



2021

GROWING THE GAME

A survey of participant
experiences in adult hockey
and figure skating
development programs

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 1992, approximately 45% of Canadians over the age of 15 regularly participated in sport. By 2010, that figure had dropped to 26%. It's no wonder then that sport organizations talk frequently of the need to "grow the game," an objective that has led to ongoing efforts to make sport more attractive to children and youth. But this emphasis on young people represents a limited view of how sports might grow. Baby boomers and their children now make up 55% of the Canadian population; yet, adults are often overlooked by sports programmers who are looking for new athletes. Many adults want to learn new skills and would take up a new sport if the opportunity were available. The sports sector could benefit from meeting their needs.

This report presents findings from a research project exploring programs available to adults in Canada who want to learn and develop as hockey players and/or figure skaters. Survey results were gathered from 130 athletes over the age of 18 who have participated in adult hockey and/or figure skating development programs. The study also included interviews with 14 coaches who work with adults and some of their insights are included in this report.

The most common reason that participants gave for starting hockey or skating later in life was because the opportunity had not been available to them as children (20%). They said they enjoy learning new skills and want to improve (91%). Many are very dedicated to their sports, as demonstrated by the amount of money and the time they commit to them (44% spend over \$400 per year on instruction). In general, the respondents reported positive experiences with coaches, but they noted that too few coaches are willing to work with adult athletes. They complained that a general lack of adult programming means that adults often have to learn in groups that include people with very different, perhaps incompatible, skill levels. Many survey respondents said groups organized by age, gender, and skill level would be more effective and more enjoyable for them.

We recommend enhanced attention to the needs of adult athletes in rink environments. Programs for adults will bring more people into sport organizations, grow the game, and help build a more sustainable future for both hockey and figure skating in Canada.



INTRODUCTION

For almost 20 years, the Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) framework, produced by the non-profit Sport for Life Society, has governed the design and implementation of sport programming across Canada. The first two versions of this framework skewed heavily to the needs of high performance sport and the production of elite athletes, belying the Sport for Life message. In 2019, the organization updated the framework, releasing "[Long-Term Development in Sport and Physical Activity 3.0](#)," a broader and more inclusive model intended to promote sport and other forms of physical activity as truly life-long pursuits. With the recognition that the word "athlete" had previously been too narrowly defined and exclusive, LTAD 3.0 now describes an athlete as a person of any age "striving to achieve their sporting potential."

While the definition of athlete in the LTAD framework has expanded, the programming available to adults in Canada has not yet caught up. An over emphasis on elite sport means that many Canadian sport organizations are still focused primarily on attracting children and adolescents and tailoring development programs for them. Opportunities for adult athletes to achieve their sporting potential are far and few in between.

In this report we identify and share the views of adult athletes, an underserved demographic with money and time to dedicate to sport, but lacking opportunities to develop their skills. We contend that by addressing the needs of adult athletes, sport organizations could grow their membership base, become more financially sustainable, and, more importantly, increase the contribution they make to the social and physical well-being of Canadians.

In a 2019 study of adult beginner curling programs, Barrick and Mair argue, "little is known about the experiences of new sport participants—especially adults as they try a sport for the first time" (p.1). We would add that little is known about adult athletes who have moved beyond the beginner stage and who want to improve their skills. This report presents the views of athletes in this latter group, focusing on people who took up figure skating and/or hockey as adults and who are now working to reach their athletic potential. Hockey and figure skating have different progression structures and cultures, but the rink can offer a shared space of struggle and pleasure for adults who are too often relegated to the stands as spectators, volunteers, chauffeurs, and facilitators of the sporting lives of children.

We have learned through this survey, and our subsequent interviews with coaches, that adults are desperate to have opportunities to not only learn but to improve – and sometimes become competitive – at sports that were unavailable to them as children for a variety of reasons. In light of Statistics Canada data that shows that girls drop out of sport at higher rates than boys and that adult women participate at lower rates than men, this report amplifies the voices of women. It shows that women can and do return to sport if given the right opportunities. Women are also more likely to seek coaching services at all ages. As nice as the sentiment of "sport for life" sounds, it can only be achieved if programming is available for life and meets the needs of our athletes of all ages.

All the anonymous quotes in this report are from survey participants. We use the term athlete when speaking about their experiences in sport programs. We use the term participant or respondent to refer to those who contributed to our survey results.



SPORT FOR LIFE: WHERE ARE THE ADULTS?

The assumption behind the LTAD model is that by doing "the right things at the right times" kids and adults will be able to develop sport skills that will help them stay active for life. But while the model offers an ideal description of stages for children, it inadvertently suggests that there can be a "wrong" time to pick up a sport.



Awareness and first involvement (Pre-stage engagement):

Individuals must first be aware and afforded the opportunity to learn and try a wide range of sport and physical activities. It is critical they have a positive first experience.



Active Start (0-6 years):

The first stage focuses on locomotor development, object manipulation and a wide range of movements on land, in water, in the air and on ice/ snow.



FUNDamentals (Boys approximately 6-9 and girls 6-8):

Focus on fundamental movement skills, with an overall emphasis on participation and having fun. Begin to develop agility, balance, coordination and speed.



Learn to Train (Boys approximately 9 and girls approximately 8 to onset of adolescent growth spurt):

Begin to focus on skill acquisition in a wide range of sports and activities on land, in water, in the air and on ice/ snow.



Train to Train (11-15 females and 12-16 males):

Critical stage in development for high performance with an emphasis on aerobic and strength fitness development.



Train to Compete (beyond end of adolescent growth spurt):

This stage focuses on sport specialization, physical conditioning, technical/tactical preparation to maximize development.



Train to Win (around the age of optimum performance in the sport):

Focus on the podium performances at the highest level of competition (Olympics, Paralympics and World Championships, etc.)



Active for Life (following the first 3 stages):

Having built the foundation in the first three stages, individuals will have the basics to progress to playing sport and physical activities for their enjoyment, satisfaction or for health benefits throughout their life span.



LONG-TERM ATHLETE DEVELOPMENT

Sport for Life's Long Term Athlete Development model is intended to prepare young people for a life in sport. It aims to create a culture of lifelong sport and physical activity participation by emphasizing the value of sport for overall health and well-being, while identifying the pathway through which athletes can develop their skills and achieve their goals.

The three main goals of the LTAD are to:

1. Support the development of physical literacy
2. Strive for excellence
3. Empower people to be active for life

Sport Canada has set a mandate that all Canadian amateur sport organizations must revise their programming to reflect the LTAD model and implement its philosophies. The following are Hockey Canada and Skate Canada's adaptations of the LTAD model. What is most concerning is how early people are expected to start their sports and how quickly the competition window presumably closes.

Hockey Canada 9-stage LTAD model:

1. Discovery (Females & Males 0-4)
2. Fundamentals 1 (Females & Males 5-6)
3. Fundamentals 2 (Females & Males 7-8)
4. Learn To Play (Females 8-9; Males 9-10)
5. Learn To Train (Females 10-11; Males 11-12)
6. Train To Train (Females 11-15; Males 12-16)
7. Train To Compete (Females 16-18; Males 16-17)
8. Train To Win (Females 18-22; Males 18-20)
9. Excel (Females 22+; Males 21+)

Skate Canada 6-stage LTAD Model:

1. Learn to Skate (Females 3-8; Males 3-9)
2. Learn to Train (Females 7-11; Males 8-12)
3. Learn to Compete (Females 9-13; Males 10-14)
4. Train to Compete (Females 10-16; Males 11-17)
5. Learn/Live to Win (Females 13-19; Males 14-21+)
6. Active for Life (any age)

ABOUT OUR SURVEY

- 130 survey participants
- 27 online questions, offered in English and French
- Completed on a voluntary basis



103 (79%)
hockey players



26 (20%) figure
skaters



1 (0.77%) both
hockey and figure
skaters

GENDER IDENTITY

(117 participants completed this question)

- 97 (82%) Women
- 15 (13%) Men
- 5 (5%) Non-Binary

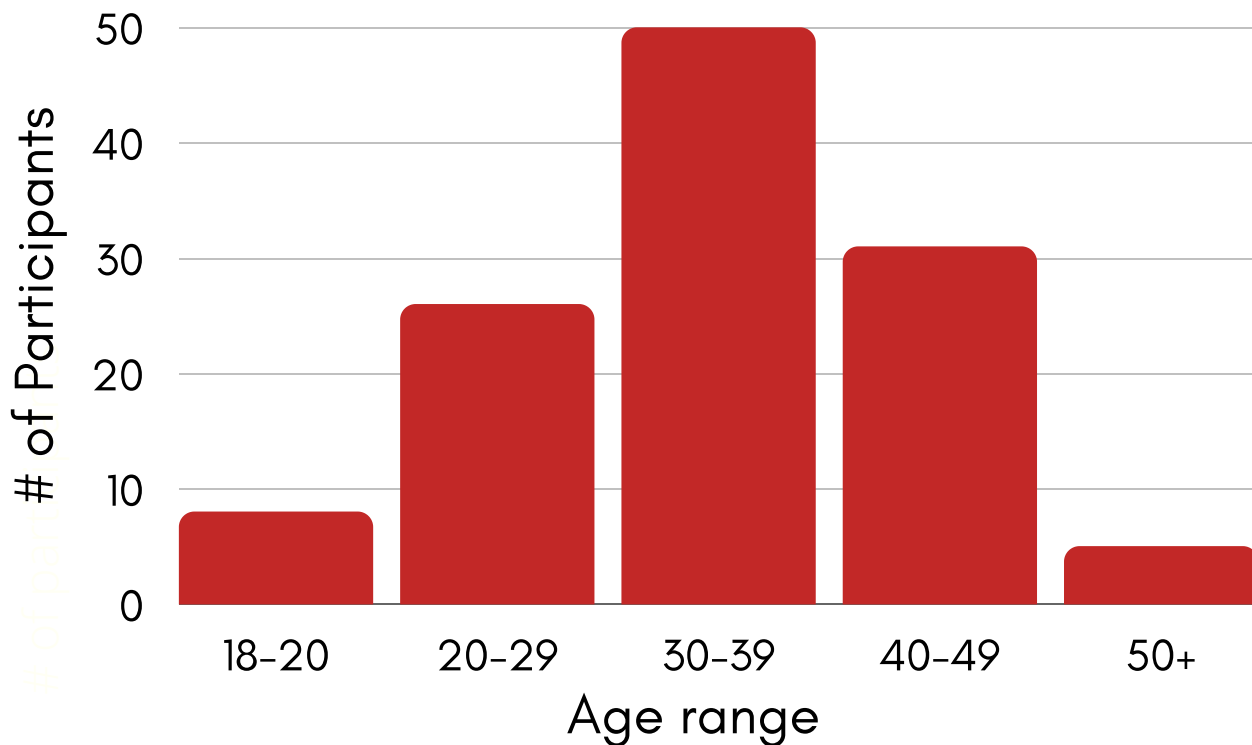
RACIAL IDENTITY

(89 participants completed this question)

- 75 (84%) White
- 9 (10%) Asian
- 2 (2%) Indigenous
- 1 (1%) Black
- 1 (1%) Latinx*
- 1 (1%) Bi-racial

*Gender inclusive term

AGE OF PARTICIPANTS WHEN THEY FIRST JOINED ADULT PROGRAMS



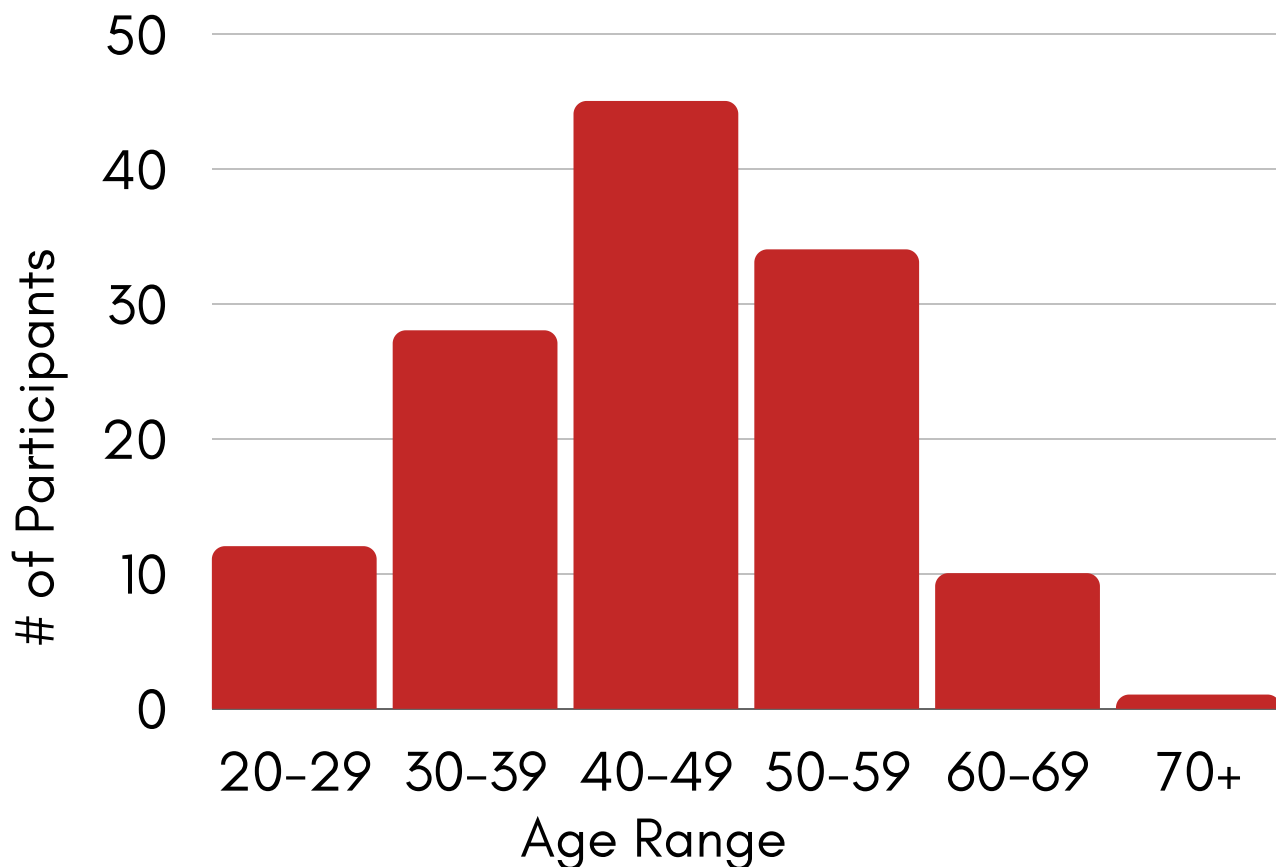
“

You're never too old to acquire new skills or develop as an athlete. There is a big market for the adult recreational athlete. While there are many types of fitness classes available, there isn't a lot [of sport programming] to select from for the mature adult.

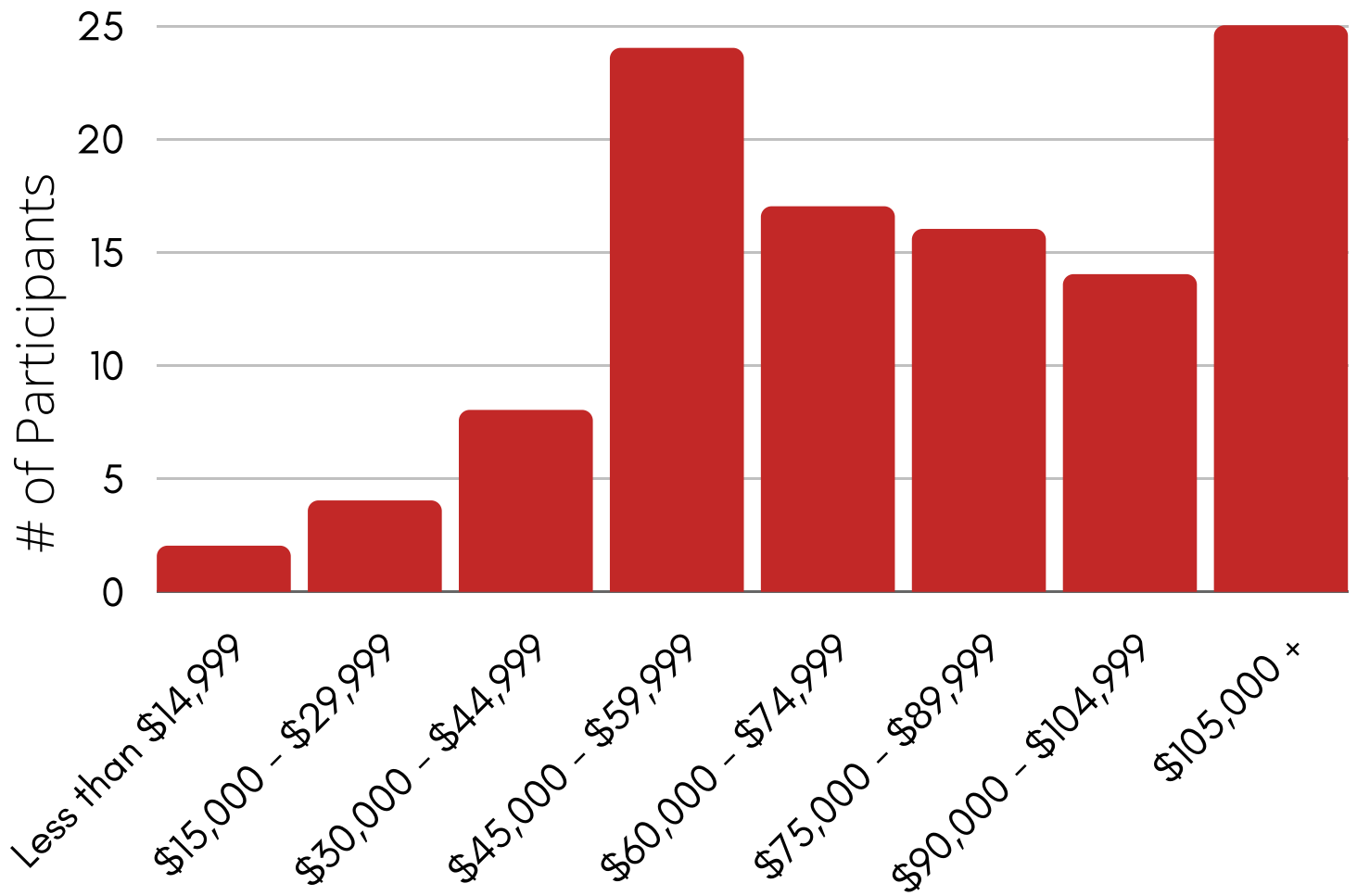
”

“
Learning a new sport after 40 is challenging and liberating.
”

AGE OF PARTICIPANTS AT SURVEY COMPLETION



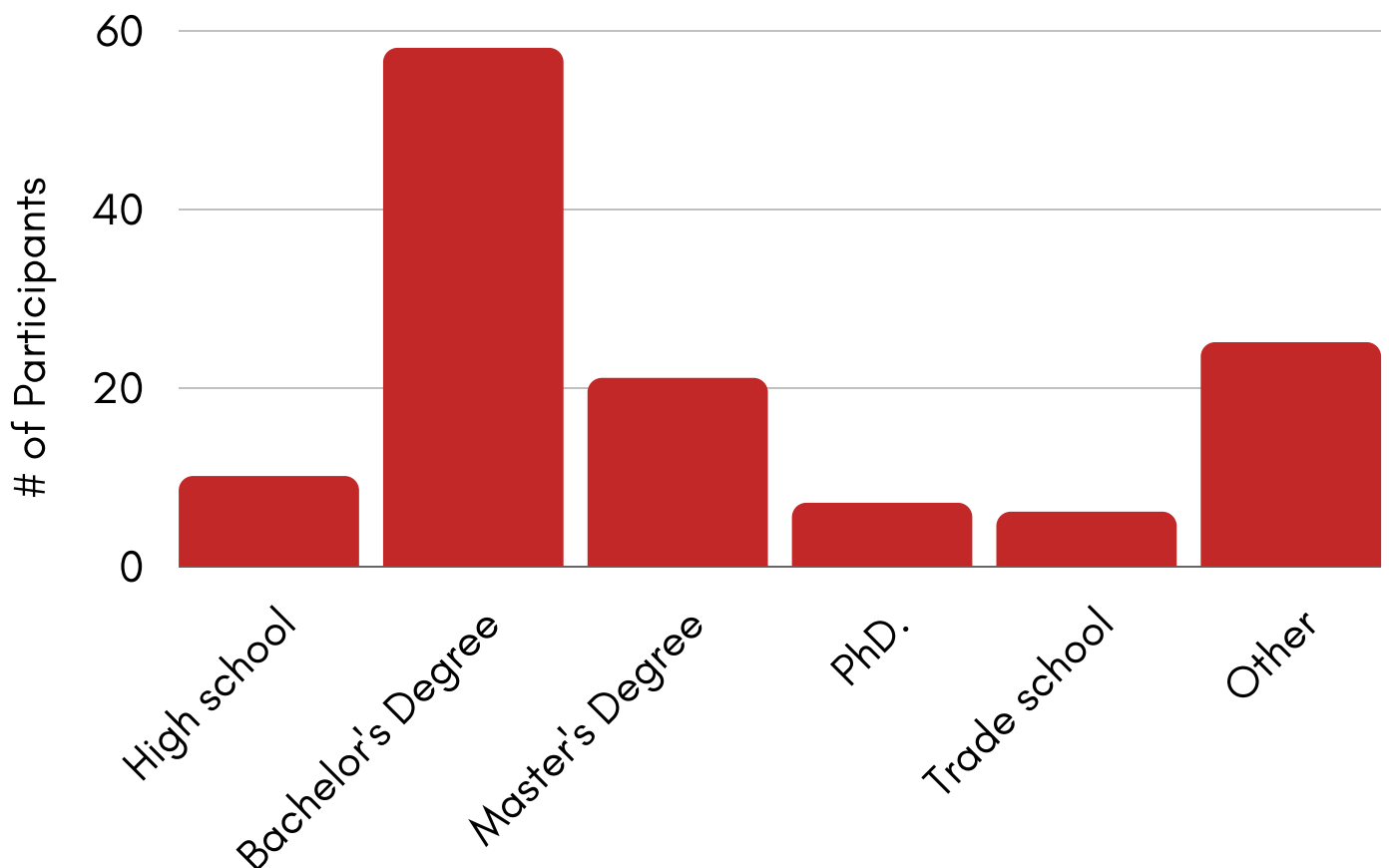
APPROXIMATE ANNUAL INCOME



“
I had always wanted to learn to play, and now had the time and money to learn, and moved to a town that had a women's learn-to-play program that was near my house and fit my schedule.
”

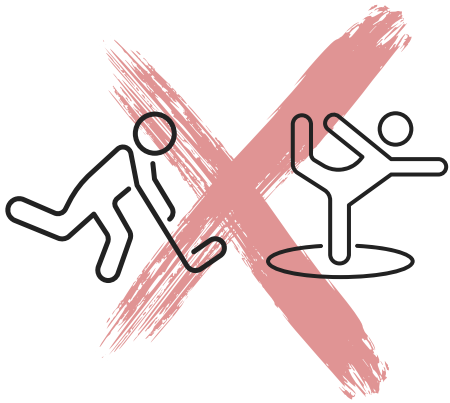
I enjoyed being able to play the sport I had watched my son play for so long. I was proud to say I was learning to play and enjoyed the game.

HIGHEST DEGREE OR LEVEL OF EDUCATION



PARTICIPANT MOTIVATION

What prompted participants' initial involvement?



Limited opportunities/access to hockey and figure skating as youth.

Financially able to participate as an adult.



Moved to Canada and wanted to try an ice-sport.

Already at the rink supporting family members' activities.



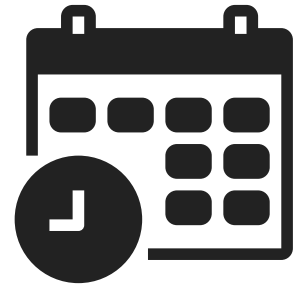
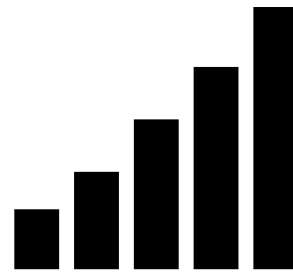
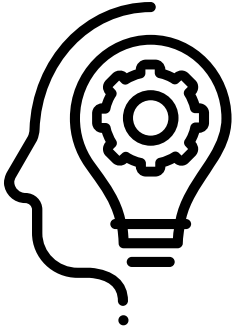
Opportunity to meet new friends and have fun.

Exercise, fitness, or health were not significant reasons for initial involvement.



FACTORS FOR PARTICIPATION

What influenced participants' involvement in their sport?



Participants identified the following factors as important influences on their decisions to participate in adult programming:

- Compatibility of age and/or skill of other participants (87%)
- Cost (72%)
- Level(s) of instruction offered (64%)
- Time commitment (62%)
- Ability to participate with friends/people you already know (55%)
- Experience of the coaches (45%)
- Travel time (35%)
- Gender-specific program vs. co-ed (29%)
- Access to transportation/public transit (11%)
- Gender of the coach(es) (10%)
- Access to child care (8%)

ATTRACTION TO PROGRAMS

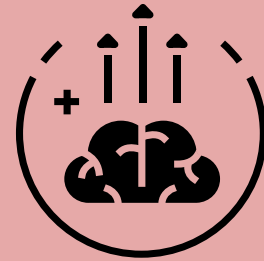
What drew participants to these programs?



Convenience

Time and location of programming have a significant impact on participation:

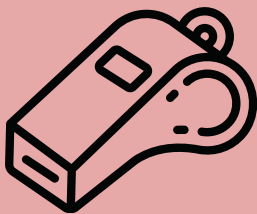
- Is someone already at the rink dropping off friends or family members?
- Is the rink near work or home?



Learn & Improve

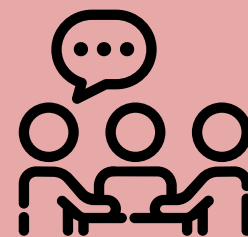
Adult hockey players desired opportunities to learn and practice game skills outside of organized games:

- Need for "Stick n' Puck" or "Ticket Ice" times



Coaches and Programs

Many coaches came highly recommended by friends. Some athletes were drawn to programs for women, taught by women, and/or to programs specifically geared towards beginners.

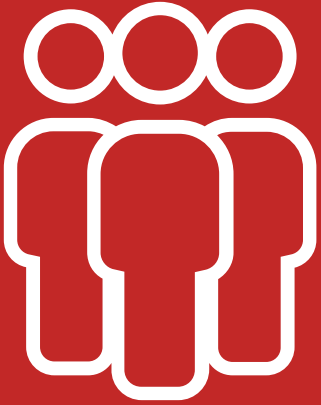


Social Factors

Participants appreciated the opportunity to meet new people and socialize with friends. Sport programs allow adults to take a break from 'real life' and interact with new and interesting people.

GROUP COMPOSITION:

Gender-specific vs. Co-ed programs?



The majority of our participants identify as womxn*(82%), and they voiced a strong preference for womxn-only learning environments, instead of co-ed programming. They felt that gender-specific programming:

- fostered a better environment for asking questions
- enabled participants to feel more confident and safe on the ice
- created more enjoyable game situations

*We use womxn to include non-binary and trans women.

“

[I] disliked co-ed powerskating because the male students liked to skate fast but without control and they didn't pay attention to how to do the drills correctly. And they kept knocking down people as they ran into them because they couldn't stop.

”

“

Classes were co-ed which for the most part was ok but sometimes it was a challenge if I was the only female in a class.

”

“

Male skaters assumed they were faster/stronger/better than the women.

”

CLASS SIZE & SKILL LEVEL:

What did participants say about the organization of their classes/groups?

“There wasn’t anything pleasant or enjoyable about being the only adult in a beginner skating program with 25 small children.”

“Many programs are labeled 'beginners' but are not so. You mostly get people coming back from pregnancy or a long time away from the game looking to get game ready. So real beginners often get left behind as instructors need to move on and they don’t break down exercises properly and expect you already know how to do it.”

Participants prefer to learn:

- in programs with fewer than 20 skaters on the ice
- in smaller groups divided according to skill level
- with people of similar ages when possible
- in programs with a low coach to participant ratio

Due to the limited number of adult-only classes and programs, participants said that they often had to skate with people much younger than them, or sometimes even with teenagers or children. Some participants quit programs due to the negative comments they received from younger skaters or hockey players.

COACHES

What did participants say about their coaches?

Coaches and instructors play a very important role in the learning experience of the athletes. Participants consistently listed patience as the key characteristic needed by someone coaching adults.



Coaching techniques that were appreciated by athletes include:

- demonstrating appropriate progressions
- re-arranging drills to match the needs of participants
- asking what participants want to work on
- organizing stations and running efficient drills that don't keep players waiting in lines

“

It's important to be in a learning environment where the coaches are passionate about what they do and put the care into helping the students get the most out of their experience regardless of the level of play.

”

“

The tone of the coach really makes the biggest difference.

”

“

It always seemed like there was nowhere [the coach] would rather be in the world than helping grown ups of all shapes, sizes and skill level learn to play.

”

WHAT DO PARTICIPANTS WANT COACHES TO KNOW?

“

I [am] all in when I want to learn something - I appreciated that the coaches I had made the experience worthwhile, met me where I was at, and didn't take anything away from how good I wanted to be considering I was an adult starting a new sport.

”

“

It's important that coaches know we're not trying to make it to the NHL. We have careers and families AND we love to play hockey so we want supportive and constructive coaching to help us have fun and improve our games while [appreciating] we have other competing priorities in life.

”

- Adults attending these programs are motivated and want to learn.
- Adults recognize that they may learn at a slower pace than children and elite athletes, and they expect their coaches to understand this.
- Adults fear falling and getting injured.
- Adults want to be taken seriously, but do not sign up to get yelled at, singled out, or be threatened with consequences.
- Adults with limited free time or who are unable to commit to regular programming prefer one-off workshops and/or drop-in sessions.
- Adults are grateful for coaches who want to work with them.

TRAVEL

How far have participants travelled to receive instruction?



89 athletes (68.5%) have not travelled more than one hour for instruction.



22 athletes (17%) have travelled 1-2 hours by car for instruction.



11 athletes (8.5%) have travelled more than 2 hours by car for instruction.

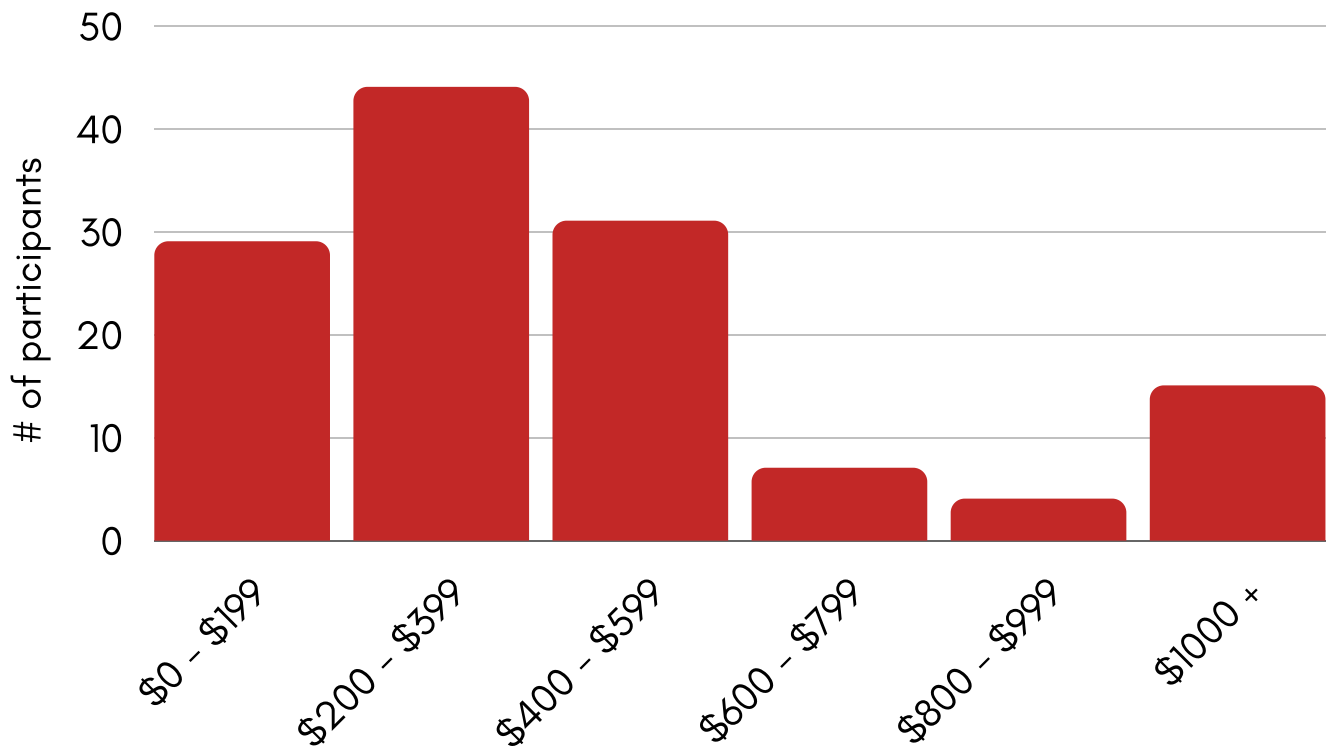


8 athletes (6.22%) have travelled by plane for instruction.

FINANCIAL COMMITMENT

How much do participants spend per year
on instruction?

PARTICIPANT YEARLY SPENDING FOR ON-ICE INSTRUCTION



“
I would pay more and travel further to play in a well-organized, skill-appropriate league. There needs to be more beginner-level leagues to transition into for women that learn to play as an adult.
”

SURVEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Encourage more coaches to work with adults
- Offer more adult programming at a variety of times (e.g. earlier in the day/evening) and commitment levels (e.g. drop-in sessions, short workshops, camps, weekly classes)
- Advertise beyond 'word of mouth'
- Ensure that beginner programs actually meet the needs of beginners
- Create narrower tiers for skill groups
- Offer womxn-only programs, coached by womxn, when possible
- Offer more adult opportunities to work on individualized skills in figure skating classes

“

I wish there were more opportunities. It's rare to find programs geared for adults, especially programs for women.

”

“

I love that there are more opportunities for adult learning. However [I'm] still having trouble finding beginner friendly leagues.

”



PARTICIPANT THOUGHTS

- "It would be nice to see more skating clubs offer adult programming that [is] targeted at those who want to learn, rather than those who have skated their entire lives."
- "It can be very daunting for a beginner skater to look for classes. Especially ones who are not strong in skating, there are so many classes and lessons available, and on paper, they all sound great. But it's difficult to decide when they don't specify level of skill."
- "Every adult has [their] own experiences and goals. Coaches for adult skaters should ask about goals of their adult athletes so the coach can prepare and coach properly."
- "I think it is important for coaches to realize that adults very often learn at a slower pace than kids because of the fear factor and physical limitations."
- "Lack of childcare really gets in the way of women participating. I learned to skate because I could take lessons when my kid did... but, if [programs] offered adult skills classes and/or games at the same time as kids played, many more women would be able to play, but ice time for women is still not a priority and no one seems to think to do this."



A FEW WORDS FROM OUR COACHES

"In terms of making hockey more inclusive and diversifying hockey in general, you have to go beyond the market that already exists...The adult market is such a fun one to be in. [Adults] are responsible for themselves. They want to be there and they want to get better. I think that's something that you'll never really get anywhere else." ~ Kristen Richards, Nine Hockey

"You have to coach for the right reasons. I get just as much out of coaching recreational women, and them improving, as [I] do with national team girls...There is a market for it. And, at the end of the week you get to go for beers together!"
~ Kori Cheveri, Assistant Coach - Ryerson Rams & Assistant Coach - Canadian National Women's Team

"[Adults] mostly want to get back into skating just to brush up on their old skills that they used to have when they were kids. Some just want to get active. Others want to re-live their childhood...I'm getting more [direct messages] from adults rather than kids."
~ Acacia Hill, Brampton Hill Skating Academy

"This was kind of an accidental business choice that ended up making a situation [where] a parent could bring their child, put them on the ice, and then go out themselves. As parents would sit in the room, they started to realize that this is what we should be doing. We shouldn't be sitting here. So, my adult program just started to grow." ~ Brad Hopkins, Central Toronto Skating Club



RECOMMENDATIONS FROM ADULT COACHES

Want to start coaching adults? Here are some tips from the coaches we interviewed:

- **Beginner classes should be for beginners!** There will be some adults who return to skating or hockey, but true beginners need to learn about everything from the physical skills, to equipment, to terminology. Never assume they know what you are talking about.
- **Skills followed by games:** Some of the most successful beginner hockey programs schedule one hour of skills lessons immediately followed by one hour of game play with coaches, or they outline "x" number of lessons and "y" number of games as part of the overall structure.
- **Scheduling:** Many parents are at the rink with their children, and one way to get them on the ice is to offer adult sessions while they are already there. Depending on skill level, these adults sessions could be on a separate sheet of ice or segregated on the same sheet of ice. Avoid late ice times, because coaches report more injuries later in the evening.
- **Don't forget the goalies!** For hockey programming, include goaltenders in skills sessions where possible because it makes it more fun for the participants. This also means that adult goaltending lessons/clinics need to be offered with dedicated goaltending coaches.
- **Summer isn't good enough:** Adult hockey programs peak during the summer months, because coaches are often committed to teams during the rest of the year. There needs to be more consistent programming throughout the year. More consistent programming also offers more consistent employment for coaches.
- **Ask for Feedback:** Offer anonymous evaluation surveys at the end of programs.



ADULT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

HD (hockey development)

PS (power skating)

FS (figure skating)

PROGRAM NAME	LOCATION	PROGRAMMING TYPE
<u>Canadian Hockey Enterprises</u>	Whistler, BC	HD
<u>Canlan Langley</u>	Langley, BC	PS, HD
<u>Canlan North Vancouver</u>	North Vancouver, BC	PS, HD
<u>Discover Hockey</u>	Richmond, BC	HD
<u>Gold in the Net</u>	Vancouver, BC	HD
<u>LS Hockey Camp for Women</u>	Whistler, BC	HD
<u>North Shore Winter Club</u>	North Vancouver, BC	HD
<u>Scotia Barn</u>	Burnaby, BC	PS, HD
<u>UBC Adult Hockey & Skating</u>	Vancouver, BC	HD
<u>Viet Goaltending</u>	Vancouver, BC	HD
<u>Discover Hockey</u>	Edmonton; Calgary, AB	HD
<u>NAIT Summer Hockey Camp</u>	Edmonton, AB	HD

ADULT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

HD (hockey development)

PS (power skating)

FS (figure skating)

PROGRAM NAME	LOCATION	PROGRAMMING TYPE
<u>University of Alberta Female Hockey Program</u>	Edmonton, AB	HD
<u>Belleville Bulls Hockey Adult Camp</u>	Belleville, ON	HD
<u>Bill Bolton Arena Adult Hockey Skills</u>	Toronto, ON	HD
<u>Brooke Beazer Adult Hockey</u>	Kingston, ON	HD
<u>Canlan York University</u>	Toronto, ON	HD
<u>Centre Ice</u>	Burlington, ON	HD
<u>East Coast Edge</u>	Ottawa, ON	HD
<u>Fort Henry Skating Club</u>	Kingston, ON	FS
<u>Front Line Hockey School</u>	Mississauga, ON	HD
<u>GHL Hockey Academy</u>	Hamilton, ON	HD
<u>Gloucester Skating Club</u>	Ottawa, ON	FS
<u>Hamilton Hawks – Women's Fundamentals</u>	Hamilton, ON	HD

ADULT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

HD (hockey development)

PS (power skating)

FS (figure skating)

PROGRAM NAME	LOCATION	PROGRAMMING TYPE
<u>Harrigan Hockey</u>	Burlington, ON	HD
<u>Hockey Extreme</u>	Toronto, ON	PS, HD
<u>Hockey Toronto</u>	Toronto, ON	PS, HD
<u>Huntsville Skating Club</u>	Huntsville, ON	FS
<u>Inside Edge Powerskating</u>	Napanee, ON	PS
<u>Kathy Plug Power Skate</u>	St. Catharines, ON	PS
<u>Kori Cheverie Summer Sizzle Adult Camp</u>	Toronto, ON	HD
<u>London Skating Club</u>	London, ON	FS
<u>Moss Park Adult Hockey</u>	Toronto, ON	HD
<u>Nepean Skating Club</u>	Ottawa, ON	FS
<u>North Dorchester Skating Club</u>	Ottawa, ON	FS
<u>Nine Hockey</u>	Oakville, ON	HD

ADULT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

HD (hockey development)

PS (power skating)

FS (figure skating)

PROGRAM NAME	LOCATION	PROGRAMMING TYPE
<u>Pro Hockey Life - Women's Clinic</u>	Ancaster, ON	HD
<u>Rideau Skating Club</u>	Ottawa, ON	FS
<u>Russell Hockey</u>	Toronto, ON	HD
<u>Sister Sports</u>	Toronto, ON	HD
<u>Skate Oakville</u>	Oakville, ON	FS
<u>Sparkles Hockey Academy</u>	Greater Toronto Area	HD
Stephanie Boyd Female Hockey School	Gravenhurst, ON	HD
<u>Stoke Hockey Adult Camp</u>	Hamilton; Cambridge, ON	HD
<u>Ted Reeve Skating and Hockey School</u>	Toronto, ON	HD
<u>Thamesford Skating Club</u>	Thamesford, ON	FS
<u>The Zone Training</u>	Guelph, ON	PS, HD
<u>Toronto Leaside Senior Program</u>	Toronto, ON	HD

ADULT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

HD (hockey development)

PS (power skating)

FS (figure skating)

PROGRAM NAME	LOCATION	PROGRAMMING TYPE
<u>True North Hockey Canada</u>	Brampton, ON	HD
<u>Asticou Figure Skating Club</u>	Gatineau, QC	FS
<u>Lakeshore Skating Club</u>	Point Claire, QC	FS
<u>Masham Skating Club</u>	Masham, QC	FS
<u>Ouellette Poulin Hockey</u>	Montreal, QC	HD
<u>Patinage Adulte</u>	St-Hubert, QC	FS
<u>Patinage de Puissance MG</u>	Longueuil, QC	FS, PS
<u>The Montreal Silver Blades</u>	Montreal, QC	FS
<u>Dust Off the Rust Camp</u>	Fredericton, NB	HD



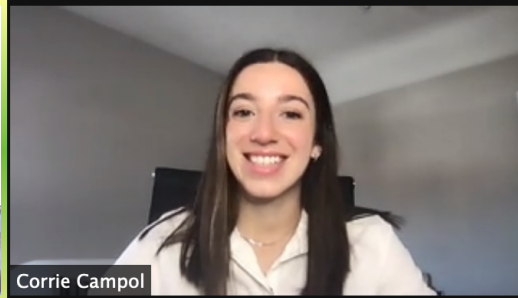
MEET OUR RESEARCH TEAM



Courtney Szto



Madison Danford



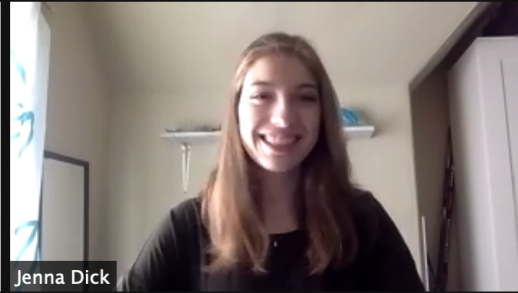
Corrie Campol



Sorsha A



Erin Dzongowski



Jenna Dick



Affaan Mahmud



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