



REACHING EACH AND EVERY ONE

Success Story

Paddles Up! participants from FunSports on their first paddle of the season on Lake Banook, before trying the lanes and rally races.

Banook Canoe Club brings Paddles Up! program to youth and families

ZOE WILLIAMS LOVES EVERYTHING ABOUT paddling: the coaches, making new friends, and the amazing memories made on the water.

“I love it so much because I basically do it like every day now,” says the Nova Scotia youth, who paddled with the Banook Canoe Club’s Paddles Up! on Lake Banook program. “I love my coaches. They’re literally amazing. It makes me happy.”

Zoe was just one of many youth, as well as newcomers and their families, who were able to experience the joy of paddling during the summer of 2023, 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.



BANOOK CANOE CLUB,
NOVA SCOTIA

Canada

This project is funded by
the Government of Canada



BCC's Coach Karen Ferneau and members of the Canada Sprint Canoe National Team help Paddles Up! participants get ready to safely get on the water.



BCC Coaches Karen Ferneau and Kevin McIntyre with Paddles Up! participants from the YWCA of Halifax.

Kasia Tota, a board member for the Banook Canoe Club, says the Paddles Up! on Lake Banook program was created for newcomers to Canada, as well as children and youth aged 12-16 years old from underrepresented groups, to introduce them to the sport of paddling.

She says it started as a pilot project in 2022 with some partner organizations, like FunSports and the East Dartmouth Boys and Girls Club, where participants could come for two-hour paddling sessions once a week at the club – providing them with coaches and boats to help them learn to paddle. These participants even had the opportunity to meet athletes on the national team and hear their stories.

“It was really just an introduction to the sport, because many of the kids never had a chance to try paddling,” Tota explains.

In 2023, Banook Canoe Club received funding from the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association's Reaching Each and Every One: A Community Sport Intervention program, which allowed them to expand Paddles Up! to more groups, such as the YWCA, local organization FUNSports and Public Safety Canada's Youth Advocate Program, as well as newcomers and their families from Ukraine and Syria. Financial barriers are just one of many challenges that participants often face when accessing sport to sport, and the organization was able to offer the program to them free of charge.

Tota says the organization wanted to reach families in the community who may want to join, but may not be able to join because of the fees or other barriers such as transportation. She adds that these partnerships with various organizations helped the Banook Canoe Club reach more equity-deserving groups, such as the African Nova Scotian community, newcomers, and youth who are vulnerable to gang influence and involvement.

“We really believe in partnerships, and making these connections expanded the program,” Tota says. “Initially, we were focused on engaging youth, but in some cases we can see the importance of including the entire family because we believe paddling helps you stay healthy for life. And, it helps bring communities together when the parents are paddling and the kids are also paddling.”

Additionally, the funding helped the canoe club purchase new equipment, such as spin bikes to help participants train, as well as a para boat for para-athletes – which Tota says was very helpful for the club because it can also be used by beginners.

“We are a nonprofit organization and we run almost entirely by volunteers. We get some summer grants for staff, but we really need

to cover our costs. So, this support has definitely helped us be more inclusive and creative in our outreach,” she says.

Crystal Lane, whose daughter Alessia participated in the program, says that the opportunity helped her daughter try paddling without having to worry about registration costs.

She adds that as a parent, it was great to see youth like her daughter connecting with each other outdoors through sport and recreation.

“I like that the kids stayed active. They weren't on their social media or on their phones,” she says. “It gave them exercise, and allowed them to meet new people and learn a new sport. For her, meeting the athletes was also really cool – it's not really an opportunity that a lot of kids would have the chance to do.”

Alessia agrees that the opportunity was an amazing experience, and she would recommend it to others.

“If anybody who's on the fence about paddling because they're too scared, or don't think they'll have enough balance to stay up and not fall in the water, they need to know they should definitely try it and definitely do it with this program,” she says. “It was really fun and really enjoyable. We made a lot of memories and a lot of friends.”

Iryna Kotlinska, who is a newcomer from Ukraine, says she also enjoyed the experience because Banook Canoe Club is such a tight-knit group.

“I coached in Ukraine for 16 years, and this is my favourite sport,” says Kotlinska. “I'm very happy coming here because it's like a very big family, and a very friendly family, and there's very nice people here.”

Dave Green, founder of FUNSports – which is a non-profit organization that offers children in Nova Scotia free multi-sport after school programs – says he is pleased to be a longtime partner with the Banook Canoe Club, and was delighted to partner with the organization for its Paddles Up! program.

“It's really been a true partnership over the last couple of years,” Green says. “The support has been unbelievable.”

Jim Johnson, president of the board of the Banook Canoe Club, says when Tota brought the idea to the board it was “literally a five-minute conversation.”

“It was a unanimous vote within 10 seconds,” Johnson says. “Kasia has done an amazing job, and the whole community is behind this program.” 🍁