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REACHING EACH AND EVERY ONE

Success Story



Swimming coaches and instructors gathered in Charlottetown on March 18th for a Para Swimming Workshop that was hosted by ParaSport and Recreation PEI and funded by the Reaching Each and Every One Grant.

ParaSport and Recreation PEI expands para swimming programs

DARCY MACDOUGALL NO LONGER refers to himself as “the guy who hates exercise.”

The Charlottetown resident, who is blind, has spent the last decade swimming in ParaSport and Recreation PEI’s ParaFit program, which teaches adults with physical disabilities how to swim.

The program has helped him get physically fit. It has improved his mental health. And it has boosted his self-confidence.



PARASPORT AND RECREATION PEI,
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

Canada

This project is funded by
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“I didn’t have good experiences in gym and elementary school,” explains MacDougall. “Until I got into ParaFit, I thought of myself as somebody that didn’t like much physical activity. But now, I’m just loving it.”

In 2023, ParaSport and Recreation PEI was able to deliver programming to adult participants like MacDougall in its ParaFit program, as well as expand its Aqua-Abilities program for children with physical disabilities. These programs were made available thanks to funding from 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.

Tracy Stevenson, Executive Director of ParaSport and Recreation PEI, says the goal of the funding was to grow its programs for children and adults with physical disabilities on Prince Edward Island.

“We were able to expand these programs, and open them to so many more people,” Stevenson says.

The organization’s Aqua-Abilities program, geared towards children ages five to 17 with physical disabilities, was piloted in 2006 and is one of its longstanding programs. Stevenson says the initiative had a low instructor to participant ratio, and helped get children more comfortable in the water.

But as children developed and strengthened their swimming abilities, they faced a major barrier: there was no higher-level programming available to them.

“We knew we wanted to take Aqua-Abilities to the next level,” says Stevenson. “Our goal as an organization is for participants to maybe go to a higher level of swimming lessons, or even move into a competitive swim program.”

She says the funding from CPRA helped the organization establish the Advanced Aqua-Abilities program, where children could work on more advanced swimming skills and learn the skills needed to swim competitively.

Stevenson adds that the funding also supported the organization’s ParaFit program, which is for adults aged 18 and over with a physical disability, and offers more individualized programming.

“The ParaFit program is more of a training atmosphere,” describes Edie Rogers, a para swimming coach with ParaSport and Recreation PEI. “We have some participants that we have to teach right from the beginning. For others, it goes right up to being competitive in the sport.”

Stevenson says the funding helped the organization cover the cost of training for the coaches, as well as pool time for these programs – helping the organization keep registration costs low for participants who face financial barriers to accessing the sport.

“This grant enabled us to keep our fees very low, which is very important for our organization,” she says.

Stevenson adds that the funding also helped purchase four adapted personal floatation devices, helping participants overcome physical barriers to swimming in the water, as well as transportation to and from the pool.

“The transportation piece can be a barrier for many, so we do provide transportation support for individuals,” she says. “We don’t want anyone to have to stay home and not participate because they are not able to pay the transportation fee.”

In 2023, for the first time ever, MacDougall says he was able to attend lane swimming independently from beginning to end – getting there and back by himself using the provided transportation and swim independently thanks to the training he received from the ParaFit program. He also had his own lane available to practice swimming independently.

This independence has made lasting impacts on MacDougall.

“I feel so proud of myself that I’m able to now go and do that by myself,” he says. “It is such a confidence boost.” 🍁