

Engaging Newcomers in Physical Activity: Podcast

[00:00:01.21] Flip Livingstone: Hello everyone and welcome to a conversation on engaging newcomers to Canada through physical activity, hosted by ParticipACTION and Sport for Life Canada. I'm your cohost Flip Livingstone, ParticipACTION, with my esteemed cohost, Kabir Hosein from Sport for Life Canada, the Senior Operations Manager and Lead for Newcomer Engagement. Thanks for joining us Kabir.

[00:00:27.01] Kabir Hosein: Oh, thank you. And thank you to the ParticipACTION team for hosting such a meaningful forum.

[00:00:33.19] Flip Livingstone: We're very much excited to be a part of it. And hopefully, this is just the tip of the iceberg for some amazing content to really help people get the most out of living an active lifestyle. Today, we'll be looking at some research, some resources, some case studies, and also, talking to a guest or two, to really help newcomers to Canada get the most out of active living. Our first guest from the PEI Association for Newcomers to Canada is Nancy Clement. Nancy, thank you for joining us today.

[00:01:09.18] Nancy Clement: Thank you for having me on Flip and Kabir, that's great.

[00:01:12.28] Kabir Hosein: Pleasure, Nancy.

[00:01:13.13] Flip Livingstone: We really appreciate you taking the time. So, Nancy, why don't you just tell us a little bit about your program, maybe the background, what made it successful and what's it all about?

[00:01:23.23] Nancy Clement: Sure. Well, the main project that I have in mind to talk about is called Women on the Move, and it really grew out of our women's

group activities which already existed, but at that point they were just monthly, and they didn't focus specifically on physical activity. But we'd been getting a lot of requests from the women in our group and in our program to have more physical activity, more like weekly exercise classes, weekly dance classes, things like that. And at that point, we just didn't have the funding to do that, until we came across some funding through Canadian Women & Sport, who were incredibly supportive, not just through the funding, but also just in kind of logistical support and sharing best practices with different projects across the country and so on.

So, at that point basically, we realized that we could expand to once a week, women-only exercise classes. And I think the thing that made it the most successful was really just that we listened very intently to what the women wanted. So, not only which particular activities they liked, which weren't necessarily the ones that we would have just check marked off the top of our list, but moreover, we realized that privacy was a huge concern for a lot of women, for either cultural or religious reasons, or just for personal reasons. So, we made a really concerted effort to try and find venues that we could ensure complete privacy, rather than just, you know, having a room where the women would go and exercise, but there might be men walking by, there might be someone looking in the window, that kind of thing. So, we did a lot of work on just finding the right space and then adapting it, so that it would really ensure privacy for women. And that just gave them the comfort level to come and to be able to, for those who wore hijab, they can choose to leave it on or take it off, they felt comfortable either way, just for those who were just concerned about not being seen in gym clothing and so on, it removed a barrier.

And I guess another barrier that we tried to remove was, and we do this with all our programming, but it's just to try and make all of our advertising very plain language and make the registration simple and sweet, so people don't have to go through a lot of rigmarole to get themselves to the actual class. And we just try to make it as flexible as possible. In one case, for instance, we had a few women with toddlers, and they wanted to exercise, and we were like, "Well, we could do a mums and tots exercise class then." So, we found an instructor who was used to doing that and willing to do it, and it was a much smaller class, but it included the toddlers in the actual exercise, and that made it accessible for women who were at home with young kids.

So, I think those were the main things that really kind of made it successful for us. There've been lots of other programs that other teams in my association have done with newcomers in sport, particularly with youth. I'm not directly

involved in those, but with the youth, I think one of the main things has been just loaning of equipment, so that a family doesn't have to outlay thousands of dollars to get involved in hockey or buy figure skates and then find out after the second time that their child doesn't like figure skating, you know, things like that. So, just having an equipment loan library has been kind of huge for the youth as well.

[00:04:52.09] Kabir Hosein: So, Nancy, for a follow up question to that, what sort of feedback did you get from the women and girls? Do they feel a sense of belonging to your province and to the great country of Canada?

[00:05:05.22] Nancy Clement: Yeah, it has been really good feedback, actually. I mean, the best feedback for us is just that people keep coming to the classes and they keep asking for more. Like we just finish a yoga class and they're like, "Can we do Zumba?", and we finish the Zumba class and they're like, "Hey, I teach salsa", and so on. So, we never ran out of ideas and things to do, the women just kept coming up with the ideas themselves. So, that was probably the best feedback for us. But there were also like, we did swimming at one point, which was incredibly difficult to find a pool that was private enough, but when we did, one woman said, "This is the first time I've been able to swim since I left my home country and I missed it so much." You know, so that was, for us, that was really, yeah, just really made it worthwhile.

[00:05:46.27] Kabir Hosein: Very rewarding.

[00:05:48.00] Nancy Clement: Yeah. And I guess the other thing was just that, through any activities, but I think sports are great for this, is that people develop bonds and friendships. You know, so they did amongst each other and with those of us, the staff who attended, because we'd sometimes just participate in

the class, and the volunteers, some of whom are established Canadians. So, there were like a lot of connections made that went beyond just the exercise class.

[00:06:14.05] Kabir Hosein: Indeed, and the research shows that people return back to your programs because they make friends, they have fun, and they feel safe.

[00:06:24.14] Nancy Clement: Yeah. Absolutely.

[00:06:27.20] Flip Livingstone: I think that's one of the things that we've seen stand out in our research, is it really is that social connection side is so important, obviously, not just getting active, but getting that social connection, those social bonds are obviously so important.

[00:06:42.02] Nancy Clement: Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. And mental health wise, it's just like exercise is great for your physical body, but also just keeping people sunny side up.

[00:06:53.02] Kabir Hosein: Indeed.

[00:06:54.03] Nancy Clement: Really important.

[00:06:54.28] Flip Livingstone: Definitely.

[00:06:55.08] Nancy Clement: Especially in these times, you know, this past year. We did keep our programming going and at the very beginning, we've been extremely fortunate on PEI that we haven't been in a complete lockdown for a lot

of the time, but at the very beginning we were, and we just brought everything online. We actually kind of trained some of our instructors online how to, you know, do Facebook Live and, you know, Zoom and things like that. And so, they would actually bring the classes online and we didn't have the same kind of participation that we would in person, for sure, but we did have some people who just really needed that social connection and they kept coming. And then,

after that, we basically adapted to, we rented a larger space, like a large gym, rather than just the smaller yoga studios that we've been using, and adapted it that way, because we just felt it's a super important program to keep going.

[00:07:46.08] Kabir Hosein: Beautiful. Great. So, transitioning to the next topic of discussion. As a country, what progress have we made in being inclusive of newcomers in sport and recreation programming, Nancy?

[00:08:01.02] Nancy Clement: That's a really good question. I think that our population as a whole, and I think particularly, the owners and managers of sports and exercise facilities have become more understanding, I guess, of the barriers faced by newcomers. And I think, I can only really speak for PEI, because that's where I live and work, but I know we've gone from being a society that was quite homogenous, and newcomers were not a large percentage of our population, and now, they are a much greater percentage, and the population is much more diverse. And I think that the owners and managers of these facilities have realized that they need to really make that extra effort to make sure those barriers are removed or reduced, so that people can easily access places and feel comfortable when they're there.

So, I think it's definitely growing, and I think it's in the interest also of the people owning the facilities. You know, they want the whole population to be able to come. And so, it's in their interest too, to just kind of learn how to make it work. So, I definitely have seen a change over the last sort of 5 to 10 years, I would say, where we live. And I particularly noticed that, I think, the sports associations are much more adaptable for getting kids involved as well. I remember there was a time when, if they didn't sign up in September, they couldn't sign up, period. And we kind of had to say, or, you know, whatever month the sign up was happening

for a given sport, and we had to point out that well, if people arrive in Canada at a certain time, do you really want them to have to wait 10 months before their kids get involved just because they happened to arrive at that time? And I think people have started to recognize that the kids shouldn't be punished for just sort of a random part of their life like that. So, they have become more flexible.

And also, I think just making the registration processes clear, because I think, unfortunately, in a lot of places, we just think, "Oh, well, everyone knows how that works." Everyone knows that, you know, at this time of year, you go here,

and you sign up and this is how you do it. And now, I think that they're realizing, no, it's not self-evident, you have to make it clear, you have to advertise it, you have to advertise it in certain places to attract newcomers and so on. So, yeah, I think there's some progress happening that way. And I think there's an interesting sort of a side synergy that happened that we noticed, was that a lot of non-newcomer women, like established Canadian women, really, really appreciated the additional privacy layers that were there, because some of them, you know, just for various reasons of body image or whatever, were not that comfortable in gyms and exercise classes. And then, when they heard it was women-only, it was completely private and so on, and they experienced that, they were like, "We really enjoy this." So, it can have some interesting spinoffs, I think, just making things more accessible in general.

[00:10:57.08] Kabir Hosein: Oh, beautiful. Thank you. And you spoke about accessibility to facilities, transportation, time commitment, familiarity or unfamiliarity with sports, but do you think there are any financial challenges of newcomers on Prince Edward Island?

[00:11:16.10] Nancy Clement: Definitely newcomers who arrive as refugees. Like for us, we find we have the whole spectrum of people arriving. So, you know, it can be someone arriving with very, very, you know, no financial resources really, to large financial resources. So, in some cases, for instance, we had to choose families to refer to programs for financial support, and "we" meaning the settlement workers, not myself, because I'm on more of the community engagement team, but the settlement workers would know if a family was really

in need, they could access some financial support for their kids to be able to come to sports and so on.

[00:11:53.17] Kabir Hosein: Beautiful.

[00:11:54.14] Nancy Clement: And for adult, like all of the programming that we do ourselves, it's always free. So, that's, yeah, part of the idea of our programming is that it should be completely accessible that way.

[00:12:04.19] Kabir Hosein: Great. Wonderful. So, would you consider the financial assistance and organizational policy and practice, that inclusion is non-negotiable, everyone should have access to opportunities?

[00:12:20.19] Nancy Clement: Yeah. Yeah, that's definitely a principle that we try to operate by. And I guess it's the reason, you know, we come very much from an equity, not an equality kind of lens. Like you know, if a family needs a lot of assistance, that's because they've had a lot of barriers in their life, and another family may not have had those same barriers, and they may need very little assistance. And so, we very much divide up our time much more heavily towards the families that are in higher needs and have experienced more barriers. So, yeah, it's just part of the way that our association deals. But I found, when we would partner with other groups, I found there was a lot of willingness to do that too, for people to say, "Well, how can we make this work for those families as well, as the more financially average families?"

[00:13:06.19] Flip Livingstone: So, Nancy, we found through our research that we know community champions are really important to kind of gaining that trust and making the connections through the newcomer communities. We're curious about what you think in terms of what partnerships might be needed through organizations from the settlement sector and sport and rec center. Do you think that's something that we need to place a little bit more emphasis on maybe moving forward?

[00:13:30.21] Nancy Clement: Yeah, I think those are really, really useful partnerships. I think any sports or rec center that can partner with either a settlement agency, an ethno-cultural group or organization, sometimes there's very specific ones, there may be like women's ethnocultural, you know, for this particular country, depends on where you are, I think those definitely help, both with getting the word out to the newcomer population, because we've kind of already got our channels of communication, and just also testing the waters for like, "Well, we have this program at our gym, but we don't seem to be able to attract any newcomers, do you have any idea why?", you know, that kind of conversation, either our staff, who are fairly diverse staff as well, or our clients,

you know, might be able to sort of help the facilities to figure out what barriers are actually there that might kind of be invisible.

[00:14:26.10] Flip Livingstone: Perfect. Thank you so much. Kabir?

[00:14:28.13] Kabir Hosein: Thank you. So, Nancy, what piece of advice would you give to a leader, a leader of a community program, a leader of a national sporting organization or provincial sporting organization, who just started to develop programming that is more inclusive and welcoming to newcomers to Canada? Based on your experience and your organization's experience, what piece of advice or pieces of advice would you offer?

[00:14:55.18] Nancy Clement: I actually do have pieces of advice, because there's several.

[00:15:00.29] Flip Livingstone: Perfect.

[00:15:01.21] Nancy Clement: You actually just hit on one of them, was partner, you know, partnering, I think that's always a huge one. I think thinking outside of the box, like surprisingly, we have a great cricket league here on PEI, and that's mainly because of the community from India, Pakistan, many, many countries

that play cricket. And badminton, table tennis, those are all popular amongst our clients and they weren't that popular on PEI previously. So, I think thinking outside the box, looking for newcomer leaders who could be coaches, instructors, volunteers, et cetera, because if you have a completely established Canadian staff and volunteer base, it's harder for people to feel that comfort level and belonging. Some cultural inclusion or diversity training for staff is always a great thing, because, you know, we've all got blind spots, we're always working on trying to be more inclusive in our own heads, and so, that's something not to overlook. From our program, I guess the women-only classes and the real attention to privacy was a huge thing. So, that's definitely something to consider. And then, yeah, again, just making the advertising and the registration process as clear and as simple and as in plain language as possible.

And maybe even having a staff member who can be kind of like that buddy or that guide the first time, to kind of introduce people to the space and to, you know, "Here's where the change rooms are, and here's where you come in there, and you know, this person here at the desk can help you out with this thing." So, just making each step of the process as, I guess just not making the assumption that people will just figure it out themselves, because it is completely different in different countries and, you know, the Canadian way isn't the only way, so yeah.

[00:16:48.03] Kabir Hosein: Thank you. And I'm a newcomer, Nancy, I'm a newcomer to Canada coming from the southernmost Caribbean island, which is Trinidad and Tobago. Cricket is one of our main sports in the Caribbean, and I have had a really welcoming experience where cricket is played in Victoria where I am currently situated on the west coast. So, what I would like to add to that, my advice that I would offer to leaders that are getting into this, I wouldn't even call it space, it is such a beautiful opportunity, that we newcomers, we bring our own unique and rich culture. And this comes from centuries of work by all our ancestors. And I would advise that people are open to our ideas, so that there is that diversity. And we want everyone to flourish.

Newcomers, we newcomers, we gain a sense of belonging. And we spoke about that a few minutes ago. And you could achieve this, your organizations can achieve this, by facilitating work in groups comprised of newcomers, so that we can learn from each other. And guess what? That's valuable data and that data would inform your programs. And quality sport programs can provide a sense of

belonging. We spoke about friendship, we spoke about, not only the physical, but mental wellbeing impacts. And if you have youth programming programs, the parents also get a sense of belonging by looking on and becoming volunteers in your program. Because at the end of the day, we, the administrators and leaders of quality sport programs, we want everyone to flourish, and some of those outcomes can actually be high-performance, or we just create really good citizens for Canada.

[00:18:39.04] Flip Livingstone: Okay, Kabir. Well, thank you so much for that. I guess really, I just want to know now, where can people go to learn more information about getting started? What's going on with Sport for Life? Let's hear from you a little bit more.

[00:18:50.11] Kabir Hosein: Yeah, thank you. At the Sport for Life society, we have created a few resources that you would find very useful, such as the Sport for Life for all newcomers to Canada learning resource, and this is a manual that's available on our website. And we have also created specific e-learning. There's an e-learning called Welcome to Canada: Engaging Newcomers in Sport and Physical Activity. And I also highly recommend that you look at our Cultural Awareness Workshop for Youth in Sport, and the Diversity and Inclusion Training for Volunteers. These are three e-learning that are available on our campus via our website. It is interactive, we have been working with a number of organizations across Canada, included in those e-learning are actual feedback from newcomers, administrators of newcomer programming, sharing their experiences. And we don't own this framework. We would like to be completely inclusive and to have all newcomers flourish.

In addition to that, I plea to teachers, coaches, parents, the Canadian communities, to understand the barriers, seek potential solutions, consider those potential opportunities and create action plans on those opportunities. Remember that culture beats strategy any day. Do stay informed with the IRCC, that's the Immigration Refugee and Citizenship Canada, because last October, the government of Canada actually announced that there are intentions, and it has already begun, to target over 400,000 newcomers per year until 2023. And that is just over 1.2 million newcomers coming to Canada. And that's a major opportunity. Because guess what? There's tremendous wisdom that that 1.2 million newcomers to Canada can bring and provide to the sport and recreation

and physical activity space. And this is a major opportunity that I employ all of us to act on and take advantage of.

[00:21:02.19] Flip Livingstone: That's extremely well said, Kabir.

[00:21:05.00] Kabir Hosein: Thank you.

[00:21:05.00] Flip Livingstone: And hopefully, with this, we get the ball rolling and really just offer up all the resources needed to really help all newcomers to Canada really get the most out of living an active lifestyle.

This has been a conversation on doing just that, hosted by ParticipACTION and Sport for Life Canada. Thank you so much to Nancy for joining us, and the PEI Newcomers to Canada association, and to you Kabir, thank you very much. And thanks for listening.