



Final Report of the Inclusive Sport and Recreation Summit

Background:

In 2017, Danielle Peers (researcher and former parasport athlete & coach) and Tim Konoval (PhD student and emerging parasport coach), met with various members of the Alberta parasport community, and the leadership of Alberta Sport Connection (ASC). Collectively, it was decided that a meeting of parasport leadership was needed to get us talking about what needs to change to make for a more sustainable, successful, and inclusive sport system in Alberta.

Collaborative, Accessible Process:

We collected over 160 email addresses from parasport and inclusive sport and recreation leaders across the province, and sent an email out to them asking: who would come, what barriers do we need to address, and who wants to help make decisions?

The resulting steering committee included representation from various sports and recreation, as well as from Edmonton, Calgary, Red Deer, Medicine Hat, and folks who run programs in Northern Alberta. We also had graduate students who had been practitioners, as well as three undergraduate students who are parasport athletes.

The topics we covered at the Summit were those voted highest in an email survey by participants. For speakers, we made sure there were more community speakers than academics; that a variety of activities, regions, and impairment groups were represented; and that people with impairments voices were forefronted. See full schedule [here](#).

Major Successes and Challenges of Summit:

Access: We modeled access throughout: wheelchair accessibility, visual description, volunteer guides, ASL interpretation, plain language summaries, and hotel for out of town delegates. Many attendants articulated this as a model for future events.

Attendance: 137 people registered, including sport and inclusive sport and recreation administrators, policy-makers, community leaders, current and former parasport athletes, coaches, researchers, undergraduate and graduate students, and volunteers. Roughly 120 people came to panels on day 1, 60 people came to workshops on day 2.

Archiving: To make learnings more accessible we put up videos and slide decks on our website (<http://www.isrsummit.ca/>). Our website had 458 page views by 283 unique visitors. These resources have already been used for education by the Provincial Fitness Unit/AFLCA.

Who was not centered: Due partially to how the collaboration started, recreation was not as forefronted as it could have been. We would have liked to forefront voices of recreation participants and athletes with developmental disabilities more.

Desire for more collaboration: The most resounding decision made at the Summit was to collaborate and communicate more: a desire to create ways to better make decisions together. As a result, we have launched an ISR listserv and Facebook group. These will make it **much** easier to recruit working groups, share learnings, and conduct community-based research.

Major Learnings - “we need to...”

Based on planning surveys, feedback sessions during the summit, and a survey afterwards, these are the biggest actionable things we learned from the community.

Get Better At Sharing Knowledge:

- 90% of survey participants identified knowledge sharing as the most desirable kind of collaboration (volunteers and equipment were tied for 2nd at 56%).
- The majority of respondents also said that networking and knowledge sharing were the most important parts of the event for them.
- Many of the issues people wanted to know more about have been studied significant, and so often it is more a question of sharing existing knowledge than new research.
- Roughly 70% of survey participants said the best ways to get information are short plain language summaries (68%) or websites and social media (66%). Next most popular options were either short videos (59%), or in-person workshops (56%).

Actions:

1. We invited all participants to join an ISR facebook group and/or listserve that we set up for knowledge-sharing and networking for community, researchers, and policy-makers.
2. We will keep updating our website (www.isrsummit.ca) and Facebook and listserve with short plain-language summaries.
3. We will work with graduate students to produce 2-3-page plain language summaries on the issues people identified as most important to them.
4. ASC, researchers, and community members can use the listserve and facebook group to invite participants for future research, workshops, and decision-making opportunities.
5. It would be good to add one or two ISR practitioner networking and information sessions at regional sports events like the Sport Conference or the APA Symposium.

Think and Work Across Difference

- Pre-event respondents said one of the most important topics to learn about was how to include people with disabilities who were also part of other marginalized groups.
- During the event many participants noted how the thing they learned about that would most change their practices, was how to better include Indigenous, LGBTQ2S, and trauma survivors with disabilities.
- Post-event, over half of participants said they wanted to learn more about these issues.

Actions:

1. We have posted videos of panels and slides of teach-ins on these topics on our website.
2. We will continue to make plain-language two-pagers available on these topics.
3. It would be useful to facilitate knowledge sharing between organizations that focus on disability sport and rec, and those that focus on other marginalized communities.
4. Research funding could be used to support and learn about collaborations between these communities, if communities were keen.

Recognize and Respond to Unique Parasport Barriers

- A resounding message from Summit and survey participants was that parasport and inclusive recreation face unique barriers, and have unique strengths, that cannot be measured and funded in the same ways as mainstream sport.
- Specifics include:
 - small local disability sport organizations run majority of programming but are underrecognized and underfunded when grant focus in on provincial bodies. This means most grant funds to greatest programmers go to multiplying admin.
 - lack of accessible transportation, especially outside of Edmonton and Calgary
 - lack of accessible infrastructure, information, and communication (e.g. websites)
 - lack of coaching and administrator knowledge (e.g., mainstream PSOs & clubs)
 - wide range of disability groups with specific needs and skills, while specific sports tend to cater to only one or a couple of these impairment groups
 - expensive equipment (for some sports and impairment group)
 - reducing barriers takes sustainable financial and knowledge commitment- not one-off funding, need a 5-year plan to transform Alberta sport
 - rural athletes face unique barriers that need unique solutions
 - separating recreation and sport often does not make sense in disability contexts because many people with disabilities are not eligible for Paralympic-stream sports, and full LTAD model needs to be accessible and supported.
 - competing for athletes and grants where collaboration enables more growth
 - mainstream granting, accountability, and governance structures are poor fit.

Actions:

1. We suggest the creation of a working group, created through an open-call to community participants, to focus on funding, accountability, and governance in parasport.

2. A community-research partnership with ASC and the working group could learn from recent work on this area in Ontario and BC, adapt to our provincial needs, and seek deep consultation with parasport (and potentially inclusive recreation) groups through our established listserv and Facebook group (and beyond).
3. Alberta could learn from and adapt viaSport's work on evaluation and funding, which is designed to increase knowledge and accessibility across all of the sport organizations (not just disability-focused ones) in relation to disability, gender, new-comers, Indigeneity, etc. A similar model could increase access to all sport for all Albertans.
4. Consider funding and accountability crossovers between sport and recreation for organizations that cater to disability inclusion.

Develop and Support Disability Leadership:

- David Howe (an ex-Paralympian, a coach, and a researcher) challenged Summit participants to help make disability sport leadership 51% people with disabilities.
- This point was echoed strongly by speakers throughout the conference, and by participants in conference feedback forms and end surveys.
- Developing future leaders from the disability community in our sector would be a major investment in the sustainability, success, and accessibility of sport and recreation in Alberta. It would also help to reduce disability unemployment rates, and offer our athletes and participants meaningful life trajectories where they can gain employment and make an important impact on their communities.

Possible Actions:

1. Including disabled people in staff, coaching roles, and on boards could be part of an adjusted accountability framework.
2. Internship programs (e.g., SCIP) could be leveraged to ensure that current and former participants with disabilities get access to important on the job training & experience.
3. Develop a robust para-athlete and para-participant training and transition program to develop future researchers, coaches, officials, and administrators. This would make a wonderful Community-Research partnership that would have a good chance at external funding. Such a program could also leverage grants, in-kind supports, and external collaborations from funders outside of the provincial sport and recreation sector.



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