISH, NOVA SCOTIA

Canada

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Courtney MacDonald, Coordinator of Sport and Recreation Alignment

“Having groups operate in their own in separate silos created problems that were making sport hard to access for some people,” says Gina MacInnis, a regional sport consultant for the Highland Region in Antigonish County.

“With each sport group hosting their programming through their own website – or in some cases, relying on paper registration) – parents had to look in multiple locations to explore options for their child,” says Gina. “And scheduling wasn’t coordinated, so often, one program’s schedule conflicted with another program for the same age group.”

The information on different programs also came out at varying times, making planning impossible for families. It was also challenging for the volunteer-led organizations, Gina says.

“Many of the volunteers start out wanting to coach their kids and then find themselves becoming a leader of the organization and responsible for creating registration processes and taking on other time-consuming tasks that are outside their skill set.”

A new collaboration emerged from a desire to align and streamline sport delivery, and it ultimately resulted in the creation of “Sport Hub Antigonish” – one of the more tangible parts of which is a multi-organizational online registration portal and “one-stop” community sport/recreation information website. It brings together several sport organizations, as well as the recreation departments of the Town and County of Antigonish.

The project was spearheaded by Sport Nova Scotia and supported by provincial and local government, and Antigonish is the first in the province to use this sport-hub model.

“This initiative aims to increase and enhance sport participation and positive sport experiences in our community,” says Amy Leigh George, Recreation Programmer with Antigonish County. “Sport Hub is more than a registration portal – the partners also have many long-term goals to improve community sport.”

To gain resources to further develop the Sport Hub, the municipality applied for and received funding from CPRA’s Youth Employment Experience program. This funding supporting the hiring of an individual as a Coordinator of Sport and Recreation Alignment to support all the partners and continue to integrate municipal recreation programming into the hub.

The job went to Courtney MacDonald, a sports enthusiast who is from Antigonish.

“I played a lot of sports growing up here, including playing badminton competitively. I’ve also coached badminton and CrossFit and done highland dancing. I’m very involved with the sport and recreation community and was definitely interested in taking on the Sport Hub role to help strengthen that community,” Courtney says.

“With her strong connections and sport knowledge, Courtney could hit the ground running. She also brought solid technical and communications skills to the table,” says Amy Leigh.

One of Courtney’s roles was to take the lead on developing templates that each sport organization could use to promote programs, set up volunteer training protocols and for other purposes – reducing the work for individual organizations and bringing consistent best practices to everyone’s work.

Parents have welcomed the new more streamlined system, says Laura Duggan, who until recently served as Sport Hub Coordinator. (This position has now transferred to Amy Leigh as Laura’s role shifts to expanding the Sport Hub pilot project by bringing Sport Hub to additional communities in the province.)

“Parents simply log into their Sport Hub account, with all their children listed, get information about sport programs matched to each child’s profile, and move them into registration,” Laura explains. To date, 860 families in the community have opened more than 1,000 Sport Hub accounts.

This centralized information source has greatly improved two-way communication between the sport and recreation providers and program users in the community, Laura says. And it has brought all the organizations closer together, and they are planning to set up committees to develop community-wide standards and policies to expand inclusion and access and make other quality improvements to sports and recreation.

“The CPRA funding that allowed us to hire Courtney created an immense impact by allowing us to build capacity and bring even more benefits to small volunteer sport organizations,” says Laura. 🍁