



Cowichan Valley gives newcomers a taste of community sports programs

A T COWICHAN VALLEY'S TRY IT DAY during spring 2023, newcomers like Olha Kuzemko and long-time locals bonded over the great unifiers: food, sports, and recreation.

Spanning multiple generations and languages, some participants engaged in fast-paced sports. Others sat side-by-side, learning deep breathing techniques during calming yoga sessions. Many connected over dance – an activity that serves as a universal language that unites people of all ages and backgrounds.

For Kuzemko, who arrived in Canada last year from Kyiv, Try It Day was a memorable day where she played lacrosse for the very first time — and enjoyed this activity with her children.



COWICHAN COMMUNITY CENTRE,
BRITISH COLUMBIA

Canada

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Try it Day - Lacrosse with Jamie.

“I didn’t have the opportunity to try different sports, and Try It Days helped me and my kids try a new sport,” says Kuzemko. “It was a great experience to try something new, and have a good time with family and friends.”

The program, which was a partnership between the Cowichan Community Centre (CCC) and the Cowichan Intercultural Society (CIS), bridged gaps between recreational opportunities and the British Columbia community’s newcomers like Kuzemko – giving them a taste of different sports and recreation experiences, and eliminating roadblocks they face in accessing these activities.

The event was made possible 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 the Government of Canada’s Community Sport for All Initiative, seeks to remove barriers and increase sport participation rates for equity deserving groups across Canada.

“This is one of those things that started out as an idea. When we actually saw it come into reality, it was a beautiful and exciting thing,” says Danielle Seeliger, recreation programmer at CCC.

She and her colleague Sadie Bartam, a program assistant at CCC, say the Try It Days — which were held twice throughout 2023 — broke down barriers to sport that newcomers in their community often face.

“We wanted to look at who is accessing our centre, and how we could make it more accessible for people who are new to Canada and may be English language learners,” explains Bartram.

Seeliger says that many newcomers are from Ukraine and Syria, and might be unable to read English-language information about sport opportunities in their community. The funding allowed the community centre to translate marketing materials for the event, which the CCC and CIS can use for years to come — including summaries of



Try it Day - Yoga with Sadie.

Cowichan Valley’s four recreation centres, and important information on how to register online for activities.

“It’s a piece that’s really cool to have that lasts beyond the event,” she says, adding that translators were also available at the Try It Days to help newcomers overcome that language barrier to sport.

She adds that childcare is also a major barrier for newcomer families, who can’t participate in sporting opportunities if they have young children to look after at home. The funding covered the cost of on-site childcare at the Try It Days, which helped families immerse themselves in different sport and recreation activities.

“Parents were able to drop off their kid for a few hours, or even just for a session,” Seeliger says. “I think it allowed parents a little bit more freedom to participate themselves, rather than having to be focused on parenting the entire time.”

Bartram says the funding also allowed the event to be offered free of charge — which helped newcomers overcome significant barriers to cost.

“Newcomers to Canada are often on a very limited income, so financially it’s definitely a barrier for them to be able to attend different programs,” she says. “This funding gave them the opportunity to become familiar with our community centre, meet some of our instructors, and try a different sport.”

Seeliger adds that the funding even helped break down barriers to transportation — allowing the CIS to offer newcomers bus passes to the event, and the CCC offered a minivan service for newcomers who live further away from the community centre.

“Without the grant, we never would have been able to do something this big, with this many additional offerings,” says Seeliger. “By offering a barrier-free environment, I think we were able to get a higher attendance out. Financially, I don’t think we could have offered Try It Days in this way.” 🍁