



GENDER EQUITY IN RECREATIONAL SPORT

Success Story



Project Love Run Creates Safe Spaces For Runners

WHEN EMMA TSODZAI HITS Vancouver's trails for a run, she takes notice of her surroundings: the trees, the birds and even the way her own body feels as it moves.

She never did that before – until she joined Project Love Run's trail running program in the spring, which received funding from the CPRA Gender Equity in Recreational Sport Community Grant.

"This experience allowed me to push myself out of my comfort zone. It got me out of my box," says Emma. "Every single session is awesome because I'm always pushing myself."



Canada

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Filsan Abdiaman, Project Love Run’s founder and trail running coach

Throughout March 2022, the Vancouver-based trail running program hosted a series of trail events in Toronto and Vancouver geared towards Allies and BIPoC self-identifying womxn, as well as a separate trail running event open to Black self-identifying womxn.

“The funding meant we could have the running events take place, and also helped us reach our audience through marketing and outreach to let the community know there was something there for them,” says Filsan Abdiaman, Project Love Run’s founder and trail running coach.

Project Love Run hosted three events that featured a trail run and brunch for womxn to learn more about running, and how to navigate trails. In Vancouver, womxn could also sign up for trail running coaching and continue with their running group.

Emma was one of the participants who jumped at the chance to remain in the program.

“I love the way we run,” she says. “We all have different paces, but there’s a respectful approach to the way we run as a group. No one ever gets left behind.”

Emma adds that the opportunity to run with other Black womxn helped her feel like she was in a safe space where she could have relatable conversations with her fellow runners.

“The feeling of community and being together is really powerful,” she says. “We could ask each other, what oil do you put in your hair after a run? There’s a method and a process to what oils you can use and as an active person, you want to be able to keep your hair moisturized, healthy and strong. It was nice having other womxn of colour who have the same texture to talk about that with.”

Filsan says Emma’s experience echoes a lot of the feedback she has received from Project Love Run’s participants.

“A lot of the womxn we targeted were from the BIPoC community, and these are womxn that feel intimidated by running in general. And when it comes to trail running, of course, not being able to see themselves in that space adds another complicated barrier for them,” she explains. “We wanted to ensure the sport felt safe for them to participate in, and create that environment for them to just get to experience it in a community where they feel safe.”

While the trail events were a success, Filsan says that Project Love Run had to change its original plans as a result of COVID-19 restrictions.

Instead of hosting one trail clinic, which was the initial plan, the organization decided to host three trail runs in each city capped at 10 participants per event – which resulted in high registration numbers with 16 participating in Vancouver and 13 in Toronto.

Filsan hopes that the funding will be available again so Project Love Run can host a clinic for womxn in the BIPoC community, and help them in their trail running journey from beginning to end.

“As places are starting to re-open and we get the green light to have these events, I would love to focus on the clinic itself where we get to train these womxn through a run program and have them racing at the end – and be with them for a longer period,” she says. 🍁