

CHALLENGER BASEBALL PROGRAM REPORT 2019





Thanks for allowing us to be able to be on a team where we can feel accepted and be able to play despite the challenges we face with a disability.

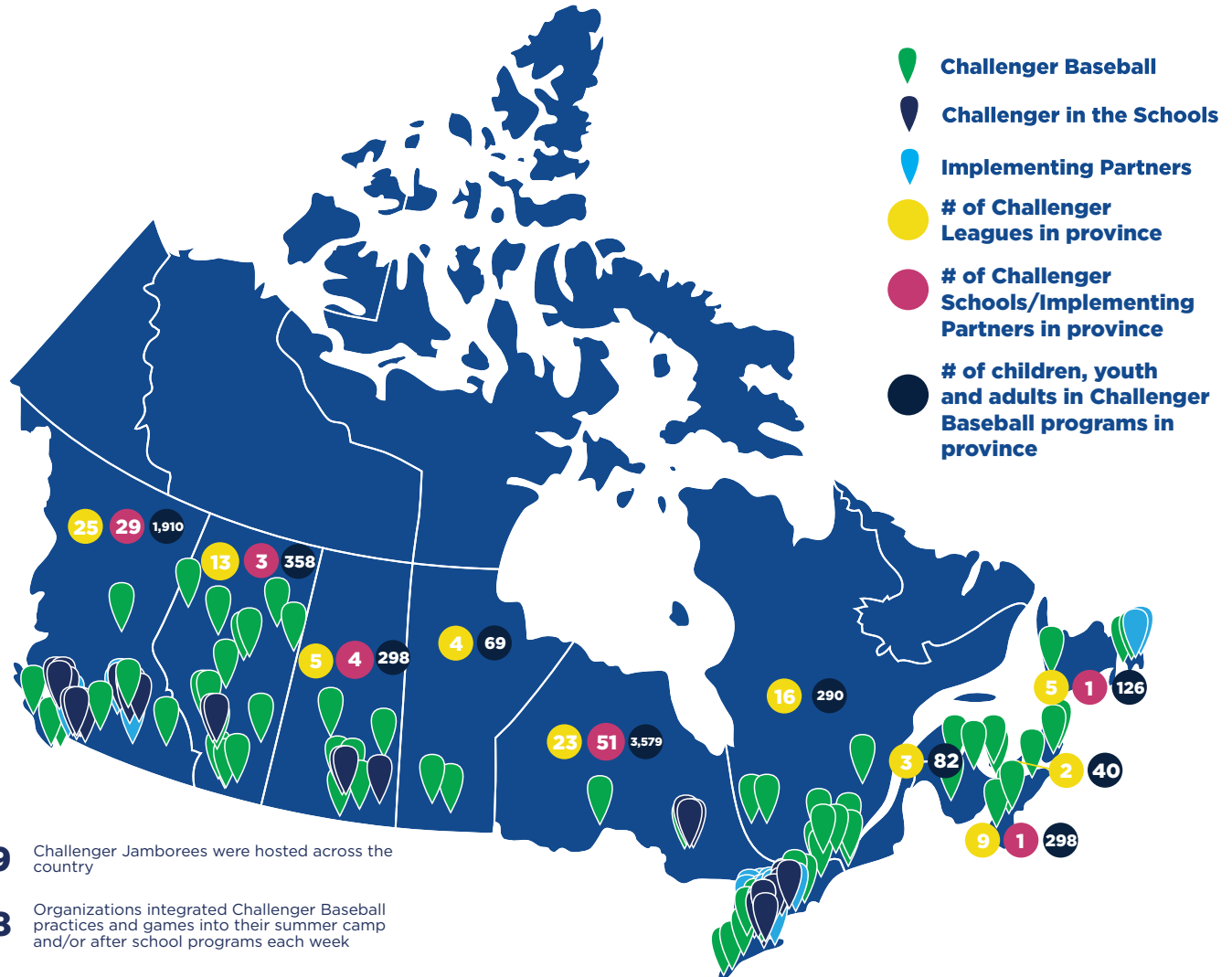
- Challenger Baseball Athlete

7,050

Children, youth and adults with disabilities participated in Challenger Baseball programs across Canada

Program Map

Children, youth and adults from the following sites participated in the Challenger Baseball program in 2019:



9 Challenger Jamborees were hosted across the country

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

71 Schools ran Challenger Baseball programs after school or as part of their Physical Education curriculum each week

105 Summer Challenger Leagues ran weekly practices and games

550 Teachers, coaches, program leaders and Buddies were trained to enhance their skills as Challenger champions. Since 2017, we've training over 1000 program implementers

OVER 3,000

Youth and adults participated in Challenger Baseball as Buddies across the country

7,050

Children, youth and adults with disabilities participated in Challenger Baseball programs across the country

*For a list of all program locations in 2019, see the following: <https://www.mlb.com/bluejays/community/jays-care/program-map>

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.

At Challenger Baseball, we see the opportunity and potential in every interaction, conversation, and radical idea to grow and develop as a team. At Challenger Baseball, the athlete always comes first, and we utilize experts in the field of disability, inclusion, adapted recreation, baseball and coaching to explore, create and develop best-in-class opportunities and programs for the athletes and communities we serve. We strive to be a high-expectation, high-performance, and high-support team that is fuelled by creative thinking, collaboration, risk-taking and room for boundless growth.

Impact of Challenger Baseball



The courage to try new things



A life-long commitment to sport and physical activity

Why it Matters

Of the 5.3 million Canadian residents who live with some form of disability, over 200,000 of them are children and youth.¹ Yet, only 56% of them are participating in sport, play and recreation compared to 87% of those living without disabilities.



Physical activity is beneficial to health and well being. However, in Canada, only 1 in 3, children and youth ages 3 to 21 with developmental disabilities play team sports.

This leads to children with disabilities having obesity rates 38% higher than youth without disabilities.²

What We Do

Challenger Baseball creates a support network and community of peers and adults to support, encourage and challenge athletes to step outside their comfort zone.

An increased element of choice to make trying new things less scary and more exciting.



Challenger Baseball provides access to free sport for development programming, specially adapted for our athletes.

We train coaches to make every practice focus on fun through play-based drills, thus reducing anxiety and helping athletes fall in love with exercise.

The Impact of Challenger Baseball

88

88% of athletes reported that Challenger Baseball helped them try something new.

“When I tell people about Challenger, I tell them nobody can understand the impact this activity has on the families until your hands are involved and getting dirty with the players. Challenger makes possibly the biggest difference in the lives of these kids each week.”
- Challenger Baseball, Coach



82

As a result of Challenger Baseball, 82% of athletes want to play more sports.

76

76% parents have noticed an increase in motor skills of their athlete.

“The program gave us a platform where ALL students felt comfortable with physical activities.”
- Challenger in the Schools, Educator



Healthy and supportive relationships

Social isolation is often prevalent amongst children and youth with disabilities; it can lead to poor health, limited participation in the community, as well as a poor quality of life.



A greater sense of independence

Children and youth with a disability are much less likely to be engaged in education, work and community. The 2012 Canadian Survey on Disability found that adults with autism have the lowest employment rates in Canada at 14.3% as compared to the general population at 92.7%.³

At Challenger Baseball, we strive to increase the sense of belonging of our athletes, buddies, coaches, and families. We use specific resources to increase quality communication and incorporate the use of ASL wherever possible, and train buddies, coaches, coordinators and educators to adapt their activities to work towards building relationships



By providing adaptive equipment, every athlete can play fully and increase their independence.

By connecting athletes with Buddies, parents can sit on the sidelines and build relationships while their children foster independence.

94

94% of athletes felt part of a team in Challenger Baseball.

“Thank you, this is the only place I can play with a team, I look forward to next year and playing again!”

-Challenger Baseball, Athlete

87

87% of parents of athletes have built positive relationships with other parents and guardians at Challenger Baseball.



99

99% of Coaches reported the training helped them learn new ways to adapt activities to children and youth.

“My proudest moment was that my athlete is requesting to get dropped off at Challengers instead of me walking him into the group. Also, he is being more independent and taking initiative with what needs to happen and there is little need to give direction or support.”

-Challenger Baseball, Parent



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 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 and mentoring.



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:

ONTARIO: JAYS CARE MAKES BIG CHANGES TO NATIONAL JAMBOREE

On July 26th, we hosted our 7th annual National Jamboree at Rogers Centre, inviting more than 250 Challenger Athletes and their buddies from 7 provinces to engage in a series of unique challenges and activations. With feedback from parents and coaches, we sought to make this year more accessible for our growing number of athletes. Here's what we added:

- **30 activities/activations** stationed both on the 100 level concourse and on the field;
- **A Passport Map** to help athletes, their buddies and families create their own journey while at the National Challenger Baseball Jamboree by incorporating more choice;
- **Sensory tents, a chill zone, therapy dogs, and a universal washroom** for everyone to use.

The feedback has been great:

- **97% of parents and/or guardians** reported that the increased element of choice helped their athlete engage in more activities in a meaningful way
- **88% of parents and/or guardians** reported that the increased element of choice allowed them to have the courage to try new things as a family



MANITOBA: WINNIPEG SOUTH CHALLENGER BASEBALL INITIATES SKILLS AND DRILLS NIGHTS ONCE A WEEK IN ADDITION TO THEIR GAMES NIGHTS

Bobbi and Ross Bottle have been captaining Manitoba Challenger Baseball for four years. With close to 70 athletes, many of whom demonstrated enhanced skills and greater desire to continue improving, they launched a second night of Challenger Baseball this summer. On Wednesdays, they spend 90 minutes rotating through a series of skills and drills stations designed to enhance their batting, hitting, running, and catching skills alongside life skills such as communication, patience, leadership, courage, and resiliency. On Saturdays, athletes showcase all their hard work in a traditional game setting. "We've gotten lots of great feedback from parents and athletes. They are loving the chance to play more and work harder," said Ross. Ross and Bobbi were so inspired by the success that they just launched Fall Ball this September which included 90 minutes of skills and drills followed by a 30 minute Challenger Baseball game.

NOVA SCOTIA: HAMMONDS PLAINS MAKES LARGE-SCALE BUDDY TRAINING A BIG PRIORITY

With more than 3,000 Challenger Buddies across the country, providing training that enhances confidence to support all Challenger Athletes has become a priority. On May 2, 2019, we piloted a 5 hour training program for 80 Buddies from the Hammonds Plains Challenger Program. Buddies learned how to best support their individual athletes, promote independence, and use inclusive language. This is what the Buddies had to say about the new training:

- 100% of Buddies reported feeling better prepared to support, encourage and promote independence with athletes as a result of the training.
- 97% of Buddies reported feeling more comfortable and prepared to effectively communicate with their athletes.



ONTARIO: BRUCE TRAIL PUBLIC SCHOOL MAKES CHALLENGER ATHLETES FEEL LIKE CHAMPIONS

As one of the first schools to join the Challenger in the Schools program, Bruce Trail teachers Jennifer Galloupe Roos and Joanne Plant invested significant energy to ensure the program was a huge success. They started by inviting grade 8 students to take on the role of Buddies. Next, they recruited another teacher volunteer to initiate monthly challenges (many of which the entire school was invited to participate in over the morning announcements - with announcements made by Challenger athletes). After running the program for 20 weeks, Jennifer and Joanne got their athletes prepared for their first Challenger Jamboree at Rogers Centre. As the athletes headed out of school to board their buses, Bruce Trail assembled all of their students to cheer for their Challenger Athletes and wish them luck. This year, Jennifer and Joanna are creating a junior and senior team and have recruited a Challenger Baseball student-coach from the Oakville Challenger program to help enhance, expand and run the program.



NOVA SCOTIA: PICTOU COUNTY MAKES “FAN CORNER” A FIXTURE IN THEIR OUTDOOR SUMMER LEAGUE

This summer, Trevor Kearley and Craig Murray of Pictou County Challenger Baseball introduced “Fan Corner” to their weekly practices and games. Using a giant decorated white board, they invited players, buddies, coaches and parents to write down anything they noticed that deserves to be celebrated (both big and small). “Some milestones are so simple to the ordinary person but when you have players who finally try to do things they may have never done before – recognizing them is huge,” says Trevor as he reflects on the impact of “Fan Corner”. Each week they read out every comment and players and buddies were visibly proud and inspired to see and hear their names on the board.

“Some milestones are so simple to the ordinary person but when you have players who finally try to do things they may have never done before – recognizing them is huge.”

ONTARIO: JUDITH NYMAN SECONDARY SCHOOL TRANSFORMS A RESOURCE ROOM INTO “THE STINGERS CLUBHOUSE”

Before the end of the first Challenger Baseball practice at Judith Nyman Secondary School, the Challenger team had already named themselves “the Stingers”. With a school whose mascot is a hornet, the name Stingers was an easy pick. 30 athletes signed up right away, and Julie Prankard (their coach and teacher) went to work on finding ways to make their team feel as official as a major league team. Her first step, creating a clubhouse. Julie convinced her school administration that their resource room would be better used as a clubhouse. Within days the room had a sign above it, their practice and healthy challenge calendar in the window and an open invitation for any athletes to visit at any time to work on the core skills that are integral to Challenger Baseball (courage, care, love of sport, and independence).



BRITISH COLUMBIA: KAMLOOPS CHALLENGER BASEBALL STARTS A FALL BALL TREND THAT SPREADS ACROSS THE COUNTRY

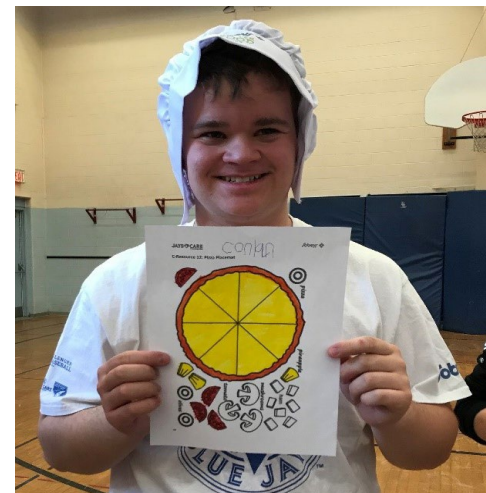
For the past 2 years Stacey Willis and her team at Kamloops Challenger Baseball finished the summer season and immediately launched a Winter Ball program. In an effort to help athletes maintain their commitment to sport and their connection to their Challenger teammates, Stacey has created an extended season and has taken the game indoors for 6 weeks. Inspired by the success in Kamloops, leagues in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, and Nova Scotia have launched their own Winter Ball and Fall Ball programs.



ONTARIO AND BRITISH COLUMBIA: CHALLENGER SCHOOLS TAKE ADVANTAGE OF SOBEYS HEALTHY ATHLETE CLINICS

Sobeys Healthy Athlete Clinics are 1.5 hour clinics offered to schools running Challenger Baseball after they have completed 10 sessions with their athletes. Each clinic is fun and interactive and invites athletes to learn more about healthy behaviours that produce healthy athletes. Jays Care facilitators visit schools and lead one of the following five sessions (based on the school's request): Myth Busters, Food Groupies, Sugar Sugar, Water, Water, Water, and Health Detectives.

Launched in October of 2018, 16 Sobeys Healthy Athlete Clinics were facilitated in the 2018/2019 school year with 8 schools across BC and Ontario. Educators have been thrilled with the outcomes and reported that 100% of their students felt more confident making healthy food choices and more excited about trying new and healthy foods as a result of the clinics.



Celebrating some of our Challenger Baseball All-Stars

It's hard to pick All-Stars when there are so many incredible athletes, buddies, teachers and coaches across the country to celebrate. Here are a some who really stood out this year:



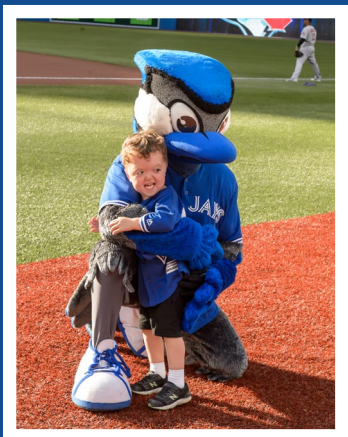
UNSTOPPABLE VAN BERNARD & RYAN TRENHOLM

For years, Van Bernard has been a fixture at Hammond Plains Challenger Baseball. As the first player on his team in a wheelchair, the league invested in new bases, raised on one side, flat on the other. This allowed Van to “be on the base” in his chair. Van purchased his own bat to accommodate hitting from his chair. However, Van was quick to notice other players that could benefit from using his special bat. It is nothing to see Van drive in from a base, or playing in the outfield to share his equipment.

Van has incredible energy, a great sense of humor and brings a positive attitude to all he does. He has also built a deep relationship with his Challenger Baseball buddy, Ryan Trenholm. Van can be seen regularly attending Ryan's games and on some occasions, acting as bat boy for Ryan's team. Their partnership has grown well past player and buddy. They are invested in each other's lives and have vowed to remain friends forever. In honour of this friendship, Ryan and Van travelled to Toronto to make a speech at Jays Care's annual Curve Ball Gala in front 1,200 inspired guests.

UNSTOPPABLE JOHN VOLLETT

The Centre for Dreams is an adult day program that provides services for adults living with a development disability. John is a standout leader among his peers, but he means more than that to them. John, is both the face and reason that Centre for Dreams exists. John was born with cerebral palsy and was told he would never walk or talk. John has beaten the odds and by doing so has made so many opportunities possible for his fellow peers. In 2018, Centre for Dreams launched a Challenger Baseball program with huge success. 38 athletes practice all year long in an indoor gym, and John is one of the most passionate baseball fans among them. As a true showcase of his outstanding leadership and courage, John threw out a ceremonial first pitch this season at a Toronto Blue Jays game with the support of his family and all his fellow Centre for Dreams Challenger Baseball athletes in attendance.



UNSTOPPABLE MARSHALL KU

Marshall Ku, the youngest player from Downtown Toronto's Challenger Baseball, is one of the hardest-working, most courageous and inspirational players in his league. He looks forward to Challenger Baseball all week long and he loves practicing with his coaches and playing with his new friends. His dedication to practicing baseball has shown through the flourishing of numerous skills, including his home run hit during a league game and his social interactions with new and old friends! His unstoppable passion for baseball and resiliency in the face of challenges, along with his contagious positivity and excellent sportsmanship are why Marshall's coaches nominated him to throw out a ceremonial first pitch at Rogers Centre this year!

UNSTOPPABLE

ELLIOT SMITH

On April 25, 2019, Elliot Smith, a long-time Durham Challenger Baseball Athlete, all-round baseball enthusiast, and student at Fleming College, started a 22 week placement in the Jays Care office at Rogers Centre as our first Challenger Baseball Youth Amplifier. The position is designed to be a career-launching opportunity that offers a chance to practice the life-skills developed in Challenger Baseball (courage, independence, connection) in a safe and inclusive working environment. It is the first of many ways Jays Care is working to combat the 40% jobless rate for individuals with disabilities in Canada. After 22 weeks, Elliot had become a fixture in the office that none of us wanted to say good-bye to. His hard work led to new visual resources that supported 50 schools and over 100 outdoor leagues, and an innovative partnership with Cooperative Education Colleges across Ontario. After completing his placement, we asked Elliot to help us explain his experience as a Youth Amplifier to the Challenger Baseball Community. Here's what he had to say:



“Working at Jays Care helped me learn how to be respectful and inclusive to all my colleagues. Being at Jays Care makes me feel good about myself and makes me feel like I’m going to help so many kids with bright future ahead of them achieve their goals.”



UNSTOPPABLE

ST. JULIA BILLART CATHOLIC SCHOOL

In the heart of Markham, sits St. Julia Billart Catholic School. In November 2018, Vice Principal Adam Sanderson signed his school up to join Challenger Baseball, and following the training, he and several teachers launched the program with huge success. Twenty-four athletes signed up and they participated in 40 Challenger Baseball sessions throughout the school year – making them one of the most consistent programs on offer for students. Next, Adam got grade 8 students to create a video that features practice sessions and athlete interviews from the program – helping each athlete feel like a true superstar for their involvement. St. Julia Billart’s commitment to making Challenger Athletes feel spectacular made them an easy pick as the Challenger Baseball All-Star School of 2019 and a deserving recipient of a night in the Jays Care Community Clubhouse.

“To say that Challenger is one of the most positively impactful initiatives that I have been involved with in my career is an understatement. Truly, to watch the joy and excitement this program brings to children is to understand what education is really about. It is not an exaggeration to say that the impact Challenger has had on our student community has been transformative; the excitement, joy and happiness has been palpable in these school communities, and has spread to staff and parents with equal fervor.”

– Adam Sanderson, Vice Principal, St. Julia Billart Catholic School

UNSTOPPABLE HAMMONDS PLAINS COACHES

This year marked a special one for Nova Scotia Challenger Baseball for many reasons. Among them was the fact that five of their long-term athletes from Hammonds Plains Challenger Baseball officially graduated from the Regional Coach Training to become Challenger Baseball Coaches. Cheering for them as they accepted their certificates and coach pins were the Buddies they worked with as athletes and more than 120 fellow coaches and proud parents.

From left-to-right: Scott Chaddock, Ian Lane, Max Nodwell, Evan Longley, Patrick Flewelling



UNSTOPPABLE TED ROGERS SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS

This year, through the Ted Rogers Scholarship Fund, we are pleased to announce 11 new recipients of a renewable scholarship for post-secondary schooling from Challenger Baseball. These recipients were awarded their scholarships based on their incredible leadership and dedication to Challenger Baseball and on their submission of compelling and thoughtful applications. Congratulations to:

Noah Dugas
Luca Ramelli
Hanna Chesher
Maria Thiel

Reide Harmsworth
Julia MacDonald
Anna Mackenzie
Devyn Rattee

Adam McEachern
Graham Thurston
Cameryn Richardson



“My son who has anxiety, showed confidence to remain with his buddies without needing mom.”

-Challenger Baseball, Parent

Strategic Plan

Challenger Baseball works tirelessly using best practices to fill the gap in inclusive, grassroots recreational programming for children, youth and adults living with physical and/or cognitive disabilities in outdoor leagues, schools, and organizations across Canada. Using baseball as a vehicle, Challenger Baseball works to provide endless opportunities for life skill development for its athletes and integral community connections for its families and stakeholders. In 2020, our target is to reach over 8,500 athletes across Canada.

In 2020, here are some objectives we intend to achieve in order to get closer to that target:



STRATEGIC PLAN:

Develop a 3-5 year strategic plan to effectively and sustainably grow Challenger Baseball and enhance coast-to-coast awareness of the program nation-wide.



TRAINING MODEL:

Develop and execute enhanced Training Model that reflects feedback and growing needs of programs across Canada.



RESOURCES:

Create an on-line toolbox that includes the most essential resources for Challenger Baseball Provincial Coordinators, Program and League Coordinators, Coaches, Buddies, educators and parents/guardians.



PROGRAM EVALUATION:

Enhancing quality assurance and program monitoring by investing in a deep-dive programmatic evaluation of our Challenger Baseball in the Schools Program.



FURTHER DIVERSIFY BASEBALL:

Enhance leadership opportunities for our Challenger Baseball athletes by creating multiple, athlete-focused events and long-term projects to further promote and include our athletes' voices in our programming.



Thank You

Thank you to everyone who makes Challenger Baseball possible across Canada!

1,250 Challenger Baseball Coaches and Program Leaders across the country
3,000 Buddies across the country
7,050 Challenger Baseball athletes

Abilities Centre
Baseball Canada
Camp Awakening
Camp Cambria
Canucks Autism Network
Canucks Autism Network Kelowna Summer Multisport Camp
Centre for Dreams
Challenger Baseball Canada
City of Newmarket
Easter Seals, NL
Flaghouse Inc.
Grandview Children's Centre
Holland Bloorview Children's Rehabilitation Centre
Little League Canada
Little League International
Niagara Children's Centre
PALS Autism Society
Pegasus Community Project
posAbilities Association of British Columbia
Rawlings Inc.
rEcess Outreach Kingsway
rEcess Outreach Oakville
Shadow Lake Camp
Silent Voice Canada
Variety Village

Thank you to our amazing group of volunteer Provincial Coordinators:

Ontario - Steven Bagnell and Bruce Campbell
British Columbia - Tim Hall
Alberta - Denis Wren
Saskatchewan - Amanda Hodgkin
Manitoba - Bobbi Bottle
Quebec - Richard St-Amour
New Brunswick - Charline Allain Godin
Prince Edward Island - Scott Taylor
Nova Scotia - Randy Crouse
Newfoundland - Ryan Garland and Colin Rose

Thank you to our incredibly supportive and wise Advisory Committee:

Adam Sanderson - St. Julia Billiard & St. Joseph Catholic Elementary Schools
Amanda Grassick - Girl Guides of Canada
Archie Allison - Variety Village
Christina Swett - Abilities Centre
Denis Wren - Challenger Baseball Canada Provincial Coordinator (AB)
Elisabeth Walker-Young - Canucks Autism Network
Jim Baba - Baseball Canada
Kelly Kasper - Abilities Centre
Kimberly MacAulay - Challenger Baseball Canada Master Coach (BC)
Kris Gustavson - Provincial Health Services Authority
Kristen English - Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital
Randy Crouse - Challenger Baseball Canada National Coordinator and Provincial Coordinator (NS)
Roxanne Seaman - Acadia University
Roy Bergerman - Little League Canada
Stephanie Jull - Canucks Autism Network

Thank you to our fearless National Coordinator:

Randy Crouse

