



First squash camp for people with partial or no eye sight held at CBS Recreation Center, NL, with assistance from St. John's office..

Funding helps Canadian Inclusivity Squash spread the word

GERARD NOLANDER WAS NEVER REALLY interested in playing sports. He exercised, and played some hockey, but was never drawn to any particular sport.

It was only after he became visually impaired that he discovered his love for the game of squash.

Nolander was given the opportunity to play squash with others who have visual impairments through the Canadian Inclusivity Squash Program – which serves people with physical and intellectual disabilities in Conception Bay South and the surrounding communities of St. John's, Mount Pearl, Paradise and Holyrood, NL.



CANADIAN INCLUSIVITY SQUASH PROGRAM INC.,
NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

Canada

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CNIB provided simulators for squash camps, assisting coaches in understanding eye conditions and developing effective strategies for teaching squash to those with specific conditions.

“With my vision loss, I was never 100 per cent sure what I can do and what I can’t do, but squash has really boosted my confidence because I could actually play the game.”

Program Participant

“With my vision loss, I was never 100 per cent sure what I can do and what I can’t do,” says Nolander, who had 20/20 vision up until three years ago. “But squash has really boosted my confidence because I could actually play the game. I could learn the game and succeed in it.”

While the organization has made profound impacts on participants like Nolander, head coach Eric Hart says he has needed help getting the word out that they are in the community, and welcoming participants with disabilities. In 2023, Hart was able to spread the message across Newfoundland communities and reach more participants, 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.

“The funding has done a fabulous job for us in our promotion of the program, and different streams that our squash club does because we run a wheelchair program, a neurodevelopmental program, and now a program for people with partial or no vision,” explains Hart. “It has allowed us to develop a website, and put advertisements into a regional newspaper for three months to show people that we’re here.”

Since its inception in 2019, the Canadian Inclusivity Squash Program has broken down barriers that people with disabilities face when accessing sports.

For example, its latest pilot program for people with vision impairment — which is the first of its kind in the world — delivers squash lessons based on participants’ individual abilities. For Nolander, who is legally blind and has a severe case of light sensitivity, he’s able to use tinted safety goggles on the court. He also uses a ball that makes a jingling noise, so he can hear where the ball is coming from.

Hart says the program has another participant who has been blind since birth, so their lessons are different from Nolander’s.

“We couldn’t say, ‘swing like you would in tennis’ because there’s no reference point. They haven’t seen tennis,” Hart describes. “You basically have to establish a starting point, and somehow teach him how to swing. You have to teach him the length of his racket, and how to hold his racket. But, so far, he has learned how to hit a forehand drive, a backhand drive and how to serve. If there was a ball that constantly beeped/buzzed and could be used to play squash, that would be a game changer as it would give the player a chance to rally alone or with others.”

Nolander says the program has also helped him overcome barriers to accessing sports specifically for adults who are vision impaired.

“For me as an adult with low vision, there wasn’t much out there for physical activity,” he says. “There were no other programs for adults to get out and get physical activity, and stay in shape.”

Kathie Paterson, chair of the board for the Canadian Inclusivity Squash Program, says that Hart also works tirelessly to break down additional barriers participants face to playing the sport — whether it’s going to local Ys to see if the program can use their facilities because of participants’ transportation challenges, or asking the Town of Conception Bay South to waive court fees for non-residents who may need to pay for transportation to get there.

The latest CPRA funding, she says, has been “very beneficial” and has allowed the program to continue its important work removing barriers to sport for people with disabilities — and at the same time, raising awareness of its services.

“The website is going to be a big deal for us,” Paterson says. “The website and the newspaper ads will really give us a bit more of a presence.” 🍁