

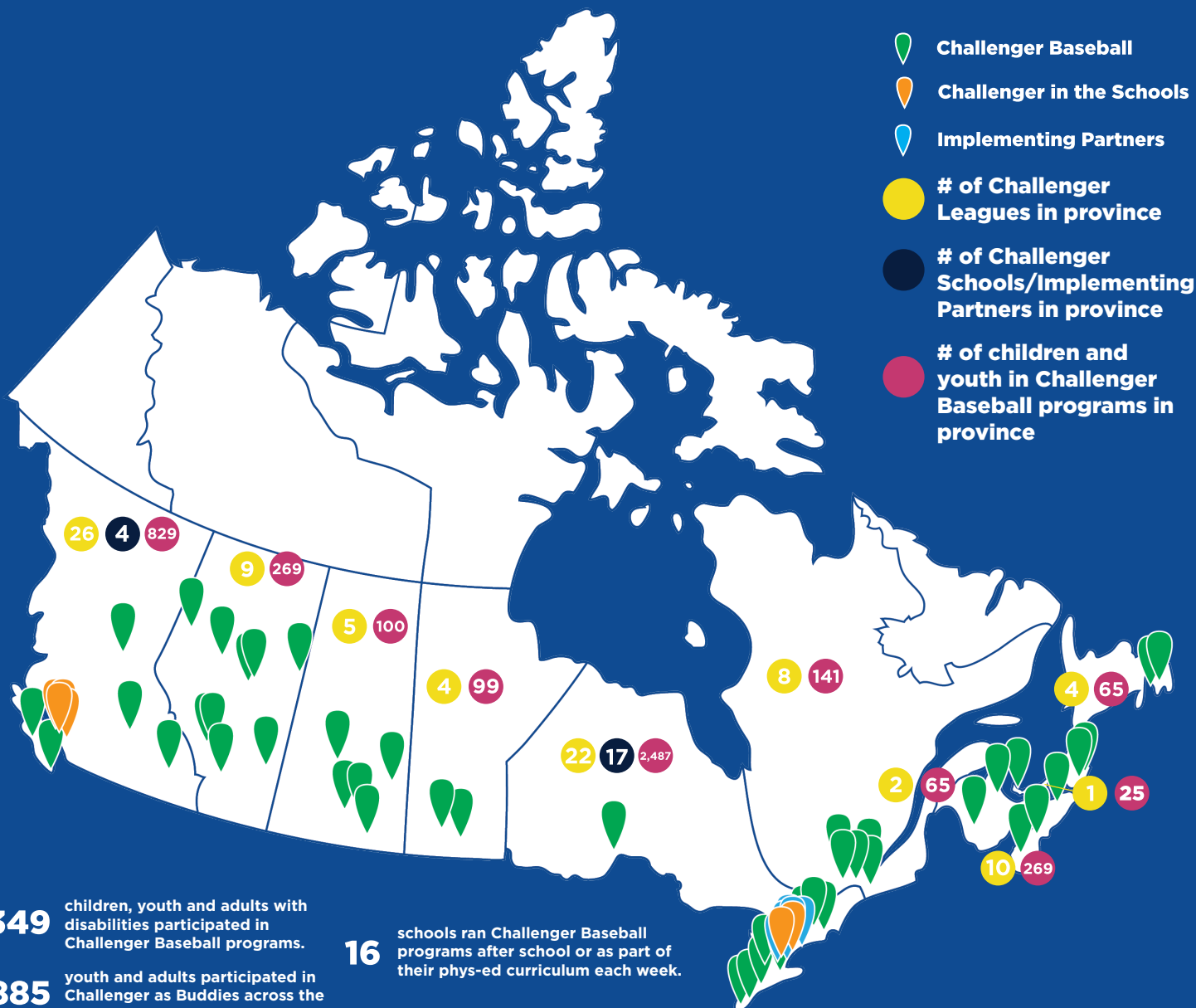
CHALLENGER BASEBALL

PROGRAM REPORT 2018





Program Map



4,349

children, youth and adults with disabilities participated in Challenger Baseball programs.

8,885

youth and adults participated in Challenger as Buddies across the country.

302

teachers, coaches, program leaders and buddies were trained to enhance their skills as Challenger champions.

91

summer Challenger Leagues ran weekly practices and games.

16

schools ran Challenger Baseball programs after school or as part of their phys-ed curriculum each week.

5

organizations integrated Challenger Baseball practices and games into their summer camp and/or after school programs each week.

7

Challenger Jamborees were hosted across the country.

In 2018, 4,349 children, youth and adults living with physical and/or cognitive disabilities joined summer leagues, school-based programs and camps as **Challenger Baseball** athletes. Learn more about the incredible athletes, buddies, coaches, teachers, program leaders and organizations involved in **Challenger Baseball** and the impact this grassroots program is having across Canada in this report.

What is Challenger Baseball?

Challenger Baseball is an adaptive baseball program specifically designed to empower children, youth and adults living with physical and/or cognitive disabilities. The program is designed to teach its athletes the core life skills inherent to baseball, including: teamwork, communication, determination, resiliency, inclusion, support and courage. **Challenger Baseball** ensures every athlete has the opportunity to play in a fun and safe environment where they learn to become more independent, build confidence and self-esteem, improve their communication skills, and set and achieve their own personal goals.

Program Sites

Challenger Baseball

British Columbia

Abbotsford Angels Challenger League, BC
Burnaby Challenger League, BC
Cloverdale Challenger League, BC
Cranbrook Challenger League, BC
Gordon Head Challenger League, BC
Hampton Little League, BC
Highlands Little League, BC
Kamloops Challenger League, BC
Langley Little League, BC
Layritz Challenger League, BC
Little Mountain Little League, BC
Mission Challenger League, BC
Mount Seymour Little League, BC
North Delta Challenger League, BC
North Langley Challenger League, BC
Peninsula Challenger League, BC
Prince George Adult Challenger League, BC
Prince George Challenger League, BC
Ridge Meadows Challenger League, BC
Sechelt Challenger League, BC
Tri-City Challenger League, BC
Trout Lake Little League, BC
Tsawwassen/South Delta Challenger League, BC
Victoria National Challenger League, BC
White Rock/South Surrey Little League, BC

Alberta

Cochrane Little League, AB
Cold Lake Challenger League, AB
Grande Prairie Challenger League, AB
LL Alberta District 3 Challenger League, AB
Medicine Hat Little League, AB
Parkland Challenger League, AB
Sherwood Park Challenger League, AB
St Albert Challenger League, AB
Whitecourt Challenger League, AB

Saskatchewan

Moose Jaw Little League, SK
North Regina Little League, SK
Saskatoon Riversdale Kiwanis Little League, SK
Weyburn Challenger League, SK
Yorkton Challenger Baseball, SK

Manitoba

Carberry Challenger League, MB
North Winnipeg Challenger League, MB
St. James Assiniboia Challenger League, MB
Winnipeg South Challenger League, MB

Ontario

Brampton Challenger League, ON
Buddy League Challenger Baseball (Cambridge), ON
Burlington Challenger League, ON
Caledon Challenger League, ON
Chatham Challenger League, ON
Durham Region Challenger League, ON
East Nepean Little League, ON
Etobicoke Challenger League, ON
Hamilton Challenger League, ON
Hespeler Challenger League, ON
Ivy Challenger League, ON
Kanata Little League, ON
London Challenger League, ON
North York Challenger League, ON
Oakville Little League, ON
Ontario District 6 Challenger League, ON
Peterborough Challenger League, ON
Pickering Challenger League, ON
Port Arthur National Little League (Thunder Bay), ON
Quinte Challenger League, ON
Windsor West Little League, ON

Québec

A.B.J.H. de Laval Challenger League, QC
Ancienne-Lorette/Val-Bélair Challenger League, QC
Brossard Challenger League, QC
Challenger Laval-Nord, QC
Challenger Mauricie (Trois-Rivières), QC
Des Laurentides Challenger League, QC
Diamond Baseball Little League, QC
Drummondville Challenger League, QC
Estrie Challenger League, QC
Grandby Challenger League, QC

New Brunswick

Dieppe Challenger League, NB
Fredericton Challenger League, NB

Nova Scotia

Annapolis Valley Challenger League, NS
Antigonish Challenger League, NS
Corridor Challenger League (East Hants), NS
Glace Bay Little League, NS
Hammonds Plains Challenger League, NS
Inverness/Richmond Challenger League, NS
Pictou County Challenger League, NS
Sydney Mines & District Little League, NS
Truro Challenger League, NS

Newfoundland and Labrador

Conception Bay South Challenger League, NFLD
Mount Pearl Challenger League, NFLD
Paradise Challenger League, NFLD
St. John's Challenger League, NFLD

Prince Edward Island

Stratford Challenger League, PEI
Summerside Challenger League, PEI

Challenger in the Schools

Ontario

Bloorview School Authority, ON
Central Etobicoke High School, ON
Drewry Secondary School, ON
Eastdale Collegiate Institute, ON
Heydon Park Secondary School, ON
Maplewood High School, ON
Newtonbrook Secondary School, ON
Oakdale Park Middle School, ON
Oodenawi Public School, ON
Sir William Osler High School, ON
St. Dominic Catholic Secondary School, ON
Winston Churchill Collegiate, ON

British Columbia

Bayridge Elementary, BC
Creekside Elementary, BC
Mary Jane Shannon Elementary, BC
Old Yale Road Elementary, BC

Implementing Partners

Ontario

Abilities Centre, ON
Camp Awakening, ON
Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital, ON
Silent Voice Canada, ON
rEcess, ON

How Challenger Baseball Works



Jays Care staff (with guidance from the Challenger Baseball Advisory Committee) review feedback from all prior trainings and up-to-date research on best practices to design evidence-based and dynamic coach and program leader workshops. Jays Care Program Specialists train community coaches, program leaders, teachers, parents/guardians, and front-line staff from inclusive organizations. We also provide each program with an Adaptive Equipment Kit from Flaghouse, a Baseball Equipment Kit from Rawlings, and various communication tools.



Trained **Challenger Baseball** Coaches and Program Leaders deliver safe, inclusive, adaptive and consistent Challenger Baseball programming for children, youth and/or adults living with with physical and/or cognitive disabilities.

So that Challenger Baseball, athletes can:



Build a foundation of curiosity and knowledge about:

- Physical health and nutrition
- Being an athlete
- Their own skills and abilities
- New and fun ways of being active for life



Build skills such as:

- Physical literacy
- Communication skills
- Baseball skills
- Teamwork skills
- Relationship-building skills
- Goal-setting skills
- Independence
- Resiliency



Make/enhance connections with:

- Peers
- Coaches
- Buddies
- Their communities
- Organizations that offer more opportunities for them to grow and develop

Through Challenger Baseball, athletes feel empowered to develop:



The courage to try new things



A life-long commitment to sport and physical activity



Healthy and supportive relationships



A greater sense of independence

Most Innovative Practices

Across the country in leagues, schools and organizations, amazing innovations are taking place to make **Challenger Baseball** the best it can be. Here's a snapshot of some of those incredible ideas:



CHALLENGER BASEBALL VISUAL COMMUNICATION RESOURCE:

This all-in-one resource was created with our **Challenger Baseball Advisory Committee** to provide teachers, coaches, program leaders and buddies with visual tools for communication that can help contribute to the success of Challenger athletes. Visual tools are used in many sport, recreation and educational programs for children and youth with disabilities. This tool uses pictures to assist with communication, motivation and engagement in a wide variety of activities. It is a hand-held visual aid that is a portable resource that includes a: First/Then board, Challenger Wave/Visual Schedule, Baseball Field Visual, 'I'm Working Towards' token board and Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) on one surface.

CHALLENGER BASEBALL POCKET CHART CALENDAR:

The Pocket Chart Calendar was created as a visual schedule to help motivate, cultivate and inspire **Challenger in the Schools** programs to develop life skills while working towards Toronto Blue Jays themed prizes. This resource challenges classes and teams to work together to complete tasks focusing on kindness, healthy eating, and what it means to work as a team. The calendar is not only a great tool to help remind teams and classes to participate in **Challenger Baseball** sessions each week, but also helps student-athletes develop a better understanding of positive sportsmanship and how they can be healthy athletes!



As an EA, I have been using the Challenger Baseball Visual Communication Resource with a student who is highly aggressive and Autistic. Once I discovered their love for baseball, the Communication Resource has helped to bridge a large gap with my student!

BRITISH COLUMBIA: CREEKSIDE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL'S CHEER CHALLENGE:

One of the greatest ways to cultivate a positive team culture is by creating your own **Challenger Baseball** Team Cheer... which is exactly what Creekside Elementary School's **Challenger Baseball** program did! After working together to create a cheer that was unique to them as athletes, they used the cheer to signal both the start and the end of each session. Creekside used custom picture symbols to create the cheer for their students who are non-verbal. They also loaded the cheer using the picture symbols onto the student's TouchChat, a device their students who are non-verbal use to communicate, so everyone could participate



Hamilton Challenger Baseball Association

ONTARIO: HAMILTON LEVELS UP THEIR PROGRAM FOR ALL LEVELS OF PLAY:

In 2018, Hamilton **Challenger Baseball** celebrated its 28th year of league play. With 197 athletes, there is a huge variety of skill and ability on the field. In order to address that variety, Hamilton **Challenger Baseball** has expanded to include four different **Challenger Baseball** divisions:

- **Junior Recreational** – athletes of all abilities under 18 years of age
- **Senior Recreational** – athletes of all abilities over 18 years of age
- **Senior Semi-Competitive** – athletes of all abilities over the age of 14 looking to level-up their baseball skills in a fun and safe environment
- **Senior Competitive** – senior athletes of all abilities who are highly skilled

Athletes are encouraged to choose which division they would like to play in each year. These new divisions have created a safer way to begin baseball for athletes that are new to the game, and a great opportunity for athletes wanting a greater challenge to play in a more demanding league.



Buddies help Challenger Baseball players get the most out of the game. (Grace Kennedy photo)

BRITISH COLUMBIA: CLOVERDALE CHALLENGER BASEBALL MOVES BEYOND BASEBALL TO SKILLS AND DRILLS:

Cloverdale **Challenger Baseball** has been running for 3 years and had a roster of 50 amazing **Challenger Baseball** athletes in 2018. The program has evolved immensely over the years. In their first year, Cloverdale ran a typical baseball game with their athletes each week, however, they found that many of their athletes in the outfield were disengaged while waiting for their turn up to bat. Now, after consideration, feedback and attending annual trainings, Cloverdale incorporates many different strategies, activities, and skills and drills to help ensure their athletes are constantly participating for the entire session. The coaches made it a priority to actively work on finding new ways to engage the athletes in order to support the athletes' development in relationship building and communication skills. This year they found success by splitting the field into 3 stations; an infield baseball game, outfield skills and drills activities (i.e. colourful parachute games) and a batting station to give every player a chance to hit several times! In the coming season, the team is planning on inviting a number of mature athletes with cognitive disabilities to guest coach in the younger divisions as a way to build connections among the leagues.



Hammonds Plains Challenger Baseball Buddies

NOVA SCOTIA: HAMMONDS PLAINS MAKES BEING A BUDDY A PART OF THEIR MINOR BASEBALL PROGRAM:

Hammonds Plains **Challenger Baseball** has been running for 6 years with 93 reliable Buddies supporting the program in 2018. Finding enough reliable Buddies can be tough for any league - that's why Holly LaPierre established a practice early on with the Hammonds Plains Minor Baseball programs. As a mandatory part of their program, each Rep (travel team) Minor Baseball Program (13U, 15U and 18U) is scheduled as Buddies for **Challenger Baseball** throughout their season. Each team is required to commit to at least one night which provides an extra 10 to 12 buddies per game to assist with vacations and other conflicts the regular buddies would have. Each Buddy arrives 20 minutes earlier than their **Challenger Baseball** athletes to prepare for the practice. The outcomes for this outstanding buddy program are vast, including building a strong sense of community, building lasting relationships and friendships, and increased program sustainability. In addition, the volunteer fire department also joins to support the last game of the year by bringing their fire trucks, helping hand out the year-end medals and being the Challenger Athletes biggest fans!

Throughout 2018, we collected data from coaches, athletes, buddies and parents across the country through surveys, interviews and focus groups. **Here is a snapshot of the impact Challenger Baseball is**



98% OF COACHES SAID THAT TRAINING GAVE THEM THE SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE THEY NEED TO BE A GREAT CHALLENGER BASEBALL COACH

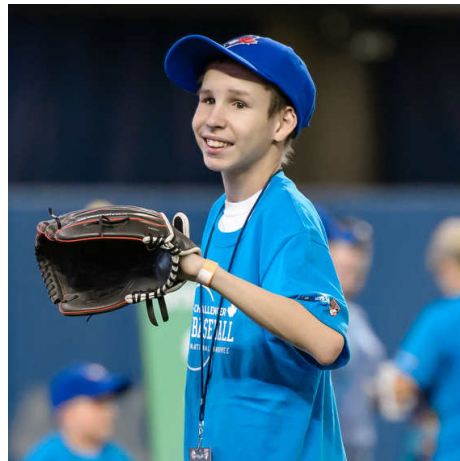


82% OF PARENTS REPORTED THAT THEIR CHILD IS MORE CONFIDENT IN THEIR PHYSICAL SKILLS SINCE PARTICIPATING IN CHALLENGER BASEBALL



“What I like most about Challenger Baseball is “the inclusion and having a safe place for your kiddo with special needs. It’s nice to be among fellow parents who are all going through the same thing. No judgement, just understanding.”

- Challenger Baseball Parent



“Thank you so much for creating this program. Having a child with special needs makes joining sports more difficult but thankfully my son is able to create great friendships and feel like a part of a team with Challenger Baseball!”

- Challenger Baseball Parent

“This is the best program hands-down. For years my son had to sit on the sidelines as his brother played “real baseball” and now HE gets to play and is treated like a champ.”

- Challenger Baseball Parent

88% OF ATHLETES REPORTED THAT CHALLENGER BASEBALL MAKES THEM FEEL LIKE THEY CAN DO ANYTHING IF THEY TRY THEIR BEST



The best moment in Challenger Baseball for me this year was “finally hearing my daughter who has selective mutism talk directly to people at Challenger other than her family.”

- Challenger Baseball Parent



94% OF ATHLETES
**WANT TO
COME BACK TO
CHALLENGER BASEBALL
NEXT SUMMER**

What I like most about Challenger Baseball is “meeting other parents that are faced with the same day-to-day challenges and stresses as me, and being able to ask them how they cope with it... finding my own little social group that understands the ins and outs of parenting a child with a disability that I could learn from.”

- Challenger Baseball Parent

97% OF PARENTS
**REPORTED
THAT THEIR CHILD
WAS WELCOMED INTO
THE CHALLENGER
BASEBALL
COMMUNITY**



The best moment in Challenger Baseball for me this year was “the first day he went to the ballpark and was able to play and participate. Until now, he just watched mom and dad play ball. This time it was HIS team and HIS time to play!”

- Challenger Baseball Parent



The best moment in Challenger Baseball for me this year was “seeing my son become confident in a sport and feeling proud of himself”

- Challenger Baseball Parent



100% OF COACHES
**SAID THEY
LEARNED NEW AND
EXCITING ACTIVITIES
AT TRAINING
THAT THEY WILL
BRING BACK TO THEIR
CHALLENGER BASEBALL
PROGRAM**

The best moment in Challenger Baseball for me this year was “when I saw Buddies genuinely wanting to play with my son and his smiles because he felt included.”

- Challenger Baseball Parent

Celebrating Our Challenger All-Stars

#Unstoppable

ATHLETES AND BUDDIES GET ACADEMIC SCHOLARSHIPS

Since 2017, 19 Challenger Athletes and Buddies have received renewable academic scholarships for post-secondary schooling from the **Ted Rogers Scholarship Fund** for their incredible leadership and dedication to Challenger Baseball. Below is a list of the amazing recipients of this esteemed award:

Caylah Groskurth, ON
Elliott McWilliams, B.C
Grace MacKenzie, NS
Griffin O'Connor, B.C
Hannah Shea, NS
Hunter Hogan, NS
Jacob Keagan, NS
Kristen MacPherson, NS
Gabriel Blumberg, NS

Leah Groskurth, ON
Lyndon Murrin, NS
Nicholas Mari, ON
Paul Gustavson, B.C
Riley FitzGerald, NS
Riley McWilliams, B.C
Sarah Jennings, NS
Spencer Knapton-Oaks, ON
William LeBlanc, NS
Austin Chapman, NS



#Unstoppable

AMMAAR - CHALLENGER BASEBALL ATHLETE IN CALEDON AND BRAMPTON, ONTARIO

In 2018, Ammaar made his debut playing **Challenger Baseball** and quickly fell in love with the game of baseball. Always one to take on a challenge, Ammaar joined two teams, Brampton and Caledon, for his first season playing ball. On any given game night, Ammaar is the first one on the field and the last one off, determined to play his best and do everything he can to support his team. Beyond his talent on the diamond, Ammaar has also developed a passion for cheering on the Blue Jays and his favorite player, Kevin Pillar, who he has been able to meet twice through **Challenger Baseball** events. For his love of the game and confidence to take on any challenge that he faces, Ammaar was selected as a Jays Care Unstoppable Kid and invited to throw out the first pitch before the Blue Jays game on September 9th against Cleveland. Like so many times before, Ammaar sprinted onto the diamond with a smile on his face and threw a strike—this time to Blue Jays pitcher Ryan Borucki at Rogers Centre in front of thousands of fans.



#Unstoppable

PAIGE - CHALLENGER BASEBALL ATHLETE IN HAMMONDS PLAINS, NOVA SCOTIA

In Halifax, Nova Scotia, there is a feisty 10-year-old girl with a love of baseball and an infectious positive attitude. Born with skeletal dysplasias, Paige McNally has been a star in the Hammonds Plains **Challenger Baseball** Program for the past four years. "One of the reasons I love **Challenger Baseball** is that I just get to be me," she says. "I get to play on a team, be a leader, and help my teammates with the challenges they face." Not only is Paige a standout player on her team, but she also takes a leadership role far beyond her years, serving as the coach of her brother's baseball team. For her leadership and for the positive impact she makes on all those around her, Paige was selected as a Jays Care Unstoppable Kid and invited to deliver a keynote speech at the 2018 Jays Care Curve Ball Gala. On stage, Paige spoke with charisma and confidence while proudly sharing the positive impact that **Challenger Baseball** has made in her life with the 1,200 guests in attendance including the entire Blue Jays roster.



#Unstoppable

JAMES - CHALLENGER BASEBALL ATHLETE IN CRANBROOK, BRITISH COLUMBIA

In 2018, a **Challenger Baseball** league made its debut in Cranbrook, British Columbia and a young athlete named James stepped up to the plate and joined. Born with High-Functioning Autism, James had sometimes faced challenges in fully expressing himself. His Educational Assistant shared that prior to playing baseball, she had never seen James write more than a few words. However, after discovering his love of baseball, James had a breakthrough. Inspired by his time playing the game and his close relationship with **Challenger Baseball** buddy, Kayson, James voluntarily wrote a paragraph about his love of **Challenger Baseball**. James' love of the game continues to grow and he's excited to play his second season of **Challenger Baseball** in 2019.



“I play Blue Jays Challenger Baseball. I got a hat. I got a shirt. My shirt has number 11. And Blue Jay on the front. I love my shirt. It is the best shirt I have evers had. And I get to keep it forever and ever. My buddy is Kayson. Hims helps me out. And when I hit baseball so far, Kayson runs and gets it for me. And him put it back and then I hit it again... I like Kayson. I have fun at baseball. I hope it is not gonna rain. When it is cancelled, I feel a little sad. Cause I really like baseball and I don't want it cancelled.”

- An excerpt from James' paragraph on why he loves Challenger Baseball



James and buddy Kayson partaking in **Challenger Baseball** game.

Making Strides

Challenger Baseball in schools officially launched in November 2018 with the goal of filling the gap for in-school physical activity opportunities for children and youth with physical and/or cognitive disabilities and providing a year-round opportunity for **Challenger Baseball** athletes. **Challenger in Schools** carefully weaves physical activity with life-skill development – all through the game of baseball. The program was launched in schools after seeing the tremendous success the summertime **Challenger Baseball** program was having among athletes, buddies, coaches and families all across Canada. This program provides access to baseball for children and youth who may not have been exposed to **Challenger Baseball** before and provides the opportunity for many of these students to participate in sports and to be a part of a school sports team, in many cases for the first time. By integrating the program into schools, more and more children and youth are given the chance to fall in love with baseball and learn incredible things about themselves and their peers both on and off the field!



Strategic Plan

In 2019 we plan to build on the momentum of 2018 by enhancing the reach and maintaining the quality of **Challenger Baseball** across the country. Here are the top 5 things we will be focusing on to strengthen our work:

UTILIZE ATHLETE VOICE:



Only 1 in 6 youth meet the recommended 150 minutes of physical activity each week. If our Challenger athletes had more of a say in structuring their physical activity, would they feel more empowered to take ownership of their own recreational experiences? Statistics say, yes! In order to help better shape **Challenger Baseball** across Canada, we're excited to pilot our first **Challenger Baseball Youth Advisory** in 2019.

DEVELOP ADDITIONAL BUDDY/VOLUNTEER TRAINING RESOURCES:



We know Buddies and volunteers are an integral part of **Challenger Baseball**, yet only **53% of Challenger Baseball leagues host a formal or informal pre-season training for leaders within their program!** Our goal is to develop simple, helpful tools to allow each and every league to motivate and inspire their volunteers.

CONNECT LEAGUES AND SCHOOLS TO INCREASE PLAYTIME:



By linking **Challenger in Schools** programs to neighbouring summer Challenger Baseball leagues, we can allow our athletes to grow and thrive in **Challenger Baseball** all year.

FURTHER EMPHASIZE BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES:



We learn just as much from our athletes as they learn from us! Each day is a different opportunity, and by filling the back pockets of all our coaches, program leaders, and volunteers with tools and strategies they can use to promote positive behaviours, we can help athletes bring their best selves to the program.

FURTHER DIVERSIFY BASEBALL:



One of the greatest opportunities we have as **Challenger Baseball** program leaders is the opportunity to be wildly creative in how we structure the game of baseball. Whether Challenger athletes require multiple creative spins on the game of baseball to maximize engagement or are looking to learn more traditional rules and game structure, we've learned the game of baseball can be adapted to work towards the unique and individual goals of each athlete. "10 Different Ways to Play" is a session that will be added to all 2019 **Challenger Baseball** Training Workshops.

Thank You to the...

950

Challenger Coaches and Program Leaders across the country;

2,684

Buddies across the country; and

4,349

Challenger Athletes.



Special Thanks

Thank you to everyone who makes Challenger Baseball possible!

Little League Canada
Little League International
Baseball Canada
Challenger Baseball Canada
Flaghouse Inc.
Rawlings Inc.
Variety Village
Canucks Autism Network
Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital
Easter Seals
Abilities Centre
Silent Voice Canada
Camp Awakening
rEcess
Jays Care Foundation
Toronto Blue Jays

Thank you to our amazing group of volunteer Provincial Coordinators:

Ontario – Steven Bagnell and Bruce Campbell
British Columbia – John Casey
Alberta – Denis Wren
Saskatchewan – Porter Nabis
Manitoba – Bobbi Bottle
Quebec – Richard St-Amour
New Brunswick – Charline Allain Godin
Prince Edward Island – Scott Taylor
Nova Scotia – Randy Crouse
Newfoundland – Ryan Garland

Thank you to our Toronto Blue Jays player ambassador:

Kevin Pillar

Thank you to our incredibly supportive and wise Advisory Committee:

Kristen English – Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital
Jim Baba – Baseball Canada
Roy Bergerman – Little League Canada
Archie Allison – Variety Village
Stephanie Jull – Canucks Autism Network
Kimberly MacAulay – Little Mountain Challenger Baseball
Randy Crouse – National Coordinator, Nova Scotia Provincial Coordinator, and Antigonish Challenger Baseball Coach
Denis Wren – Alberta Provincial Coordinator
Amanda Grassick – Easter Seals
Kelly Kasper – Abilities Centre
Kris Gustavson – Provincial Health Services Authority

Thank you to our fearless National Coordinator:

Randy Crouse





