

The Pennsylvania State University

The Graduate School

College of Agricultural Sciences

**ADAPTIVE SPORT PARTICIPATION & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: AN  
INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE**

A Master's Paper in Community and Economic Development

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Professional Studies in Community and Economic Development

April 2013

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## Abstract

Identifying ways to increase inclusion and participation in communities among people with disabilities is an issue most cities and towns recognize. While many ideas have been explored, few communities have considered the role that sport participation could play in this regard. In fact, sport participation and community development strategies are not often thought of in the same sentence, let alone in relation to, people with disabilities, a group typically viewed from a community rehabilitation perspective instead of one rooted in community development.

Yet, people with disabilities are a large part of every community. About 4.4 million or one out of every seven, Canadians (14.3%) reported having a disability in 2006 (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2006). In recent years, governments have seen rising health care costs in communities due to physical inactivity in addition to a decline in sport participation that has led to a rise in costly social problems for communities like crime, drug use and community apathy. (Vail, 2007, p. 571).

This paper uses community and economic theory and concepts and aligns them with an internship experience at The Calgary Sledge Hockey Association, an adaptive sport program based in Calgary, Alberta, Canada to demonstrate how a community development approach can strengthen an organization and its ties to the community in better ways than through traditional sport marketing approaches. This paper also establishes a framework to enhance participation in adaptive sport and provides insight on a way to assess whether participation in adaptive sport leads to greater community participation overall.

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## I. Introduction

People with disabilities are a large part of every community. One out of every seven, Canadians (14.3%) reported having a disability in 2006 (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2006). Identifying ways to increase inclusion and participation in communities among people with disabilities is an issue most cities and towns recognize. While many ideas have been explored, few communities have considered the role that sport participation could play in this regard.

This paper will demonstrate how a community development approach strengthened the Calgary Sledge Hockey Association and its ties to the community in better ways than could have been achieved through traditional sport marketing approaches. This paper will also establish a framework to enhance participation in adaptive sport and provide input on a way to assess whether community participation rises among those involved in adaptive sport.

Sport changes community perceptions of persons with disabilities by focusing attention on their abilities and moving their disability into the background.

Through sport, persons without disabilities encounter persons with disabilities in a positive context (sometimes for the first time) and see them accomplish things they had previously thought impossible. Their assumptions about what persons with disabilities can and cannot do are profoundly challenged and reshaped by this experience. As well, the tendency to see the disability instead of the person is greatly reduced, in part because of the common experience of sport that they now share. (Right To Play International, 2008, p. 171)

## **What is sledge hockey?**

Sledge hockey is an innovative team sport that incorporates the same rules and discipline structure as regular ice hockey. Sledge hockey players sit on specially designed sleds, or 'sledges', with skate blades under the seat. Two sticks are used to not only pass, stickhandle and shoot the puck, but also to propel and maneuver their sledges. (Hockey Canada, 2013)

Like many of the 161,000 non-profit and voluntary organizations in Canada, the highest percentage of non-profits (21%) is comprised of sport and recreation organizations like the Calgary Sledge Hockey Association. (Statistics Canada, 2004) Consequently, the Calgary Sledge Hockey Association faces struggles common to non-profit societies including raising community awareness, engaging committed volunteers, fundraising, and in drawing in and retaining new athletes to advance its sports programs. (Imagine Canada, 2005) The typical marketing models drawn from traditional sport management theories have not been as successful in mainstream sports (Vail, 2007, p. 572) and they are even less effective in an adaptive sport like sledge hockey where the primary participants are traditionally socially excluded members of the community. Also, most communities lack awareness about people with disabilities and adaptive sport in general which makes it challenging to secure helpful community resources and grow this adaptive sport even though it is recognized by Hockey Canada and at all levels of minor hockey in Alberta.

However, if the sport continues to grow there is precedent to show it along with the impacts of other amateur and recreational sports will have a positive economic influence on the local economy. A study conducted by Berrett found there was a \$540.67 million

dollar contribution made to the local Edmonton economy in 2000 from the amateur sport and active recreation sector alone which also had a significant impact on job creation as well. (Berrett, 2001, p. 46)

However, recognizing that traditional models are not as effective in sport development, Vail's work suggests using community development theories with three main priorities including identifying a community champion, developing collaborative partnerships and delivering quality sport programming instead of the traditional sport management focus of service exchanges and sponsorships to build profile in the community. (Vail, 2007, p. 571) Vail contends that following this model fosters organizational development based on building relationships with key community partners and a few community champions and by focusing on enhancing volunteerism, educating the public, fundraising through unique partnerships and by taking an asset-based approach to enhancing the vision of the organization. (Vail, 2007, p. 578)

### **Practicum and Case Study**

It's primarily with this community development approach in mind that I began my practicum with the Calgary Sledge Hockey Association under the direction of a community champion I sought out and engaged about the sport in Todd Millar. Todd is a prominent business leader and hockey advocate in the Calgary community. His mentorship proved very helpful from a leadership development and empowerment perspective as a large portion of my practicum opportunity was spent in areas like board development, building new community partnerships and in raising awareness and funds within the community for this growing adapted sport. Millar proved to be a good choice as he embodies all of the characteristics Vail discusses this when she says, "A catalyst

for community development is an individual or group who believes change is possible and is willing to take the first steps needed to create interest and support. The individual or group believes in the power of people to build healthy communities and is well connected and respected. This catalyst is needed to identify appropriate community partners and to initiate action in the community.” (Vail, 2007, p. 575)

In my role, I also developed both a community and economic development action plan (referenced in the recommendations section) and a business plan for the Calgary Sledge Hockey Association. (Appendix A) I also built a framework for a survey (Appendix B) that can be implemented in partnership with the community in Calgary to measure whether adaptive sport participation leads to greater community participation among people with disabilities. A recent study conducted in 2012 seems to confirm this assumption as it showed people with physical disabilities who participated in adapted sports had significantly higher quality of life and community participation scores compared to people with physical disabilities not involved in any adapted sports. (Yazicioglu, 2012, p. 1) However, it's important to recognize that there are numerous factors I've observed through my past experience that may affect the growth of this adaptive sport in Calgary.

Some of these factors are:

- Lack of community awareness about the sport among potential participants
- Lack of volunteer resources to help market this adapted sport to all target markets
- Lack of economic resources from potential athletes who may wish to play the sport but cannot afford it due to other expenses related to disability.

- Reluctance from some participants and their families to try the sport due to its reputation as being too rough or too difficult to play.
- Lack of a defined governance model and funding resources at the organizational level for succession planning and to sustain current levels of programming into the future.
- Lack of accessible transportation in the community to allow people with disabilities to be able to get to and from sport venues and facilities.
- Lack of wheelchair accessibility at some facilities to play the sport in their arenas.

It's in this current environment that I began my practicum using a community-development approach to increase sport participation and enhance communities through sport. The practicum timeframe is too short to measure outcomes fully but this report identifies many areas of significant progress. It highlights future work and further areas of research for policy makers and practitioners in both adaptive sport and community development that can be used to enhance participation among people with disabilities in sports and in their communities in general.

## II. Literature Review

The concepts and theories of community and economic development make up the foundation of the theoretical lens with which I assessed my practicum experience.

### **What is community development?**

The overall definition of community development could be considered as an evolving process where the ultimate goal is to help empower people within a community.

Community development enables people to share in activities among those with similar needs and goals in either a social, economic or ecological context. Wilkinson references five conditions or developmental activities that help to “elaborate the relationship between the community and social well-being.” (Wilkinson, 1991, p. 73) These conditions are distributive justice, which is focused on social equity and equality, open communication, tolerance or an acceptance of differences, collective action and lastly communion where interaction takes place to help commonalities emerge in terms of developing a shared purpose while also enhancing the self-awareness and self-actualization of individuals. (Wilkinson, 1991, pp. 74,75)

Clearly, some of these conditions will be prioritized differently in communities depending on the social development being sought and the relationships of the stakeholders involved. However, Summers also points out how community development requires the creation of systems and processes to mediate between these stakeholders and the society in order contribute to the well-being of all humans. (Summers, 1986, p. 356)

This is an essential point because community development needs a structure composed of organized processes in order to be successful. Yet, it also requires

collaboration and engagement to help determine the specific ideas, needs and outcomes that the community has indicated they want.

Bender speaks of engagement and interaction saying that “a community can be viewed as a network of social relations” (Bender, 1978, p. 7) Moffitt expands on Bender’s view saying it is “more than simply a network of linkages – more even than a combination of symbolic and symbiotic functions both network-based and place-based” For Moffitt, community is a process full of interplay between networks that is adaptive, multi-layered and self-reinforcing where contingencies are in place to meet challenges, cope with the needs of citizens and interact with other external systems. (Moffitt, 1999, p. 240)

Vail also adds, “Although it has been interpreted to mean different things to different people in different places, the fundamental element of all community-development initiatives is about people helping people improve their life conditions by addressing common interests.” (Vail, 2007, p. 572) Improvements in the quality of life such as better transportation systems, education, and cultural facilities are also indicators of development. Sometimes these indicators of development are difficult to quantify, but they are nonetheless important. (Blair, 1995, p. 15)

Sen summarizes community development saying, “Development has to be more concerned with enhancing the lives we lead and the freedoms we enjoy. Expanding the freedoms we have reason to value not only makes our lives richer and more unfettered, but also allows us to be fuller social persons, exercising our own volitions, and interacting with –and influencing- the world in which we live.” (Sen, 1999, pp. 14,15)

## **Social Exclusion and People with Disabilities**

The problem of social exclusion among people with disabilities in communities is multi-faceted and quite complex. Social exclusion occurs due to a range of reasons including inaccessible venues, poor public transportation options, poverty, lack of accessible communication options or it even can occur because of unemployment or active discrimination where those with disabilities were simply not allowed to be heard.

(Tepperman, 2011, p. 337)

Sen argues there is a need for transparent discussion in communities around the value placed on diverse capabilities and the public's priorities. He argues policy makers should make clear what the value judgements are in a community instead of implying they can somehow be avoided. Sen argues that public participation is the only solution to probably evaluate community priorities and that in the case of socially excluded groups like those with disabilities; their views are often overlooked when policy makers supplement income and commodity data with information of other types that glazes over the diversity between groups. (Sen, 1999, p. 110)

Philippa Russell vividly highlights the outcomes of social exclusion as she cites a Disability Rights Commission of the views and ambitions of young disabled people aged 16–24 where the young people were ambitious for well-paid jobs, travel, their own home and family and access to continuing education. But they saw reality as lower incomes and continuing dependency upon families for support and a social life. (Russell, 2003, p. 219)

She cites how Current Government policy in the U.K. places great emphasis upon the active participation of all children and young people both within their own assessments,

education and care and within wider service planning, development and review. There are exciting examples of young people directly contributing to the design of services and developing their skills as community leaders. But much more needs to be done to promote similar participation by disabled children and young people. Importantly, 74 per cent of the young people in the Disability Rights Commission (DRC) survey felt that the Government had limited awareness of their needs and rarely listened to their views. They did not yet feel that they were 'active citizens' in their local communities. (Russell, 2003, p. 219)

Burchardt also addresses the cyclical nature of social exclusion and disability starting that someone who is socially excluded is at greater risk of becoming disabled, and someone who becomes disabled is at greater risk of becoming socially excluded. (Burchardt, 2003, p. 62)

Wilkinson discusses this inequality in communities saying it "can stifle and distort the contacts among people that are necessary for community development. This particularly is a threat when growth serves the interest of an elite group rather than that of the community as a whole. The opposite can occur when growth in a small community upsets an existing structure of inequality, making it possible for interaction to occur where it was blocked before. Community development in such a case is encouraged by increased interaction even if the increase carries heightened potential for conflict." (Wilkinson, 1991, pp. 104,105)

Yet, Yeo points out how established and unchanging power dynamics in communities and within systems are what set the agenda and points out how until those problems are addressed, consultation and participation among the marginalized will only occur if it

corresponds to this agenda or is confined within it. Yeo also makes an important observation that the most marginalized people among the disabled are also less likely to have a broader perspective on the world around them that is causing their oppression and are also less likely to be able to offer solutions. Yeo's solution is to make the democratic movement of people with disabilities a priority to lessen the power gaps both externally in the community and also to broaden them within the disability community itself so that a wider representation of needs can be heard. Yeo says consultation and participation can only be really valid where there is not a great power imbalance, and where the supposed beneficiaries have the opportunity to discuss the wider context, the level of funding and are able to offer potential solutions. (Yeo, 2005, p. 23)

If the power gap is to be addressed, a priority has to be to strengthen the democratic movement of disabled people and of poor people in general. Again this is not as clear-cut as it might appear. The most articulate, active and vociferous people in any group are rarely the most marginalised. For example, an urban-based disabled people's organisation led by middle-class men who became disabled only after receiving an education and building a career, does not automatically provide legitimate representation of, for example, the needs of the poorest disabled women in isolated rural areas. Training and support is needed to enable people to listen, comprehend and accurately represent another's situation. (Yeo, 2005, p. 23)

The notion of poverty is primarily focused upon distributional issues, the lack of resources at the disposal of an individual or household. In contrast, notions such as

social exclusion focus primarily on relational issues, in other words inadequate social participation, lack of social integration and lack of power. (Room, 1995, p. 5)

Scholars have argued that people are not generally motivated to attain the best of all possible worlds, but that their preferences are shaped instead by the limited opportunities presented in the situation at hand. In other words, people go for what looks attainable. (Ramsey, 1996, p. 110)

While all of this is true, one of the most important parts of community development as it relates to people with disabilities in Calgary, Canada is accessibility and how a lack of it can cause greater social exclusion. Irene Casas identifies the following four things community developers should do when working with people who have disabilities. They are: Allow the community to give voice to what they perceive as problems, generate trust within the community, support community-led initiatives, and involve the local residents and the community in generating solutions. (Casas, 2007, p. 466)

Taylor addresses this by discussing the need for engagement and dialogue as it helps to remind the community to engage more than just those who have power and influence. "The importance of a reciprocal relationship between citizens and society should not divert us from the initial premise... that fundamental rights to income and access to the basic material goods and services are essential to empowerment and, indeed, to the exercise of any right to participate. (Taylor, 2003, pp. 101,102)

### **Social, Economic & Health Benefits of Sport in Communities**

Many studies have been done in Canada and in the United States and beyond about the social, economic and health benefits that participation in sport brings to

communities. Here is just a short summary of a select few that relate to Canada specifically, sport clubs and the economic impacts of amateur sport.

In *Young Peoples Socialisation into Sport: A Case Study of an Athletics Club*, Macphail states: Community based sport clubs are important in the development of young people's physical skills, cooperation, leadership skills, submerging personal interests for the common good and perseverance. (Macphail, 2003, p. 260)

Also, The Commonwealth Games Association of Canada credits sport development with all sorts of community benefits including, disease prevention, psychological well-being, social cohesion, crime reduction and enhanced productivity and offers examples on how sport reaches out to youth at risk, assists people with disabilities in building independence and even assisting nations in building peace and pride. To them sport transcends all barriers and should increasingly be used to bring about social change. (Commonwealth Games Association of Canada, 2002)

Meanwhile, Canadians feel that it is important that Canada's athletes perform well at international sporting events indicating the top three areas they believe are most impacted by Canada's Olympic performance are 68% national pride, 48% inspiring youth to perform their best and 42% inspiring youth to participate in sports. (Ipsos Reid, 2004) Canadians also see community-level sports significantly benefiting their local communities more generally as a source of fun and recreation (64%), reducing crime (49%), bringing people together (48%), building community pride (43%) and providing a rich source of tradition and history (26%). (Decima Research Inc., 2002)

A random telephone survey was also conducted with 1,005 Canadian youth aged 12 to 21 on their participation in and views on organized sport. Respondents indicated that

playing sports has the following benefits: improves their health (99%), helps them make new friends (87%), and makes them feel better about themselves (85%). Overall, 69% of Canadian youth participate in organized sport at least occasionally during the school year (excluding physical education classes). (Ipsos Reid, 2003)

Mondello addresses the impact that amateur sport has on the economy by highlighting a study where data was collected from a wide variety of amateur sporting events around the United States. The results showed there are many factors associated with the economic impact of a given event, such as the length of the competition, the number of non-local attendees and their spending habits, the proximity of the competitors involved, etc. The study concluded that one-time amateur sporting events might be more likely to generate economic increases compared to many professional sporting events. Also, women's amateur competitions have the potential to produce more revenue than certain men's events. The final noteworthy conclusion was that amateur events focusing on teenage participants rather than senior competitors tend to experience greater economic benefits. (Mondello, 2004, pp. 331-342)

### **Adaptive Sport, Community Development & People with Disabilities**

The relationship between people with disabilities, adaptive sport and community development could be considered more of a promising strategy of inclusion than it is an established community development strategy. Yet, as Wilkinson states, the "community is where the individual and the society meet" (Wilkinson, 1991, p. 77) which perhaps makes adaptive sport participation as a possible solution in need of greater research

and study due to the many factors that put greater social exclusion onto people with disabilities in communities. If sport and recreation can increase community participation among a segment of the community where 1 in every 7 people has a disability than the extra research and study could prove fruitful. (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2006)

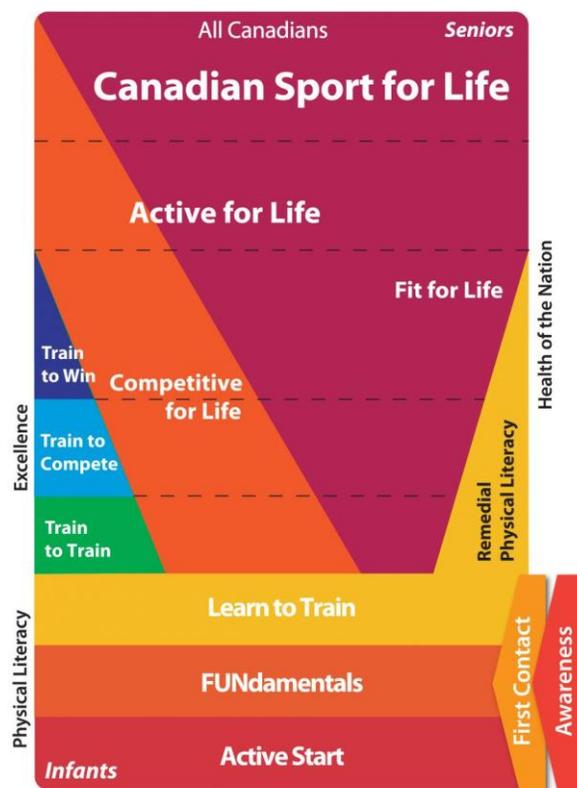
One of the big researchers of the role sport among people with disabilities plays in community development is Right to Play International who argue:

Sport changes the person with a disability in an equally profound way. For some, it marks their first experience of human agency — that is, it enables them to make choices and take risks on their own. For others, the gradual acquisition of skills and accomplishments builds the self-confidence needed to take on other life challenges such as pursuing education or employment. Sport also provides opportunities for persons with disabilities to develop social skills, forge friendships outside their families, exercise responsibility, and take on leadership roles. Through sport, persons with disabilities learn vital social interaction skills, develop independence, and become empowered to lead and make change happen. (Right To Play International, 2008, pp. 171,172)

One other interesting study highlights how physical activity among children with physical disabilities not only increases socialization but it also is a much needed normalizing experience. Physical activity and sport enhances their own perceptions and understanding of their social identity as children and not as children with disabilities where the disability is considered the dominant or defining issue. This boosts social networks with peers and provides a normalizing context where children can internalize

the beneficial aspects of sport and share in the experience of being part of a team in a competitive context. The study suggests more opportunities in this area are needed as competitive programs like the Paralympics are not integrated and limited in participation to a few elite athletes. (Taub, 2000, p. 408)

The research from Canadian Sport For Life (CS4L) expands on this as it “links sport, education, recreation and health and aligns community, provincial and national programming. Long Term Athlete Development (LTAD) is a seven-stage training, competition and recovery pathway guiding an individual’s experience in sport and physical activity from infancy through all phases of adulthood. CS4L, with LTAD, represents a paradigm shift in the way Canadians lead and deliver sport and physical activity in Canada.” (Canadian Sport For Life, 2013) This view is a dramatic departure from traditional sport models (excellence and high performance is only a small aspect), has been developed for athletes with disabilities and is graphically displayed below:



[http://www.canadiansportforlife.ca/learn 1](http://www.canadiansportforlife.ca/learn1)

Canadian Sport For Life (CS4L) argues that creating a Long Term Athlete Development (LTAD) model for people with disabilities can help “ensure the longevity of sport and activity for all Canadians with disabilities. CS4L encourages and helps implement ways in which organizations can take action to enhance sport in Canada. National Sport Organizations (NSOs) and Disability Sport Organizations (DSOs) can ensure program success by incorporating LTAD principles. The Canadian sport system at large also benefits when these organizations collaborate and share their expertise with participants and stakeholders.” (Canadian Sport For Life, 2013)

Another study reinforces how a cross-disciplinary approach to physical education and therapy programs can be motivating to students with mental or physical disabilities by integrating sport skills into therapy and as a result increasing participation. The study

showed how therapy designed around using sports skills was a motivating experience that encouraged those with disabilities to participate thereby increasing acceptance among their peers and reducing the frustration among therapists and educators in engaging those who have disabilities. (Kasser, 1997, p. 50)

Yet, even with its successes, (Donnelly, 2002, p. 13) points out there are barriers in making adaptive sport a vehicle for social inclusion amongst those with disabilities:

Researchers involved specifically in sport policy issues are deeply suspicious of the potential of organized sport (as opposed to other forms of physical recreation) to promote social inclusion. They have seen little evidence to support the idea that sport is an ideal solution to social exclusion, although most could point to some programmes that are organized on a socially inclusive basis. They note that organized sport, by its very nature, involves competition, and most organized sports occur in hierarchical and competitive structures (e.g., leagues). An emphasis on competitive success, over-conformity to the norms of the sport ethic as a basis for identity reaffirmation, moving up as an individual to the next level, etc., all combine to make exclusion and marginalization a normative part of the sport experience. Also, sports pit one group against another, and there are numerous examples of such groups being formed along lines (e.g., ethno-cultural affiliation) that may not promote social inclusion. It is important to take these traditional aspects of organized sport programmes into account when establishing activities to promote the principles of social inclusion.

This is something we have grappled with at the Calgary Sledge Hockey Association, but the challenge hasn't been based on ethnic or cultural differences that could cause social

exclusion. Instead, the challenge has been to ensure the competitive and recreational aspirations of all our participants can be satisfied. As an organization we've been successful thus far in creating levels of competition for beginners, recreational players and competitive athletes with Paralympic aspirations. This is largely due to the fact that our members have mutually agreed through a vote at our annual general meeting that all three groups should have equal rights to our ice time resources and equipment. Having three distinct ice times every week and enough players to form three distinct clubs is a luxury we enjoy and the mutual respect among all three groups brokered through ongoing discussion is an impressive accomplishment but as participation rates change we could find an organized sport model difficult to maintain into the future, especially since funding models usually favor competition.

### **Building Empowerment, Partnerships and Social Capital in the Community**

Social capital and individual empowerment are important key outcomes for marginalized groups that the literature says could be improved through adaptive sport. Shaffer describes social capital this way: "Like other forms of capital, social capital is a productive resource in communities. Unlike other forms, social capital is not invested in physical things; it is a resource that exists collectively within and between individuals. Social capital differs from other forms of capital in that it increases as people use it and it decreases if they don't use it." (Shaffer, Deller, & Marcouiller, 2007, p. 205)

Lin points out how social capital has four outcomes in a community which are the flow of information to people and organizations, the exertion of influence on decision makers, social credentials which allows influence to occur and the reinforcement of identity

through recognition of a person or group's claim to resources. (Lin, 2001, pp. 6-9)

Developing identity and a sense of belonging in the community are two areas where people with disabilities who are traditionally marginalized need more support but they need to be a part of the process.

“When individuals are able to become involved in creating, and transforming, the meaning of their physical activities, the transformative effects could reach beyond health and quality of life issues: “It is possible that the struggle to achieve a fully democratized sport and leisure [one in which the participants determine the form, circumstances, and meaning of their participation] might result in the capacity to transform communities. People could learn initiative, community endeavour, collective rather than individual values, self-determination, etc., that could permit them to begin to take charge of their own lives and communities” (Donnelly, 1993, p. 434)

Individual empowerment is one of the ultimate goals for people with disabilities in communities but it's also about building capacity and social capital both within the micro community of people with disabilities and in the broader community at large. Vail describes how this community development process includes both individual and community achievements that are necessary for positive social change:

The idea of community development as a process is closely aligned with capacity building, which implies building on the strengths of a community and developing the skills, knowledge, and leadership such that the community (i.e., individuals, groups, and organizations) is capable of recognizing and solving local problems (Frank & Smith, 1999; Goodman et al., 1998; Kirk & Shutte, 2004; Simpson et al., 2003). Capacity building not only requires skills, people, and plans but also

motivation, commitment, economic and financial resources, policy development and supportive institutions, and physical resources.

Community development is based on the premise that community sustainability can be improved over time in a self-sufficient action-oriented manner. The social and health benefits of this approach include a sense of shared purpose among citizens, a building of trust, and a sense of control over individual and community life—generally more empowered, competent, self-confident people who collectively contribute to community health and well-being (Smith et al., 2001).

Capacity is assessed differently for each community but relates to the quality and quantity of human, physical, and financial resources that a community has to assist with the change process. (Vail, 2007, p. 574)

Social capital can be broken down into the bonding social ties between people in similar circumstances like those found among people who share the experience of having a disability or by being part of a team or more intimately through their associations with family, close friends and neighbours. Or, there can also be the bridging form of social capital which encompasses the more distant ties people have with people in the community who share similar interests or the connections they make with co-workers and colleagues. (Woolcock, 2001, pp. 13-14)

Bridging social capital creates synergies integrated between institutions and established private networks in a community. This is a particularly helpful insight because it points out the need for a process to build strategic relationships that can bring the greatest benefit to the community for the future and it outlines how it can be achieved.

Partnerships like this can be powerful but they also can be problematic given the

competing and sometimes conflicting interests that are present for both public institutions and community groups. (Woolcock, *Social Capital: Implications for Development Theory, Research & Policy*, 1998, pp. 235,236)

To make community partnerships work Vail says there has to be a sense of urgency among all of the groups involved, “One of the key preconditions needed for the formation of partnerships is that all stakeholders must perceive that the stakes are high and that interdependence with the other organizations is strong.” (Vail, 2007, p. 576) Vail goes on to expand on this to point out one of the least understood aspects of community partnerships:

The aspect of partnering that appears to be least understood by researchers is the process itself. Uhlik (1995) identified a number of steps for the implementation of partnerships in recreation. The first step included educating oneself about partnerships and the needs and resources of others. The second step involved conducting a needs assessment and resources inventory to identify common needs and potential areas of shared resources. The third step focused on the identification of potential partners by researching not only the needs and resources that a potential stakeholder might bring but also the organization’s mission and accountability. Finally, the fourth step was to compare and contrast the needs and resources of potential stakeholders to ensure that those asked to come to the table would generally receive equal levels of benefit from the partnership arrangement. (Vail, 2007, pp. 576,577)

In discussing partnerships within the community field Kaufman says, “The community field consists of an organization of actions carried on by persons working through

various associations or groups.” Kaufman further explains that the community field studies the interplay of community interactions in regard to demographic, ecological and physical settings which helps to prioritize and structure the identified community needs. (Kaufman, 1985)

Often this takes the form of interstitial relationships between community groups that are either based on a buyer/seller dynamic or it can be a more formal and permanently coordinated relationship through structures like the Chamber of Commerce or a local school board. (Bacon, 1972) Bates and Bacon explain that even though there are conflicting goals, the internal relationships between groups in the community field somehow still work together to organize structures in which social, economic and environmental concerns are addressed. Clearly, as we are just beginning this work at the Calgary Sledge Hockey Association, it will be important to manage these relationships and create partnerships of equal benefit as much as possible.

### **Increasing Community Participation among People with Disabilities**

Most people would probably agree that a community should have a shared vision for the future and part of that vision should be about creating opportunities for its members based on the needs they feel are most important. Authentic, open communication is an essential tool in helping to make this happen as it strengthens communities and creates a sense of social cohesiveness. Cohesiveness within the community and a strong range of accessible and adaptive networks that can meet citizens at their own desired participation levels is also very important. As (Wilkinson, 1991, p. 75) points out, for a community to be strong there cannot be too much focus placed in any one area of

development, even though it's often tempting to focus most heavily on economic growth. In speaking specifically of people with disabilities, The World Bank argues for a specific approach in communities that is outlined below:

For community development to be truly effective as an approach towards promoting the inclusion of disabled people, micro and macro approaches need to be integrated. Some emerging lessons on ways to include disabled people are:

- Supporting a twin track approach of targeting people with disabilities and integrating their voices and needs within the broader project cycle. While specific sub-projects with an emphasis on addressing disability concerns are valuable, communities should be encouraged to address the voices and needs of vulnerable groups.

- A strong enabling environment, wherein disability concerns are mainstreamed into institutional frameworks and are supported by progressive legislation is critical to empowering disabled people. To ensure sustainability, it is also important that multiple stakeholders such as local government, civil society organizations, and the private sector, as well as disabled people be involved.

- Project staff should be equipped in terms of capacities and resources to integrate disability in programs. People with disabilities should be employed as facilitators and project managers to ensure self-representation and better outreach.

- Inclusion of disabled people can be accomplished only if a "vulnerability perspective" is integrated into all aspects of the operations. Disability, much like gender, is a cross-cutting issue and should be incorporated in all stages of the

project cycle -design and appraisal, implementation, review and monitoring and evaluation. (The World Bank, 2005)

Encouraging participation is essential to effective community development and the strategies used to foster participation are often central to the success or failure of local initiatives. The most key factor in a successful strategy is to ensure community members are engaged to participate in the formative stages of any development plan. People with disabilities in particular need to feel involved, engaged and relied upon in order for them to be committed to participation. As Richards and Dalbey state, “the more stakeholders are involved in decision-making the more predictable and fair the development process can be.” (Richards, 2006, p. 23)

Fraser discusses four different approaches to community participation and provides insight about the importance of understanding how a community is composed and what its interests are. “Thinking about who is constituted as ‘the community’ and how ‘the community’s interests are understood is critical, at least for people interested in the operations of power. Reflecting on how community participation is envisaged, who is included and who is left out, is also worthwhile.” Fraser discusses some of these political influences when she says, “the politics of community work also involve figuring out which perspective(s) usually prevail, and how counter-positions are treated (Ife, 2002). With this, it is worth considering how decision-making usually occurs. If some community members dominate, what does it mean for others?” (Fraser, 2005, p. 287)

Knowing the history of a community, identifying the key leaders and community members and understanding the power dynamics in a community should all be part of the planning aspects of devising a participation strategy. Ayres, also points out the

community developer should also try to get the community to identify the barriers to their success. Ayres writes that this process helps “assist the community in solving problems and planning for a viable future.” A visioning session helps everyday citizens to be part of decision-making which allows people to become empowered through their participation helping them to become more comfortable with and skilled in dealing with change.” (Ayres, 1996, p. 21)

### III. The Internship

For the last 15 years, I have been both a player and a manager with the Calgary Sledge Hockey Association (CSHA). When I started, I had just moved to Calgary and was living in a residence at Mount Royal College where I was the only person with a visible physical disability in my college community. I had grown up in a small town where I was always consistently the only person with a disability in my classes at school and in most of my daily activities. Yet, when I discovered the adaptive sport of sledge hockey while watching the Paralympics in 1998, I soon discovered there were many other people with disabilities like mine who were playing the sport in the city where I'd moved. Soon, I found a community of people who share many of my experiences and a place where I felt I had true belonging combining my experience with disability and my love of the sport of hockey.

When I joined, all of the players in Calgary were part of an organization called the Spina Bifida Association of Southern Alberta. All the athletes, with few exceptions, all had this particular type of disability. I also have Spina Bifida, which is a birth defect in which the backbone and spinal canal do not close properly before birth. Roach's study (2011) found the following outcomes of 84 adults interviewed in the USA who were born with Spina Bifida:

Forty-two percent had normal IQs... Forty-four percent had regular education and 8% achieved college degrees. Fifty-six percent were unemployed. Thirty percent lived independently. Twenty-three percent were either married or divorced with nine normal offspring. Eighty-five percent dressed themselves, 65% shopped independently, 54% drove. (Roach, 2011, pp. 1246-1252)

At 21 years old and as a new player I was already living independently and attending college and I was also a few years older than most of the other participants. As a result, I was put into a leadership role right away in the organization and in my early days of participation I was both the team captain and assistant coach.

For many years, we operated solely as a recreational organization and we received all of our funding for ice time and equipment from the Spina Bifida Association of Southern Alberta. However, in the last four to five years we discovered more and more players were coming to sledge hockey that did not have Spina Bifida and instead had some other form of disability either acquired through injury or birth. These individuals joined in the sport with us but as a result, the sole funding support from the Spina Bifida Association of Southern Alberta eventually was discontinued because there were too many players benefiting from funding who did not have the disability mandated for the association's financial support.

It was at this point that my role in the organization transitioned from an operational manager and captain role to the current role I have now as the Calgary Sledge Hockey Association President though it wasn't fully formalized until 2011 when we officially became a society. I was working as President in Dec. 2012 when it became apparent that an internship through the CEDEV program at Penn State University could be established with the help of a community champion and practicum supervisor like Todd Millar where I could use the community and economic development principles I'd learned in classes to further build participation in the sport and hopefully bring more empowerment to the small community.

One of my first tasks during the practicum was to find, interview and then offer roles to individuals who could join our board as there were three spots to fill in late 2012. Using Todd Millar's input as the community champion identified in Vail's work, I was able to identify, interview and offer roles to three new candidates for the CSHA board through a local volunteering board match website called Volunteer Calgary. This included a new Treasurer (Jeff Metcalf, an accountant with Condor Petroleum), a new Legal advisor (Brian Clark, Partner with Brian Clark and Associates Law Firm) and a Sales and Marketing representative (David Thompson, Sales Director for Western Canada at American Express.) to bring our Board of Directors back to a group of nine individuals with links to corporate Calgary, and Calgary Minor Hockey. Developing these two key areas was a priority that Millar and I identified as being central to the CSHA's external growth focus to expand fundraising and raise awareness for the sport in the community over the next three to five years.

Along with board development and recruitment, the biggest component of my practicum was spent implementing the community development approaches outlined by (Vail, 2007) (Lin, 2001) (Shaffer, Deller, & Marcouiller, 2007) in creating local community partnerships and linkages for the sport to raise social capital while also focusing on community awareness and in increasing participation, bonding social capital and funding opportunities for the Calgary Sledge Hockey Association. While it's difficult to show effective short term measures for many of these goals, during the span of my practicum, I was able to determine that participation in the Calgary Sledge Hockey Association is growing. In September 2012 the association had 37 registered members and as of March 2013 that number grew to 44 as our teams registered in the Western

Canada Sledge Hockey Tournament with clubs at the novice, intermediate and senior levels.

This is important to note because even though there is no direct competition from local organizations that offer specific access to sledge hockey in Southern Alberta, there is competition from many other non-profit societies that offer adaptive sports to people with disabilities for funding from the community, the government and other funding bodies like the Canadian Paralympic Committee. This is why it's important to show steady growth in participation because pursuing unique partnerships in the hockey community was another important aspect of my practicum especially if our sport is to be taken seriously in an already hockey intense market in Calgary. Thankfully, this also was quite successful as new players realized sledge hockey is an adaptive sport where athletes with and without disabilities can participate together. As you'll read later, one team took up this opportunity giving many players who had not previously been exposed to the sport the chance to play the game competitively.

Some of the other work I completed during my internship was:

- Using Vail's work as a starting point, I made contact with and forged partnerships with very large and prominent community organizations in the Calgary Food Bank, Hockey Calgary and Canada's Sports Hall of Fame to publicize our events in exchange for ad placements, volunteer commitments and team participation at our tournament. Canada's Sports Hall of Fame donated \$1 dollar from all admissions to our association while Calgary's Food Bank and Hockey Calgary both publicized our tournament through media releases and social media posts to the community.

- Brought in a team of able-bodied players under the age of 12 from Calgary Minor Hockey to participate in our tournament in the novice division alongside four players with disabilities who were placed on their team. This was an innovative idea that had never been done before at the competitive sledge hockey levels in Calgary and was helpful from a community partnership perspective as the Vice-President of Calgary Minor Hockey was their coach. A DVD of their final game was also created and circulated across all of Calgary Minor Hockey reaching more than 12,000 hockey organizations around Calgary. The team used borrowed sleds and equipment and played the sport for the very first time at the tournament.

From an inclusion standpoint this allowed for their full participation in a game everyone could play equally well instead of putting people with disabilities in a position where they are playing non-adapted sports that are not fully accessible for them. To quote the team, “This experience goes a long way to broaden their understanding of what it means to be disabled and able bodied AND of the possibilities that sport provides (skill development, personal development, camaraderie). We have witnessed in our boys examples of empathy and team building that we don’t typically get to see. We would love to make this an annual event for our club in the future.” (Bill Gould, Assistant Coach, Trails West Wolves)

- Ensured accessibility modifications were made to the rinks at Winsport on the benches to better allow sledge hockey participation during league games and tourneys. Sledge hockey players can actually skate in and out from these specially designed benches giving sledge hockey and stand-up hockey player’s full access to the ice. Only two rinks in all of Alberta have the modifications outlined by the

Canadian Recreation Facilities Council. (Canadian Recreation Facilities Council, 2007)

- Engaged The City of Calgary- Recreation, Cerebral Palsy Association, Canadian Paraplegic Association and Spina Bifida Association of Southern Alberta to participate in a survey regarding adaptive sport and its influence on community participation.
- Wrote a Business Plan, a Community and Economic Development Plan and a community based survey for the Calgary Sledge Hockey Association for growth, succession planning and to determine an approach in the community to measure participation among people with disabilities.
- Secured a two-year commitment from a community sponsor for jerseys (Stepper Homes – found through social media marketing in the first month of the practicum )
- Recruited and trained an event planner from the community and raised nearly \$10,000 in profit for the association in donations by hosting our tournament from March 8 to 10, 2013 in Calgary.
- Secured a \$10,000 grant from the Canadian Paralympic Committee for ice time in 2012/13. Applied for an additional \$10,000 for ice time in 2013/14 and a \$12,000 grant for equipment contingent on finding a community partner to cover costs.
- Hosted The World Sledge Hockey Challenge for the second year in a row, which is an international tournament that brought national teams from four different countries to Calgary to compete before the annual World Championships.
- Engaged Right To Play International to plan a world record event for longest sledge hockey game that is scheduled to take place in Sept. 2013

- Assisted Sport Calgary with developing a video on the power of sport for the community using sledge hockey and one of our players as a spokesperson.
- Became a Member of Sport Calgary, Volunteer Calgary & the Calgary Ability Network, a specific network of organizations that provide community options to people with disabilities.
- Gave presentations on sledge hockey to public schools, the Alberta Children's Hospital and to University of Calgary students as part of the Changing Minds, Changing Lives program from the Canadian Paralympic Committee.
- Began the process to become a registered charity. In Canada, non-profit societies cannot issue tax receipts for donations so it's an important advantage to become a registered charity in order to be able to secure donations more easily.
- Participated in a demo of sledge hockey for the Calgary Hitmen hockey club in front of 12,000 fans at the Scotiabank Saddledome where I spoke to the crowd about the details of how to get involved in sledge hockey.
- Received donations and grants from Hockey Alberta, The Calgary Flames and The Alberta Sport Wildlife & Recreation Program Fund in support of our tournament.
- Social Media growth. 100 Twitter followers to 988 followers from Oct. to March 2013. 65 to 119 Facebook page likes in this same time period.
- Created new marketing materials and redesigned [www.calgarysledghockey.ca](http://www.calgarysledghockey.ca)
- Approved a Logo Redesign - New individual brands were made for all teams.

## **Internship Observations**

I found my internship experience to be rewarding and rich with insights as to how the small adaptive sporting community I've been an integral part of for so many years has both significant barriers and yet also has great potential to expand in the City of Calgary.

This internship experience showed me how an inclusion strategy to bring non-disabled athletes into an adaptive sport as full participants was a barrier breaking and innovative experience where everyone had nearly equal access, ability and skill. In my opinion, this concept to make adaptive sport inclusive to people without disabilities and to have them willingly participate is an action that breaks down barriers of social isolation, inequality and stratification for those with disabilities in communities. This is because the sport brings non-disabled people into direct social contact with those who have disabilities where they all must work on a team as equals. New players without disabilities get to experience how fun yet difficult the sport is to play at any level and that opportunity changes player attitudes on the ice as they realize the experience is so similar to their own sporting experience. This changed attitudes among all the participants and by the end of the weekend the players on the other team saw people with disabilities in a new light that I'm sure will carry forward with them in their future interactions. In this sense, the reverse inclusion that happened at our hockey tournament was an act that I truly believe can improve the bridging social capital and ultimately the social mobility (Lin, 2001, p. 8) of people with disabilities in communities especially in a hockey obsessed country like Canada.

However, despite that great accomplishment I found a barrier for the growth of the adapted sport of sledge hockey is that the community itself is quite small, socially excluded and has many of the common barriers to community participation that are typical among people with disabilities. These barriers take the form of unemployment, poverty, lack of accessible transportation and a relatively small amount of community based assets and bonded social capital amongst participants which makes change slow and difficult.

Probably one of the most interesting personal insights of my entire practicum was the realization that while the sledge hockey community I support is united in its desire to play the adaptive sport there are extreme differences among all athletes with disabilities as to the specific values they have about the sport.

These views mirror an interesting hierarchy in the community of people with disabilities that I don't believe is discussed often. What I've noticed are vast differences in experience and perspective between those born with disabilities and those that acquire them through an injury and how those differing views influence what values are important to them in our small adaptive sport community that is seen by others as perhaps a more unified community than it actually is. For example, individuals that acquire disability through an accident or through military service are typically compensated economically via insurance, through veteran affairs or from within their own community so that they can get job retraining, accessibility modifications and find community services to help them reintegrate back into community living after a tragic accident or injury. Also, these individuals had different lives before their injuries so they are more likely to have pre-existing social networks and linkages to utilize as well.

The experience for people born with disabilities is not at all the same. The external economic support is mostly not there and the established social networks are also not focused on them in the same manner that they are focused on those who acquire disability. For many people born with disabilities the existing social supports are offered to their parents or their families at the time of their birth to help them adjust to raising a child with a disability but very little thought or resource is put into preparing people born with disabilities for independent living, post-secondary education or full-time employment and the statistics I mentioned earlier in this paper reflect that issue.

These differing scenarios come together in the small community of sledge hockey along with the influences of parents of small children with disabilities to create a wide range of values about what the priorities are for this adaptive sport. For the individuals who come to sledge hockey through an injury scenario the desire is almost always to play the sport as competitively as possible while for the individuals born with disabilities and the parents of children with disabilities, their participation is more focused on having a place to belong, a place to have fun and a place to get some physical activity and recreation into their daily lives. In this sense our association mirrors most minor sport groups where only a small percentage of players can or want to play at the most competitive levels yet it's those same individuals who receive the most resources, time and appreciation from the broader community. During my practicum it was those inequalities and the different desired outcomes among athletes in the competitive versus recreational sport models that created the majority of the conflict that I had to manage. As a result, I've often had to communicate the broader vision of the organization to repeatedly remind our members about how sledge hockey needs to be accessible to

players of all competitive levels and abilities. In my opinion getting all of our members to agree and act upon this shared vision is the biggest threat to the growth of this community. Right to Play acknowledges this limitation of adaptive sport arguing:

When efforts are not made to ensure that sport participation is inclusive, sport remains simply another area where discriminatory attitudes and practices toward persons with disabilities are perpetuated. Even when the decision is made to make sport more accessible and inclusive, without basic steps to foster understanding, knowledge and communication about how to adapt sports appropriately, intolerance can be exacerbated and divisiveness can ensue. With appropriate communication, knowledge and skill, sport can be a powerful tool for transforming community attitudes and empowering individuals through the acquisition of new physical and social skills, self-confidence and positive relationships. (Right To Play International, 2008, p. 173)

Externally however, the limitations aren't as apparent and the potential seems to be great. The community in Calgary is broadly receptive to the sport of sledge hockey and there are a growing number of possibilities for horizontal integration for the organization with like-minded groups that have similar community goals if that ever were to become necessary. During my practicum I also found there were many opportunities to expand the sledge hockey community beyond its current borders through innovative community awareness activities like presenting the sport to schools and interest groups and by organizing demonstrations of the sport to non-disabled athletes through Hockey Calgary. These activities also should raise fundraising opportunities and empower members of the community to enhance their own community participation by taking

ownership of their role in promoting the sport in the community. Also, there are great opportunities in sport that I believe encourage increased community participation and break down stratification and inequality as people come to realize and appreciate the skills of people with disabilities through sport.

I believe the best way forward for the organization is to enhance its internal relationships and focus of intent while broadening its partnerships with the internal and external community to expand its bonded and bridged social capital in an even greater way. The Calgary Sledge Hockey Association should also strengthen its relationship with the Calgary Minor Hockey Association and the other sledge hockey focused groups in Alberta to help bring the experience of reverse inclusion to non-disabled athletes as they try sledge hockey. In doing so, I think we will build a stronger and more inclusive community that has greater respect for the skills and life aspirations of people with disabilities and we will find new and more sustainable funding sources as well as the broader community begins to embrace the values of inclusion. As this happens, it's my hope that the opportunities for community participation among people with disabilities will increase beyond sport and recreation.

I have also come to realize that the structure of the sledge hockey community from a governance and leadership perspective will have to change. Currently, the Calgary Sledge Hockey Association is relying too much on the strength of just a few volunteers and hasn't yet been able to structure itself in a way where it can expand its social capital. As my work continues into the next season of sledge hockey this will be one of my major leadership priorities to ensure that accountability and empowerment opportunities are dispersed throughout the organization.

#### **IV. Recommendations for the Calgary Sledge Hockey Association**

The following Community & Economic Development Plan outlines a roadmap for the Calgary Sledge Hockey Association using a similar plan from the City of Canberra in Australia as a guide. (Disability ACT, 2010). The plan is designed to work with government, business, and sport and community groups to build opportunities for people to participate, socialise and engage in the community through this adaptive sport.

This plan is consistent with the vision of the Calgary Sledge Hockey Association which is to enhance the Sledge Hockey community by removing barriers to athletic success, developing leaders through sport and promoting a culture of acceptance, innovation and team work. Our association believes in Sportsmanship, Leadership, Empowerment, Diversity, Growth and Excellence and is driven to promote the full inclusion of people with disabilities alongside those who do not have disabilities through the great game of sledge hockey thereby providing a model or example of integration and acceptance to be modeled in the community at large. (Appendix A)

Implementing this plan will assist us in becoming better linked and embedded within the Calgary community and hopefully provide an access point for athletes with disabilities to live, participate and interact independently as full and equal members of both the sporting community and the greater community where we all work and play.

This plan is meant to complement the 2013 Business Plan (Appendix A) created for the Calgary Sledge Hockey Association while also specifically outlining some key targets and opportunities in the community where greater growth and community partnerships/linkages could be made for the benefit of all our members and their families. Implementing this plan will take a full effort by the membership of the Calgary Sledge

Hockey Association to build social capital and engage stakeholders in adaptive sport, amateur sport and among sport funders as well as the non-profit sector, business sector and local/provincial governments to bring about greater community awareness, participation and development.

The intention of this plan is to outline a framework of action to empower our local members in helping themselves by increasing participation, independence and an overall respect for what the power of sport can accomplish in communities on behalf of people with disabilities to build better social, cultural, economic and recreational realities.

Using an Asset Based Community Development model (Disability ACT, 2010), this plan identifies and tries to capitalize on the existing assets and strengths within our community rather than focusing solely on the problems and expressed needs of our members. By focusing on the assets we do have as an organization it is hoped that our members will see the possibilities of our exciting vision and use their skills and experience to make change happen both inside the sledge hockey and adaptive sport communities and in the broader external community.

To make this happen, The Calgary Sledge Hockey Association has four main strategic focuses (Disability ACT, 2010) for its community and economic development approach in the community. These are to:

- 1. Connect and Contribute** (Establish linkages in the community and then find ways to build social capital outside of the confines of our own sport to encourage reciprocity and the sharing of resources in the community.)

**2. Encourage and Enable** (Foster the development of independent, positive and community minded athletes in our own organization thereby enabling them to engage with others beyond their community to build mutually beneficial relationships.)

**3. Build and Maintain** (Discover local assets and build relationships with like-minded groups in the community to strengthen the value of adaptive sport and make it more self-reliant for the longer term benefit of the community.)

**4. Innovate and Fundraise** (Establish creative partnerships within the adaptive sports community, the Calgary corporate community and with non-profit societies that serve people with disabilities to develop a collaborative and sustainable funding model that is based on community and corporate support in the Calgary area.)

Later, actions are identified which can assist in building up each of these four main strategic focuses. The Calgary Sledge Hockey Association may not lead the charge in all of these areas but our small organization can support and empower our members and the community overall in raising awareness, creating linkages for people and in creating more networks in the community that are based on a mutual goal of inclusion, resource sharing, community building, trust and respect.

All of our community development activities should be governed by the following standards outlined in (Disability ACT, 2010) and adapted for the CSHA:

- **Use the assets within our own community:** Our association will use an asset mapping process to identify the strengths of our community. We will then understand and value the knowledge; processes, resources and human capital found in our own community and use these assets to further our goals.

- **We will take the time to get to know all the people we work with inside and outside our organization** so that we can better identify their talents, skills and interests thereby maximizing the value each person brings.
- **We will ensure we conduct ourselves professionally by communicating openly**, seeking feedback and by listening to the voices of everyone inside and outside our community who seeks to engage with us.
- **We will maintain and build upon relationships in the community to build social capital and to build greater sustainability for all programs.** We will seek those who share our vision in enhancing the participation and inclusion of people with disabilities in the community.

This will be done by building a stronger governance model where less work is done by more people to share more responsibility and empower others to work independently, take ownership and to self-advocate when required. In doing so, the Calgary Sledge Hockey Association board will focus less on hockey issues and more on building capacity and social capital from within the organization itself and from within the community. If this happens sledge hockey will start to flourish as people more fully appreciate the experience of adaptive sport and gain insight into how the empowerment of people with disabilities can be created through sport.

We will collaborate with other individuals, sport groups, governing bodies, private business and other community groups to ensure they are informed and are given the opportunity to be actively involved in our initiatives or in the initiatives we undertake with our community partners.

## **A. CONNECTING AND CONTRIBUTING**

People are central not only to the success of the Calgary Sledge Hockey Association but they are also an essential part of effective community development. Our members not only are a part of growing sledge hockey community but they are also part of their own community where they share a sense of place and where they have relationships with people based on principles of trust, value, contribution and reciprocity. (Richards, 2006, p. 26)

To be successful, The Calgary Sledge Hockey Association needs to perform better at creating internal governance structures and processes where all the members of the association have the responsibility, knowledge, desire and opportunity to be involved and contribute to the organization in the best way possible based on their differing skills, interests and abilities. For whatever reason, many within the Calgary Sledge Hockey Association do not know how to get involved or simply choose not to do so. To address this problem, this plan tries to create a feeling of belonging and also a feeling of responsibility to contribute to the growth of the organization and to the community.

### **Actions**

#### **1. BUILD SOCIAL NETWORKS IN LOCAL AREAS**

- Work with Hockey Calgary, community services for people with disabilities, adaptive sport groups, community associations and rehabilitation centres to support inclusive activities and events based on sledge hockey.
- Develop relationships with community programs to create an exchange of services scenario where people with disabilities can participate or try a new community

program in exchange for that community programs participation in a sledge hockey demonstration or game. (For example, engage disabled sailing, wheelchair basketball, wheelchair rugby, wheelchair lacrosse and even community art groups to exchange participation opportunities. All local groups can be found in the Recreation Discovery Guide produced by the City of Calgary Recreation department.)

- Investigate the feasibility of a neighbourhood based mentorship program where adaptive sport athletes are matched with community mentors from all walks of life who can communicate with athletes to understand their sport while also providing mentorship on career and community participation options through volunteering or paid employment.
- Investigate using different online social media technologies like forums and community message boards to promote the sport to different audiences and to potentially recruit new volunteers. (Lin, 2001, p. 9)
- Advocate alongside people with disabilities to improve accessible transportation for people with disabilities in the City of Calgary.

## **2. BROADEN VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES & DEFINE ROLES**

- Regularly scan and post for potential volunteering opportunities within the Calgary Sledge Hockey Association in the community, non-profit, sport, art and entertainment sectors.
- Develop relationships with community, non-profit, sport, art and entertainment groups to promote the benefits of engaging people with disability as volunteers, particularly those already engaged with the Calgary Sledge Hockey Association.

- Support community services to build connections between people and organisations which have volunteering opportunities for those affiliated with sport and skill development.

### **3. SUPPORT FAMILIES AND GUARDIANS TO CONNECT WITH EACH OTHER**

- Investigate ways families can form positive community networks via sledge hockey that are beneficial to those dealing with disabilities in relation to experiences connected and not connected to sports.
- Promote opportunities for skill development in relation to accessing formal and informal supports to help people with disabilities in accessing adaptive sport and their community

### **B. ENCOURAGING AND ENABLING**

This Community Development Plan is focused on the building on the strengths of the Calgary Sledge Hockey Association to build social capital and enhance relationships with the business community, adaptive sports community and the general sledge hockey community along with those in internal service delivery, sport governance and local governance to foster a shared sense of identity and connection in building inclusion. Enhancing capacity within all of these key areas is a priority for the organization and should be supported by promoting awareness and education of both disabilities in general and of adaptive sports in the community.

Community Champions are key people in our community who can lead, connect and influence others around them in creating a more inclusive community for those with disabilities. It is therefore a goal of this organization to continue to seek out these

individuals through sport channels but also in the non-profit sector, in the business community and in government as well to ensure they are telling the story of how adaptive sport strengthens communities. It also means developing and fostering the growth of potential leaders with a disability that may exist within our own organization by helping them acquire confidence, skills and the ability to self-advocate for their own aspirations, rights and expectations while also acting as ambassadors for the CSHA in the community.

## **Actions**

### **4. SUPPORT PEOPLE TO BE THEIR OWN ADVOCATES**

- Investigate ways and find resources athletes can use to promote self-advocacy through sport and in their daily lives.
- Create channels within the organization where athletes must communicate on their own behalf through to coaches and volunteers for their questions and concerns thereby helping to equip them with the skills to build connections with other people.
- Educate members on self-advocacy resources, particularly around individual rights related to sport and common life experiences wherever possible.

### **5. DEVELOP FUTURE LEADERS THROUGH ADAPTIVE SPORT**

- Establish coaching standards that require individual players to rotate responsibility on leading drills and in setting up and taking down materials for practices. Also establish individual duties for players to prepare equipment for games and demonstration events in the community.
- Establish a community relations program where players self-select to do presentations and speeches in the community about their participation in adaptive sport

to encourage new players to try sports and increase participation in community programs.

- Develop team standards requiring individual players to care for and maintain all of their own individual equipment including their team jersey. Encourage players to obtain their own equipment through grant programs and fundraising by placing a limit on the length of time the team resources can be used by a player. (e.g.: one full season)

## **6. RAISE COMMUNITY AWARENESS**

- Implement an Adaptive Sports Program for sledge hockey in schools with dedicated volunteers committed to the role for at least one season at a time.
- Support other community services for people with disabilities by creating linkages where adaptive sport programming can be demonstrated as options to a wider range of groups thereby raising awareness about adaptive sport and sledge hockey in the community.
- Encourage and support continued interaction with Hockey Calgary to create sledge hockey games for people who do not have disabilities so they can play often alongside those who do have disabilities. In doing so, we will create inclusion where every participant can play the sport at close to the same level rather than simply including people with disabilities in sports where they participate but cannot be competitive.
- Partner with members of the Calgary Ability Network to market adaptive sport opportunities together as one group thereby giving people with disabilities a broader selection of opportunities to participate in adaptive sports of all kinds.

## **7. INFLUENCE THE MEDIA TO PROMOTE POSITIVE MESSAGING**

- Formalize partnerships with local media through regular contact about Calgary Sledge Hockey events to promote positive images of people with a disability and their participation in adaptive sport.
- Create an annual media/celebrity sledge hockey match where prominent members of the community and media come together to play the sport in a public setting as a fundraiser.
- Enhance the Calgary Sledge Hockey Association's social media presence beyond Facebook and Twitter to include much more video specific content that can be promoted through the organization's own YouTube channel. Then promote video segments of the sport through mainstream and disability specific websites in Calgary and Alberta.

## **C. DEVELOPING AND SUSTAINING**

The Calgary Sledge Hockey Association is an example of one micro level community that comes together and shares a common interest with other micro level communities when it comes to providing recreation and sport opportunities for people with and without disabilities in the broader community. Our micro community is small but it has the potential to contribute in a great capacity to the diversity, inclusion and social fabric of the entire City of Calgary.

Using the same asset-based community development approach (Disability ACT, 2010) discussed earlier in this paper, the Calgary Sledge Hockey Association must use the local assets it has at its disposal to strengthen the foundations of the organization and to make it more independent and sustainable over the long term. To be successful, the

Calgary Sledge Hockey Association must identify its own strengths, raise awareness of disability and disability issues; provide education about adaptive sport; support our membership by encouraging responsibility, accountability and independence and be willing to understand, accept and even embrace change as it occurs. A selection of tools is also needed for our association's volunteers to use in helping to create opportunities for our members to engage in the organization first and then in the greater community as well.

### **Actions**

#### **8. LINK INDIVIDUALS WITH INFORMATION ON OTHER ADAPTIVE SPORTS & COMMUNITY SERVICES.**

- The Calgary Sledge Hockey Association will be aware of other programs in the Calgary area to ensure individuals can access the adaptive sport or recreational activity that is most suited to their needs.
- The Calgary Sledge Hockey Association will also keep apprised of community services that help support people with disabilities in areas like employment, transportation, and self-advocacy and in promoting life skills so that our members can be appropriately and informally referred if necessary.
- Educate our members on advocacy and practical assistance in the community to help them maintain health and wellness through sport participation.
- Investigate and develop further partnerships with adaptive sport groups in the province of Alberta and with community service groups that support people with disabilities.

- Promote information about Government, private sector and philanthropic grants for adaptive sport participation.

## **9. DEVELOP A SUITE OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT TOOLS FOR GOVERNMENT, BUSINESS AND COMMUNITY**

- Develop a tool to measure sledge hockey participation and individual satisfaction with that participation. (Mid-year and Annual surveys.)
- Develop a local asset mapping tool to assist people to find opportunities to participate in a range of inclusive networks, events and activities. (Calgary's Recreation Discovery Guide or the Calgary Ability Network.)
- Develop a Memorandum of Understanding template for partnerships between organisations.
- Develop a presentation and accompanying handout that explains the benefits of adaptive sport in communities that can be used to promote both sledge hockey and general disability awareness with community and business groups.

## **D. INNOVATE AND FUNDRAISE**

### **Actions**

## **10. CREATE MORE AWARENESS IN THE COMMUNITY ABOUT ADAPTIVE SPORT.**

- A sleds in schools program to demonstrate the sport to youth both as a motivational experience and an awareness building experience about disability sport.
- A regular demonstration of the sport at the Foothills Hospital and Alberta Children's Hospital at both the Spina Bifida, Cerebral Palsy and Spinal Injury clinics.

- Regular games between Calgary Sledge Hockey and Calgary Minor Hockey teams.
- More fundraisers through games with amateur, professional and collegiate teams in Calgary.
- A guest speaker program bringing our athletes out to organizations that could spread the word about sledge hockey.
- A partner focused survey about the impact of adaptive sport on the community participation of people with disabilities is currently in development and will be distributed via community partnerships with the City of Calgary, the CPA and other groups to potentially show a researched outcome as to how adaptive sport builds stronger communities for people with disabilities.

## **11. ACHIEVE REGISTERED CHARITY STATUS & ENGAGE CORPORATE & GOVERNMENT FUNDERS**

- Led by the Treasurer of the Calgary Sledge Hockey Association, the Board will investigate the best way to become a registered charity within Canada thereby making it easier to raise funds since registered charities can issue legal tax receipts.
- Calgary has a very strong corporate sector that has a history of donating to minor hockey. Additionally, five National Hockey League teams in the USA have fully funded sledge hockey teams while there are none in Canada. Soliciting donations from these groups (including the Calgary Flames) is a great possibility but greater marketing support is needed to realize this goal.
- More government funding and non-profit society grants can be researched to help secure different funding sources.

- Use and enhance existing marketing tools to create and implement a fundraising campaign for the Calgary Sledge Hockey Association before Sept. 2013.

**12. ESTABLISH STRONGER COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS TO ENSURE GREATER ECONOMIC VIABILITY AND TO POTENTIALLY MERGE WITH ANOTHER LIKE MINDED ORGANIZATION.**

- Seek a community partner within Calgary to help either sustain the CSHA independently or to perhaps make our organization part of a larger group with a province-wide mandate to assist people with disabilities in accessing sport and recreation opportunities like the Paralympic Sport Association or the Canadian Paraplegic Association in Alberta or even Wheelchair Sports Alberta.
- Be an active leader and an engaging force both internally in the sledge hockey community and externally in the broader community at large to seek community linkages that would broaden the reach of the CSHA in Calgary and beyond.

## V. Conclusion

From a community perspective, Vail articulates some very important social and economic reasons why communities should want to be more mindful of sport participation:

For communities the question is, why would they be interested in increasing and sustaining participation in sport? First, it is the community level at which the awareness and the benefits of the link between involvement in sport and healthy communities (e.g., lower crime rates, fewer health problems, more empowered citizens) are directly experienced. Second, it is the community level at which “learn to” programs are offered and exposure to sport occurs so that there is a pragmatic interest—more demand equals more revenue. (Vail, 2007, p. 579)

However, the challenge to build more participation and opportunities for inclusion in communities among people with disabilities is immense and quite complex. This internship experience has taught me that creating these opportunities takes change from within the disability and adaptive sport communities and it also takes a coordinated effort to engage beyond those smaller communities to form broader social networks where the right kinds of inclusion can be best introduced.

Building capacity within the disability and adaptive sport community is one of the key ways this kind of success can be achieved but to do that effectively I realize the governance model and structure of our organization must change to ensure we can keep our board focus on external and community building matters and not on the day to day conflicts that arise in running a hockey organization. To do this well, I realize the importance of having a well thought out community and economic development plan

focused on partnerships that is well communicated because as Crosby says “Often people do not fully know what their mission and goals ought to be until they create viable strategies and actions. Regardless of the sequencing of these decisions, an action plan is needed.” (Crosby, 2005, p. 72)

One of the best community partnerships we established during my practicum experience is with Hockey Calgary and I’m very excited about the future possibilities the Calgary Sledge Hockey Association has through this partnership to change perceptions and attitudes in the community about people with disabilities through sport.

I’m also pleased to be able to continue my work in this area to measure whether sport participation truly does lead to greater community participation among people with disabilities. My practicum gave me a great opportunity to create further partnerships with The City of Calgary and with many service providers to people who have disabilities to hopefully implement the survey attached to this practicum report and find out whether sport participation leads to greater community participation overall. If so, then I think this practicum report and the outcomes of that survey could lead to some changes in the way we engage people with disabilities in communities and perhaps give greater insight into how to enhance communities by providing more options for community participation from this typically marginalized segment of communities.

For me, the absolute highlight of my valuable practicum experience comes from an email I received from Bill Gould, the assistant coach of the Trails West Wolves, Calgary Minor Hockey club He said:

“This event was a fantastic example of sport serving as an effective platform for interaction amongst able bodied and disabled people. The camaraderie that

developed on the team and the respect that developed between teams was remarkable. In this sport (like others including wheel chair basketball) where able bodied players join the disabled on the same level, a huge degree of empathy and understanding is automatically created, taking the concept of 'walking in another's shoes to a very practical level. As well, because of the competitive aspect of sport, players on the team, whether able bodied or disabled, all have a stake in the collective goal. This creates a scenario where cooperation, communication and respect become critical success factors in achieving the goal – winning the game. Our players experienced this first hand, in a powerful way that they never had before. We look forward to future opportunities to play against and alongside sledge hockey athletes.”

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