



REACHING EACH AND EVERY ONE

Success Story

Outdoor kayaking on the Glenmore Reservoir in Calgary, Alberta.

Newcomer youth recognize full potential through sports

WHEN NOËL BAHLIBY'S FAMILY arrived in Alberta from Eritrea, there was one thing that helped him fit in and changed his entire life trajectory: sports.

He played everything, including soccer, basketball, wrestling, and American football. The latter, he says, had the biggest influence on him – mainly because he had a coach that provided stability and discipline.



CENTRE FOR NEWCOMERS (CFN),
CALGARY, ALBERTA

Canada

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In-door pool sessions to help families adjust to boats on the water and to get comfortable with falling in the pool so they can build their confidence and trust in their life jackets.

“He was a very intense coach, and was very passionate about what he did,” remembers Bahliby. “He pushed us very hard, but you’d understand where he was coming from. If your grades were dropping or you were skipping class, he made it clear he would take you off the team without blinking. If you didn’t follow up with your responsibilities, he’d give you the business. But he’d also ask how our families were doing, and what was going on at home. He was an adult role model we could all look up to.”

Bahliby credits sport, and his coach, for keeping him motivated and out of trouble. Together, they laid the foundation for getting him on the right path.

Today, as the Director of Youth Programs for the Calgary-based Centre for Newcomers (CFN), Bahliby wants to give newcomer youth who are at-risk for gang or criminal involvement the same sport opportunities he had – helping them realize their potential, and laying the groundwork for a happy and successful life.

In 2023, Bahliby was awarded the support he needed to deliver sports programming to these youth, thanks to the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association’s Reaching Each and Every One: A Community Sport Intervention program. This program, which was funded by Sport Canada’s Community Sport for All Initiative, seeks to remove barriers and increase sport participation rates for equity deserving groups across Canada.

The funding covered the costs for the CFN to run its Real Me Vulnerable Youth Outdoor Recreation Pilot, which was delivered in partnership with AQ Outdoors, a paddle shop based in Edmonton. The program was geared towards young newcomer youth who are at-risk for gang or criminal involvement.

As part of the program, youth and their parents had the chance to participate in a variety of outdoor activities – including snow shoeing, kayaking, swimming, and

paddleboarding. Bahliby says it was important to include new parents, because they don’t always see the value of their children participating in sports. The program helped reduce that barrier by showing newcomer parents how their children can grow through sport, and by building a multigenerational community of participants.

“Some parents have this idea that sports is a waste of time compared to academics,” he explains. “But getting parents on the boats has been really positive, and has shown them that sports can play this role of engaging their kids, getting them physically active, and ultimately helping them perform better in school and practice their English.”

Bahliby adds that the program, which was also delivered free of charge and helped families overcome financial barriers, also covered the cost of certified coaches to lead these youth – which he felt was particularly important as someone who was personally impacted by a great coach.

“We want to give kids really quality experiences – get a really high quality facility, buy the best equipment, and give them the best experience so they’ll want to stick with it,” he says.

The funding also helped participants overcome barriers to transportation. Many participants’ parents might not have had a valid driver’s license when they arrive in Canada, or their parents were busy working and couldn’t drive them. Bahliby says they were able to organize a bus to transport participants to and from the program.

Overall, Bahliby says the funding helped support a program that supported youth that are new to Canada – and gave them opportunities that would not have otherwise been possible for them.

“If it wasn’t for sports, I don’t think I would have ever thought about college. It gave me confidence,” he says. “Being involved in sports was a driving force for my decisions, and I wanted to recreate that for these kids.” 🍁