

Equity, Diversity, Inclusion & Accessibility Highlights

Highlighting: Yarmouth Recreation's "She Got Game" Program"

"By eliminating financial barriers, we ensure that all girls, regardless of socio-economic background, can participate." - Matthew Smith, She Got Game Organizer

November's EDIA Highlight features Yarmouth Recreation's free "She Got Game" program. This youth, female-only program is tailored specifically for girls ages 11- 14. It empowers young girls by introducing them to various sports in a safe, supportive, and inclusive environment.

Organizer Matthew Smith says offering the program free of charge has helped to encourage a wide variety of participants, "[The] cost can sometimes play a role in leaving girls out of programs such as this. By eliminating financial barriers, we ensure that all girls, regardless of socio-economic background, can participate." Smith says organizers have chosen to include some non-traditional sports in the program, such as cheerleading, disc golf and ringette, and traditional sports such as soccer and volleyball. He says this was intentional, "This variety allows every participant to find a sport that resonates with her interests and abilities."

University-aged, part-time recreation staff lead the sessions. These leaders are peers rather than expert coaches, guiding participants in a stress-free and supportive manner to ensure everyone feels valued and included regardless of skill level. Smith says this was a change made after the program began, "Our original plan involved bringing in coaches to lead the sports. However, we quickly realized that this approach might inadvertently create a competitive atmosphere, which could be intimidating for some participants." The change to university-aged staff fostered a more relaxed, inclusive environment where no one was an expert, and everyone was free to learn and participate without pressure.

Staff completed two training programs through Recreation Nova Scotia's REC Room platform, including the Social and Emotional Learning for Sport and Recreation and the Anti-Racism Training Module. Smith says that these courses helped to ensure that the program environment is not only physically accessible but also emotionally and psychologically safe for all participants.

Accessibility was a key focus of this program, with all necessary sports equipment provided, and the only requirement for participants was comfortable attire and a water bottle. Throughout the program, organizers experienced many girls wanting to continue with a particular sport that the "She Got Game" program introduced to them. Smith says organizers were thrilled to support this interest and connected with local sport clubs and organizations to share registration information with participants. He says they also made local partnerships to help reduce the cost of continuing if this was a barrier, "We collaborated with local organizations such as J-Strong and JumpStart to provide information on funding opportunities for participants interested in continuing their sports journey outside of the program."

Smith has valuable advice for any organizations looking to offer a similar program: focus on recreation, inclusivity is key and leverage community partnerships. Planning for the future is already underway. Smith says organizers are excited about the program's future. "We are hopeful that it will continue to grow. As participants age out of the program, we plan to offer opportunities to become volunteer recreation leaders, furthering their engagement in sports and fostering a sense of leadership and responsibility," Smith says. They are also exploring the possibility of creating a similar program for adult women, recognizing the importance of providing opportunities for women of all ages to engage in physical activity in a supportive and inclusive environment.