



Youth participate in multi-sport during Lights On at Princess Alexandra School in Hay River.

## Hay River Lights On program provides free, 'non-judgmental' sport space for youth

**EVERY FRIDAY AND SATURDAY NIGHT** during Hay River's darkest months, youth from the Northwest Territories community gathered together at two local schools to participate in sports, play games and learn about fitness and nutrition.



LIGHTS ON HAY RIVER,  
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

**Canada**

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Basketball, volleyball and soccer at the Lights On program at Princess Alexandra School in Hay River.

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Scott Clouthier, Executive Director of the Hay River Youth Centre which runs the program

This program, Lights On, has been offered to youth in the community since 2012 – but needed a funding boost to cover important costs for the free program. In 2023, it received that support 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.

“We’re really reliant on community donations, and with the current state of things, those donations are becoming harder and harder to come by,” says Scott Clouthier, Executive Director of the Hay River Youth Centre which runs the program. “This funding covered the basic needs of the program and has given us more flexibility, which helped us a lot.”

The funding helped cover the cost of staff to facilitate the program, as well as purchase new equipment like table tennis table and new soccer nets.

Clouthier says that Lights On’s free programming connects youth with recreational opportunities without worrying about the cost.

“Lights On offers a variety of sports. There’s lots of youth that have come and tried table tennis for the first time, and they decide that this is something that they love, and end

up going to the Arctic Winter Games for table tennis,” he says. “Pickleball is another example of a sport that’s fairly new that they can try out. Lights On helps youth find their passion, or something that just makes them happy, without having to spend money to be able to access it.”

He adds that Lights On serves youth from grades 4 to 12, and about half of these youth are Indigenous. While the program takes place at two local schools, Clouthier describes it as a “non-judgemental space” where everyone is welcome.

“If you don’t go to school, or if you go to school on the reserve or to the French school, you’re still welcome to come to Lights On,” Clouthier says, adding that this program has been particularly helpful for youth at risk of dropping out of high school. “This program has allowed kids to build personal relationships, and they actually feel supported by people in their community. It has definitely helped retain students in school here.”

He adds that the program has made positive impacts on the community since its inception in 2012.

“Lights On has kept them from falling into the traps that are out there like drugs and addiction, and it has exposed them to different ways of expressing themselves in different ways through sport,” Clouthier says. “There’s no real pressure for them. They can come and hang out and be themselves, and participate in sports on their own level.” 🍁