



GENDER EQUITY IN RECREATIONAL SPORT

# Success Story

## Lay-Up Breaks Down Barriers For Girls In Sport

### **L**AY-UP YOUTH BASKETBALL'S GIRLS ONLY

Program offers girls more than just basketball skills: it also serves as a space where they can grow and express themselves in an inclusive environment where everybody feels welcome.

During the winter of 2022, the program got an extra boost from the CPRA Gender Equity in Recreational Sport Community Grant – helping to run a virtual program for girls aged nine to 14 from Neighbourhood Improvement Areas across Toronto this past winter.



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

*“We operate all of our programs in Neighbourhood Improvement Areas, where folks face systemic barriers to accessing equitable sport programming. The funding supported Lay-Up’s ability to create a safe space for the girls to show up, be themselves, compete and have fun - and most importantly, to make connections.”*

Heini Davies, Director of Development, Lay-Up Basketball

“This funding meant a lot to us,” says Heini Davies, Director of Development for the Toronto-based Lay-Up. “It’s really important, especially for girls and women in sport, to receive funding because a lot of the time we don’t get the adequate amount of funding that we need. The funding supported Lay-Up’s ability to create a safe space for the girls to show up, be themselves, compete and have fun - and most importantly, to make connections.”

Lay-Up, which offers basketball programs to children and youth across Toronto, ran the Girls Only Program virtually because of COVID-19 public health restrictions. Heini says these measures were an additional barrier many of their participants face when accessing sports and recreation programs.

“COVID exasperated problems that already existed,” she says. “We operate all of our programs in Neighbourhood Improvement Areas, where folks face systemic barriers to accessing equitable sport programming. Some of these barriers (as outlined in the City of Toronto’s TSNS 2020 Neighbourhood Equity Index) include low income, marginalization, limited access to community centres, green spaces, or gyms, poor walkability, and limited access to healthy food.”

But Heini says the funding helped mitigate those barriers, and during the winter, a total of 64 girls and youth participated in the Girls Only virtual program. As part of the cost-free program, Lay-Up also provided girls the items they needed to participate – including basketballs, sports bras and hijabs, jerseys and laptops.

Brittania Brown, one of the program’s coaches, led the age nine to 11 cohort and says the Girls Only program serves as a place where girls from different communities can make friends and feel comfortable with one another.

“There is a lot of preparation that goes into our program from start to finish. It all starts with the phone calls we make to each participant before all sessions to make sure they are prepared and feel confident before showing up,” explains Brittania. “The foundation to each session is making connections and having fun, whether that is through activities focused on team play or competition. The girls love when coaches do the skills, drills and games with them. We also continue to create connections through games such as trivia to engage the girls in a different way. Before ending each session, the girls come together as a group to discuss what they liked, learned and found challenging.”

She adds that Lay-Up also helps create positive youth development.

“Creating positive social, emotional, physical, and cognitive skills are all part of our framework,” Brittania says. “When girls are part of our program, we essentially expect them to walk away with all of those skills.”

The organization hopes to eventually have 50 per cent female participants involved in its programs, and the funding helped create the foundation to reach that goal.

“From a funding perspective, it’s really important having this specific funding dedicated to women and girls’ participation in sport,” Heini says. “We are excited to hopefully see more of this kind of funding in the coming months.” 