

# 2023 PROGRAMS IMPACT REPORT

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## Land Acknowledgement

Jays Care recognizes that our organization is based on Treaty 13 lands - traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit. We also recognize that we are located on the traditional home of many other nations including the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Chippewa, and Wendat Peoples. We are honoured to work with and learn from communities all across this country now referred to as Canada. Therefore, we want to acknowledge all First Nations, Inuit, and Metis peoples whose original and treaty territories we stand upon across Turtle Island (aka, North America).

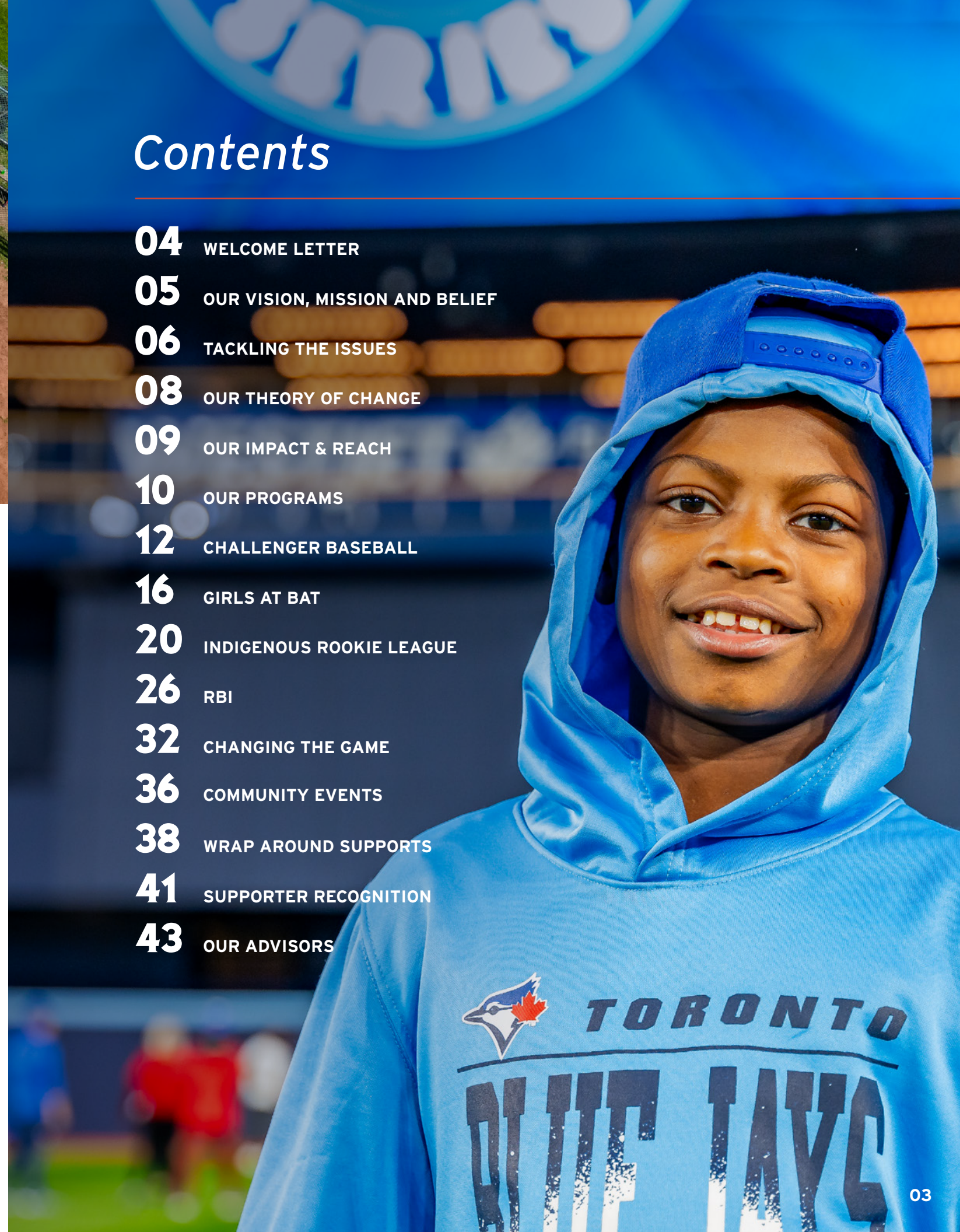
We see the unifying power of baseball and sport every day, which is why Jays Care commits to standing with Indigenous peoples, listening with a good mind, and supporting communities on their journeys towards a stronger future for generations to come.

A land acknowledgement is a first step but not an exclusive statement. Jays Care Foundation strives to use our platform to engage in respectful dialogue with Indigenous communities, and work towards educating all Canadians on Indigenous history and the vibrant cultures still here today. We encourage readers to use this page as a resource to further your learning and discover how you can be an ally for Indigenous peoples across the country.

To learn more about our Indigenous commitments [click here](#).

## Contents

- 04** WELCOME LETTER
- 05** OUR VISION, MISSION AND BELIEF
- 06** TACKLING THE ISSUES
- 08** OUR THEORY OF CHANGE
- 09** OUR IMPACT & REACH
- 10** OUR PROGRAMS
- 12** CHALLENGER BASEBALL
- 16** GIRLS AT BAT
- 20** INDIGENOUS ROOKIE LEAGUE
- 26** RBI
- 32** CHANGING THE GAME
- 36** COMMUNITY EVENTS
- 38** WRAP AROUND SUPPORTS
- 41** SUPPORTER RECOGNITION
- 43** OUR ADVISORS







# WELCOME

Throughout 2023, we witnessed a significant rise in the number of children and youth returning to sport and play across Canada as sport organizations, schools, and communities, continued to bounce back from the impacts of COVID-19. While these numbers are encouraging, questions remain around who has been able to return to play, the quality of their experiences, and, most significantly their sense of belonging in these spaces.

*Jays Care Foundation* remains steadfast in our commitment to implementing innovative sport and play programs designed to level the playing field for children and youth facing barriers. Over the past year, innovative training and programming tools have been piloted, investments have been made to improve our systems and our impact has been rigorously assessed. As a result, *Jays Care* has achieved record heights by establishing new partnerships, launching new programming, and ultimately supporting more than 59,000 children and youth facing barriers in accessing inclusive sport and play programming. These efforts were recognized by Charity Intelligence, leading to *Jays Care's* first ever appearance in their Top 100 Canadian Charities List for 2023.

Reaching these impactful milestones is only possible through the support of a dedicated group of generous donors, program partners, and committed volunteers. Throughout this report, you will discover their remarkable contributions to *Jays Care* programming and learn more about the inspiring youth, volunteers, and families that make up our *Blue Jays* community.

We recognize that levelling the playing field is a collective endeavor, and it requires the commitment and compassion of individuals like those featured in this report. *Jays Care* could not do this work alone, and for that, we express our heartfelt gratitude to all of you for your dedication to creating a country with more equitable sport and play.

## THE JAYS CARE TEAM



## Our Vision

A level playing field for all young people across Canada.

## Our Mission

Through the power of baseball, we create lasting social change across communities and empower young people to unlock their potential.

## Our Belief

At *Jays Care* we believe in the potential of every child and in the power of baseball and community to unlock it.





# TACKLING THE ISSUES

Sport and physical activity are proven as some of the most important predictors and protectors of overall health and well-being for children and youth.

And yet, the playing field across Canada remains inequitable with some kids stepping up to the plate with two strikes already against them. From significant affordability and accessibility issues to lack of quality programming, thousands of children and youth remain left on the sidelines and are missing out on the core benefits of sport and physical activity, including but not limited to improved mental and physical health, a sense of belonging, and increasing life skills.



## 1 Access

- » For **1 in 3** Canadian children, cost keeps them out of sport and extracurriculars (KidSport Canada, 2021).
- » In Jumpstart's 2023 State of Sport Report a staggering **44%** of parents can no longer afford to enroll their children in organized sports, while **62%** of sports organizations report decreased sign-up rates due to the prevailing economic conditions (Jumpstart Foundation, State of Sport Report, 2023).

## 2 Belonging

- » Two of the most common barriers that prevent Canadian children and youth from meaningfully participating in sport are **a lack of friends and peers to play with**, and perceptions of not feeling included as part of a team. These trends were particularly prominent among children and youth with disabilities (MLSE Foundation, Change the Game Research 2.0, 2022).
- » **1 in 3** girls report poor perceptions of belonging and feeling unwelcome as factors preventing them from continuing in sport (Canadian Women & Sport, Rally Report, 2022).
- » More than **1 in 4** Indigenous youth report having directly experienced racism in sport (MLSE Foundation, Change the Game Research, 2021).

## 3 Quality Physical Activity

- » In 2022, less than **40%** of children and youth met the recommended amount of physical activity per day within the Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth (ParticipACTION Report Card, 2022).
- » **43%** of adolescent girls said the quality of sport was a barrier to their participation (Canadian Women & Sport, Rally Report, 2020). Additionally, for children and youth with disabilities a significant barrier to participation is reported to be the shortage of coaches who are proficient in adapting games or sports (Rowland, 2008).

## 4 Resiliency

- » **4 in 10** parents continue to report adverse effects in their children from reduced participation in sport and play due to the pandemic, including signs of being less physically fit (42%), feelings of loss and resentment (38%), and increased anxiety (41%) (Jumpstart Foundation, State of Sport Report, 2023).
- » **1 in 5** children in Ontario is expected to face a mental health challenge during childhood. Alarmingly, **5 out of 6** of them will not receive the required treatment or support they need (Children's Mental Health Ontario, 2022).





# OUR THEORY OF CHANGE

At Jays Care, we believe it is time to usher in a 'new inning' of sport and play for children and youth across the country. That's why, in 2023, we introduced our new Theory of Change designed to guide our collective action toward levelling the playing field. We recognize that children and youth across our programs often face intersecting challenges when it comes to accessing and meaningfully participating in sport and play. Because of this, all our programs are designed to combat systemic barriers, advance belonging and resilience, and foster a love for sport and physical activity. The goal is, no matter which program a young person joins, they can step up to the plate and unlock their potential.



## THEORY OF CHANGE

LEVELLING THE PLAYING FIELD TO UNLOCK POTENTIAL

### ACTIONS

#### ADVANCE EQUITABLE ACCESS

Jays Care programs are designed to advance equitable access to sport and play for participants by offering free to low-cost programming, providing the necessary equipment for full participation, and ensuring fully accessible experiences for participants.

#### PRIORITIZE BELONGING

Jays Care coaches undergo training in relationship-building and are equipped with resources to create sport and play programs where participants feel safe, supported, and a strong sense of belonging.

#### PROVIDE QUALITY PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Jays Care programs maximize opportunities for physical activity and play, introducing participants to a diverse range of fundamental movement skills essential for lifelong engagement in sport and play.

#### BUILD RESILIENCY

Jays Care programs take a trauma-informed approach, intentionally integrating self-regulation activities and promoting healthy stress dosing into programming to foster well-being and resilience through sport and play.

### OUTCOMES

A greater love for sport & physical activity

An enhanced sense of belonging

An increase in life skills like self-regulation, leadership, and positive sense of identity

### IMPACTS

Stronger, more connected communities

Empowered young people with unlocked potential

Continued engagement in sport & physical activity

Enhanced well-being

# 2023 REACH & IMPACT



1,051

Jays Care programs sites

2,399

coaches and leaders trained

945

implementing partners

59,167

children and youth impacted



Hear from some inspiring athletes across Canada and discover why Jays Care programs matter to them!

[CLICK HERE](#)



# OUR PROGRAMS

*Learn more about our impact from coast to coast to coast.*



## Programs Overview

Annually, *Jays Care* collaborates with hundreds of partners across the country to run four program streams designed to level the playing field for children and youth facing barriers: Challenger Baseball, Girls At Bat, Indigenous Rookie League, and RBI.

These program streams are designed to offer diverse programming opportunities for children and youth across Canada experiencing some of the most significant barriers to sport and play: children and youth living with disabilities, girls and young women, Indigenous children and youth, children and youth facing multiple barriers, including but not limited to financial barriers, language barriers, sexual orientation/expression, in contact with child protective services, and living in priority neighbourhoods.

To ensure each program stream is as accessible, inclusive, and fun as possible, *Jays Care* equips all partners and volunteers with best-in-class training, comprehensive programming resources, high-quality equipment, team uniforms, and when applicable, financial support.

In the following sections, you can delve deeper into *Jays Care's* programs and discover the impact being made across the country.

- 1 **Challenger Baseball**
- 2 **Girls At Bat**
- 3 **Indigenous Rookie League**
- 4 **RBI**



# CHALLENGER BASEBALL

Physical activity and sport participation have proven to have immense benefits for children and youth living with disabilities.

However, ongoing trends reveal that they tend to engage in lower levels of physical activity and sport participation compared to their peers, primarily due to significant barriers hindering their access to high-quality sport and recreational opportunities. Challenger Baseball is Jays Care's adaptive baseball program, specifically designed to ensure every athlete can participate in a high-quality, safe, and inclusive sport and play environment. Run in partnership with schools, community organizations, Little League Canada, and Baseball Canada, the program empowers children and youth living with disabilities by using the power of baseball to foster essential life skills like teamwork, communication, resiliency, and courage.



### DID YOU KNOW?

For children and youth living with disabilities, the barriers most cited to accessing sport and play programming are cost and a lack of knowledgeable staff who understand how to adapt a game or sport to meet a given child's needs (Rowland, 2008). In fact, in 2019, only **25%** of educators that participated in Jays Care's Challenger Baseball training reported receiving any previous adaptive recreation training.

### PROGRAM SNAPSHOT

## Challenger Baseball: Affiliate Schools & Community Partners

When run in partnership with Affiliate Schools and Community Partners, Challenger Baseball is implemented as a free 8-week extracurricular baseball/softball program across the country:

*"The students in our program are all living with disabilities, most of which greatly impact their ability to take part in traditional sport programming. Challenger Baseball has been accessible for all our students and has provided the same structure and growth opportunities as the sport programming peers their age would participate in. I wish there were more programs like this for every sport that we could access!"*

- Educator, Clarence Sansom School, Alberta

**211**

program sites (178 school sites, 33 community sites)

**406**

educators and coaches trained in adaptive, inclusive programming (356 educators, 50 community leaders)

**6,981**

children and youth living with disabilities in programming (4,847 across schools, 2,134 across community organizations)





PROGRAM SNAPSHOT

# Challenger Baseball Leagues

# 78

program sites

# 53

coaches trained in  
adaptive, inclusive  
programming

# 2,830

children and youth living with  
disabilities in programming

When run in partnership with baseball associations and leagues, Challenger Baseball is implemented as a free 10-week extracurricular baseball/ softball program across the country:



STORY HIGHLIGHT

## ★ Sierra & Judy

In conversation with Sierra and Judy, Challenger Baseball Athlete and Parent, Ontario.

Meet Sierra, a 17-year-old Challenger Baseball athlete who proudly describes herself as funny, athletic, and easily embarrassed when her mom cheers her on from the sidelines. This was her first year participating in Challenger Baseball, and we had the pleasure of sitting down and chatting with Sierra and her mother, Judy, to learn more about their experience in the program.

**INTERVIEWER:** So, how did Sierra get started in Challenger Baseball?

**JUDY:** We were involved with Variety Village and heard about the program through them. They kept posting about it, and we signed her up. She's loved it ever since.

**INTERVIEWER:** Sierra, what's your favorite thing about playing baseball?

**SIERRA:** I like being on bases. First base, second base, third base...

**INTERVIEWER:** Have you learned anything new about yourself by participating in Challenger Baseball?

**SIERRA:** That I can come out of my shell.

**INTERVIEWER:** And what has been your proudest moment at Challenger Baseball so far?

**SIERRA:** Hitting the ball!

**INTERVIEWER:** Judy, I'm curious. When you are visiting the program and watching from the sidelines, what has been your impression of Challenger Baseball?

**JUDY:** I think it is fantastic! The coaches are so good with the kids. With all of them having varying needs, it is not something that everybody can relate to. Their energy and involvement with the kids are great and nice to see.

**INTERVIEWER:** What do you think is the biggest impact the program has had on Sierra?

**JUDY:** She's got to meet new people and make new friends. She really enjoyed that and had a lot of fun being on the same level with a bunch of kids she could relate to. She was able to help kids in her program, and they were able to help her. It was such a nice experience for her, and she really got to grow into her independence and take on a leadership role.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did the program impact you in any way?

**JUDY:** Yes, absolutely! I got to connect with other parents and guardians and share stories and learn about other programs or opportunities Sierra might be interested in. It was helpful to be able to speak to other families. The program is also just a really good release for the kids and gives parents the time to sit back, relax, and watch their kid enjoy.

**INTERVIEWER:** So, what's next for Sierra?

**SIERRA:** I have a soccer tournament and cross country coming up!

**JUDY:** Yes, and she's also involved in an upcoming leadership summit taking place in Toronto, so that's exciting.

**INTERVIEWER:** Wow, she's got a lot on the go! An all-around athlete. Keep it up Sierra and we can't wait to see you back at Challenger Baseball next season.



# GIRLS AT BAT

Multiple, unique barriers exist preventing girls\* from pursuing and excelling in sport and play.

Some of these barriers include, but are not limited to, a perception of inadequate skills, limited opportunities, and low self-confidence. Girls At Bat is designed to reduce these barriers and create spaces where girls can unlock their leadership potential through harnessing the power of baseball. The program changes the game for girls by offering unique programming spaces designed to enhance their connection, courage, leadership, and love of sport. Programs range from extracurricular baseball/softball programming to life-promotion retreats to virtual leadership camps.

## DID YOU KNOW?

According to Canadian Women & Sport's 2022 Rally Report, **50%** of girls are not participating in sport by the time they reach adolescence. In 2023, **95%** of Girls At Bat coaches agreed that the program enhances participants' motivation to try and play different sports.

*\*NOTE: Any reference to girls and women in this section should be read as self-identified or parent/guardian-identified gender, not assigned biological sex.*

## PROGRAM SNAPSHOT

# Girls At Bat: Affiliate Schools & Community Partners

When run in partnership with Affiliate Schools and Community Partners, Girls At Bat is implemented as a free 8-week extracurricular baseball/softball program across the country:

***"Girls At Bat has really given our girls a safe space to see themselves as athletes. Our girls are usually discouraged to participate in sports, as it is seen as something the boys do. Throughout the duration of our program, it has been great to witness the girls' confidence grow. Not only has their own self-confidence grown, but their ability and desire to participate in sports outside of the Girls At Bat program, be it during gym class or at recess, has grown so much since their first day."***

- Educator, Cedar Drive Public School, Ontario

# 289

program sites (268 school sites, 21 across community sites)

# 446

educators and coaches trained in adaptive, inclusive programming (404 educators, 42 community leaders)

# 8,519

girls in programming (7,802 across schools, 717 across community organizations)





STORY HIGHLIGHT

★ **Mudjaina**

This year, Jays Care celebrated our partnership with Calgary Women's Immigrant Association (CIWA) with an unforgettable MVP experience in Toronto. CIWA, a dedicated and long-standing partner, has been delivering their Girls At Bat program since 2018, positively impacting the lives of more than 160 immigrant girls by instilling a passion for sports and physical activity, building social connections, and fostering new friendships. Over the course of three exciting days, 20 young athletes, aged 12-18, traveled to Toronto for the trip of a lifetime that included a behind-the-scenes tour of Rogers Centre, an all-star skills clinic, Blue Jays batting practice, and watching a game from the Jays Care Community Clubhouse. Throughout their time in Toronto, the girls exhibited exceptional leadership, athleticism, and sportsmanship. Below you can hear from one of the incredible athletes who attended the MVP experience:



In Conversation with Mudjaina, 15, Athlete, Girls At Bat, Alberta.

*"I recently turned 15, and this was my first time in the Girls At Bat program. I had nothing to do over the summer, so I decided to join and make new friends and try new things. At first, it was hard for me to make new friends as an introvert, but I did make friends, so it has been exciting! I had never played baseball before, but it is one of my favourite sports now. I just love batting and the feeling of hitting the ball far. The Girls At Bat summer camp we did was so fun, and my favorite things about it were the people, the practices, and just playing baseball together. When I found out I was chosen to go on this trip, I was really, really, really excited and begged my mom to let me go. Coming here, this was my first time going to a baseball game, and we got to meet so many new, nice people. When I go home, I am going to brag for months about how we got to see where the players get ready, see how they practice, and see them up close playing. My past self wouldn't believe this all happened, and she also wouldn't believe that baseball is now my favourite sport!"*



DONOR HIGHLIGHT

★ **Darryl Doopan**

Since joining Rogers eight years ago, Darryl has been volunteering with Jays Care Foundation every moment he can. His passion for volunteerism at large is incredible and he is an outstanding champion for Jays Care. With thanks to Darryl, athletes and their coaches have been celebrated on the field at Rogers Centre at our Girls At Bat All Star Event, educators have received free books for their school libraries, and important funds have been raised to make Jays Care programming possible.

*"My journey with Jays Care Foundation began at their Turn the Page event a few years ago. Their commitment to supporting schools, along with their team's professionalism and passion, immediately captivated me. I continue to participate in their events and have had the privilege of working in various capacities. Among them, my favorite was an event on the field, where schools came to explore baseball. Witnessing kids enjoy the field and engage in various activities has been a truly rewarding experience. I look forward to more volunteering opportunities with Jays Care in the future and making a meaningful difference where I can."*





PROGRAM SNAPSHOT

## James Bay Girls At Bat

When run in partnership with First Nations along the James Bay Coast, Girls At Bat is implemented as a free week-long overnight life-promotion retreat experience for Indigenous girls living on the James Bay Coast:

*"I first started attending James Bay Girls At Bat in 2017. I was 14 when I went to my first retreat. I was really scared at first because I thought I wouldn't fit in, and it was scary to travel to a new, big place. But meeting all the mentors changed that. They were really welcoming and made it fun for all the girls."*

*Now that there are a lot of younger girls from my community joining the program, my favorite part of the retreat is being able to be there for them. I want them to experience what I did. Retreat really helped me with my self-esteem, knowing that someone was always in my corner. I know what it is like not to always have someone there for you. I want to be there for the girls. The motto here is 'We Show Up' and I will."*

- Alyssa, 20, Mentor-In-Training, Peawanuck First Nation, Ontario

10

First Nation communities represented

71

girls attended retreat

6

virtual camp cohorts

198

girls participated

87%

of youth reported trying something new and stepping outside their comfort zone when at retreat

94%

of participants reported that the program provided them with opportunities to grow as a young leader

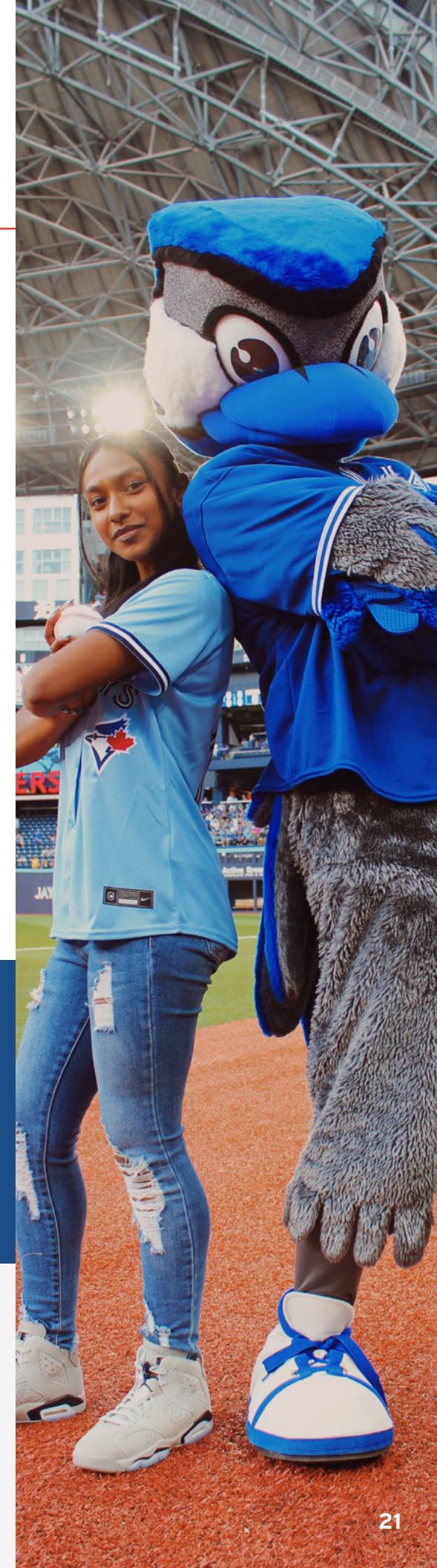
PROGRAM SNAPSHOT

## L.I.T. Girls

When run virtually, Girls At Bat transforms into L.I.T. Girls, a free 5-week leadership camp designed to further enhance the leadership potential of Girls At Bat participants:

*"I got into the L.I.T. Girls program because I was a part of Girls At Bat at my previous school. One of my teachers told me about the program, and she thought it was a great opportunity for me to be a part of it. She was running the Girls At Bat program at our school and said the L.I.T. program was all about leadership skills and how to become a better leader within your community. Being a part of Girls At Bat, I became better at leadership, and L.I.T. Girls gave me the extra push to go the extra mile. Now, I think this is what I want to do: help be a leader to others and encourage younger students like myself to strive for better, push towards their goals, and always work hard for what they want to achieve."*

- Mya, 15, L.I.T. Girls Participant, Ontario





# INDIGENOUS ROOKIE LEAGUE

At *Jays Care*, we work in partnership with many First Nation, Métis, Inuit communities, and urban Indigenous organizations and remain committed to advancing reconciliation through sport.

Indigenous Rookie League programming is designed to respond to the calls to action surrounding sport and youth programming as laid out in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Report (2012). Run in partnership with schools, Indigenous communities and organizations, and First Nations and Tribal Councils, Indigenous Rookie League programming is designed through a community-driven approach and uses baseball/softball as a tool to inspire connection, enhance a love of physical activity, and support the well-being of Indigenous children and youth.

## DID YOU KNOW?

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission published a list of 94 calls to action after a 6-year inquiry into the atrocities of the Residential School System and the lasting effects it has caused for Indigenous peoples. Jays Care is working in collaboration with our Indigenous partners to address four of these calls to action (calls 87-90) specific to sport and play. [Click here](#) to find out more.

## PROGRAM SNAPSHOT

### Indigenous Rookie League: Affiliate Schools & Community Partners

When run in partnership with Affiliate Schools and Community Partners, Indigenous Rookie League is implemented as a free 8-week extracurricular baseball/softball program across the country:

***"We have 60 students in our Indigenous Rookie League program, and 90% of them wouldn't have had the opportunity to participate in a structured baseball program if it had not been offered by the school. The equipment provided by Jays Care helped eliminate barriers for our students, and many of them got to play the sport for the first time. This opportunity is a benefit in itself."***

- Educator, Witset Elementary Secondary School, British Columbia

# 70

programs (54 school sites, 16 community sites)

# 113

educators and coaches trained in adaptive, inclusive programming (81 educators, 32 community leaders)

# 2,354

Indigenous children and youth actively participating in programming (1,756 across schools, 598 across community organizations)







PROGRAM SNAPSHOT

# Indigenous Rookie League: Intergenerational Leagues

When run in partnership with Tribal Councils and Health Authorities Indigenous Rookie League is implemented as a free 10-week intergenerational baseball/softball leagues with inter-community play and year-end tournaments:

**10**  
leagues

**57**  
participating Indigenous communities

**89**  
coaches trained in adaptive, inclusive programming

**1,536**  
Indigenous children and youth actively participating in programming

**90%**  
of league coordinators reported that Indigenous Rookie League significantly enhances participants connection to community and culture

STORY HIGHLIGHT

## ★ Touchwood Agency Tribal Council

Touchwood Agency Tribal Council launched Indigenous Rookie League programming for four member communities in 2023. As a first-year partner, Jays Care was honoured to welcome the four Chiefs of Touchwood Agency Tribal Council to throw out the ceremonial first pitch at the *Toronto Blue Jays* game on the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. We extend our gratitude to Chief Jaime Wolfe of Muskowekwan First Nation, Chief Lloyd Buffalo of Day Star First Nation, Chief Leeann Kehler of Kawacatoose First Nation, and Chief Byron Bitternose of George Gordon First Nation for their support and commitment to the Indigenous Rookie League program. Keep reading to learn more about how the program's inaugural year unfolded.

In a conversation with Angela, Manager of Sports, Recreation, and Culture at the Touchwood Agency Tribal Council, Saskatchewan.

*"This was our first year running Indigenous Rookie League. Our Senior Office Manager at the time came across the application and said, 'let's make this happen'. Softball is big around here, and we have a lot of ballplayers. However, over the past 15 years, no real leagues have run. All our communities are very sports-oriented, so we were excited by the opportunity to reintroduce softball back into their programming. We saw it as a chance to get communities back together and playing a sport we all know and love. The program started out slow, but as the season went on, we saw more and more people coming out to games and cheering teams on. Each reserve ended up having huge teams, with up to 40 players per team! The coaches really helped this season be a success. One that comes to mind is Mary McNab. She was my coach when I was a teenager and is still coaching today, in her seventies! It's amazing to see. She takes on such an active coaching role and is a big presence in her community. Watching the season play out reminded me of when I was a kid. We used to get the whole community out at the ball field. This type of community play hasn't happened since I was a kid, and that's almost 30 years ago. Seeing community teams out on the field again is very exciting!"*





# RBI

Sport and play are powerful tools for positive youth development; however, for many children and youth across the country, multiple barriers prevent them from accessing and experiencing the transformative power that being part of a team can bring.

RBI is the ultimate safe space for any young person seeking to find their team, develop new skills, and have fun. Designed for children and youth facing multiple barriers to participation in sport and play, the goal of RBI is to create a sense of belonging and community for those who often feel left on the sidelines. The program operates across schools, community organizations, and youth justice facilities nationwide, utilizing the power of baseball/softball to advance a range of diverse outcomes for participants. These outcomes include, but are not limited to, increased life skills, an enhanced sense of belonging, and a heightened love for sports and physical activity.



## DID YOU KNOW?

According to MLSE Foundation's 2022 Change the Game Research 2.0, the top cited reasons for less frequent or no participation in sport and play among Canadian youth are: a lack of friends or peers to play with, and experiences or perceptions where youth did not feel included as part of a team. In 2023, 93% of RBI coaches reported participants in their program demonstrated enhanced peer connection and friendships as a result of the program.

## PROGRAM SNAPSHOT

# RBI: Affiliate Schools & Community Partners

When run in partnership with Affiliate Schools and Community Partners, RBI is implemented as a free 8-week extracurricular baseball/softball program across the country:

***"Some of our newcomer children had never been exposed to baseball or any type of ball activities. RBI has provided an incredible opportunity for these youth to be immersed in baseball culture. Being part of this program has allowed these young people to build skills based on team activities, such as cooperation, inclusion, leadership, and a willingness to support their peers! From these activities, we have seen friendships grow. Some of our newcomer youth have even started following the Blue Jays, which has opened doors for further social inclusion with their peers!"***

- RBI Coach, BGC Foothills, Alberta

# 217

programs (163 school sites, 54 community sites)

# 351

educators and coaches trained on adaptive, inclusive programming (243 educators, 108 community leaders)

# 12,924

children and youth in programming (6,662 across schools, 6,262 across community organizations)







## STORY HIGHLIGHT

# ★ Danielle

In Conversation with Danielle, Educator, Newfoundland and Labrador.

*"This was our school's first year running an RBI program. I had never heard of the program until another teacher sent me a link to sign up. I couldn't believe it wasn't on my radar because I have been a Phys-Ed teacher for the last 14 years! We're a K-3 school and have lots of students who have never played baseball and face various barriers when it comes to engaging in extracurricular activities. Many of our students come from low-income households, and our community's lack of public transportation presents a significant hurdle. If a family doesn't own a vehicle, there's simply no way for their child to get to and from a practice. Because of this, we decided to run a RBI program to get as many students involved as possible on a team.*

*For the students, having the opportunity to participate on a team and feel successful was so transformative. We had one second-grade student who was absolutely ecstatic upon learning that he had been selected, exclaiming that it was his first time ever being part of a team. Another student, after receiving their Affiliate School t-shirt, would simply not take it off. He proudly wore it for four days straight and would stop me in the halls just to let me know he was still rocking his Jays Care swag. This was so moving to see because it showed the profound impact this program can have on students. For this student specifically, you could tell this t-shirt represented belonging to a team. It was where he felt valued. It was something that he was proud to be a part of.*

*When I initially applied for this program, I saw it as just another opportunity we were providing to our students. But by the end of it, I realized that it had been genuinely life-changing for some of these children. It was bigger than just baseball. For many students, when they got to the gym it was a reset from their day. It was a different space, one where they could connect and excel in different ways."*





PROGRAM SNAPSHOT

## RBI: Spring Edition

When run in partnership with priority schools and school boards, RBI: Spring Edition is implemented as a free 10-week extracurricular baseball/softball program with inter-school play and year end tournaments:

***“We are a small inner-city school, and we appreciate the opportunity to give our students an experience that would teach them life skills. We had many teachers assisting with the program in various capacities. Our students demonstrate more pride in their schoolwork and their conduct at school. They expressed to me that they felt like they were part of something special.”***

- Educator, Lawrence Heights Middle School, Toronto

PROGRAM SNAPSHOT

## RBI: Summer Edition

When run in partnership with summer school programming across priority schools and school boards, RBI: Summer Edition is implemented as a free 6-week summer camp program.

***“For me, I’ve grown up in Jays Care programs. I was a camper, and it’s been over 10 years that I’ve been a part of the Jays Care family. It’s been an incredible journey, transitioning from being a camper in my own community to becoming a leader.***

***Wearing that blue shirt and interacting with kids who remind me of my younger self is special. It’s about showing them that no matter where you come from, there’s an opportunity to make a positive impact in your community. I can still remember my amazing camp counsellors from when I was a camper. My goal is to be that for the kids. It’s about the impact you have, leading them to learn and grow, and building that sense of belonging. ”***

- Lex, 22, Program Director, RBI: Summer Edition



26

program sites (14 school sites in Toronto, 12 schools sites in New Brunswick)

30

educators and coaches trained (15 in Toronto, 15 in New Brunswick)

10

elementary school sites across the Toronto District School Board

339

youth staff employed

464

students in programming (223 across Toronto, 241 across New Brunswick)

94%

of parents reported that RBI Summer Edition positively impacted their child(ren)’s summer school experience

1,208

unique campers participated





STORY HIGHLIGHT

# Chris and Jessica Bassitt

There were smiles all around as Chris Bassitt made a special visit to Rawlinson Community School in July, witnessing firsthand the positive impact he and his wife, Jessica, were having on the RBI: Summer Edition program.

Eager to make a meaningful contribution to their new community in Toronto, the Bassitts partnered with Jays Care Foundation in 2023 to launch an inspiring initiative called 'Bassitts Pitch In.'

For every game won by the Toronto Blue Jays when Chris pitched, they committed to donating \$10,000 USD in support of RBI: Summer Edition. Through this incredible endeavor, Chris and Jessica generously contributed a total of \$200,000 and more than 100 donors joined in, raising an additional \$15,000.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the Bassitts for their tremendous support, as it played a pivotal role in ensuring the success of this program's inaugural season, leaving a lasting and positive impact on the lives of children and youth in underserved communities throughout Toronto.

*"We've always wanted to do something, and it was just about finding the right time. Then figuring out and learning about Jays Care through spring training really spoke to me. When we joined the Blue Jays, our family immediately felt embraced by the local community and fans across the country. We are building our family in Toronto and believe strongly in giving back to the community that supports us on and off the field. Sports have an incredibly positive impact on children's emotional and physical well-being, and we are excited to partner with Jays Care on all the amazing work they do with kids and sports."* - Chris Bassitt

[Click here](#) to learn more about how this partnership came to be!



DONOR HIGHLIGHT

# Mark Jaine, Jade Gonsalves and Family

As a huge *Blue Jays* fan, Mark loves being around the game and has been coaching youth baseball for six years. Mark has seen first-hand the impact sport and play can have on youth - teamwork, enhanced self-confidence, connection to peers and sheer joy on children's faces. As parents, Mark and his wife, Jade, understand how many children lose essential reading and math skills during the summer vacation, which negatively impacts their learning and development in the upcoming school year. They also understand the lack of resources available to help parents give their children access

to valuable summer school programming. That is why they decided to support the pilot year for RBI: Summer Edition. Their generous support has made it possible for students in priority neighborhoods, who might otherwise have lacked access to recreational programming, to enjoy free, safe, and inclusive learning experiences throughout the summer, experiencing both physical and academic engagement.

*"As a father of two children who are both growing up playing baseball, our family understands the importance of safe and accessible sport and play. Every child deserves to have a place on a team, no matter their abilities. We believe that if we can make a small difference in our community, and help get children more active and academically engaged, that we can create a Canada, where no child sits on the sidelines."*





PROGRAM SNAPSHOT

# RBI: Youth Justice

When run in partnership with youth justice facilities, RBI: Youth Justice is implemented as an extracurricular baseball/softball program designed to provide youth in custody with meaningful, trauma-informed programming.

*"I really liked this program. It helped me build my skills as a baseball player and I learned a lot of new things, like visualization, progress over perfection, and skills to strengthen my game. It was nice to have staff who were encouraging and cheering us on with every drill and game we played. The program was great because it didn't only teach me about baseball. It also taught me about life and gave me skills to use in the facility and in life outside. Thank you for coming and helping make this program happen. I was so happy to be part of it."*

- Youth Justice Participant



6

program sites

170

youth in programming

94%

of participants reported that throughout the program they positively connected with peers



# CHANGING THE GAME

*Getting more young people onto the field.*



## *Making Baseball More Inclusive*

Annually across Canada, approximately 160,000 children and youth aged 5 to 18 enroll in programs offered by Baseball Canada and Little League Canada.

Jays Care is fully committed to working with communities and partners across Canada to ensure baseball is a more safe, inclusive, and accessible game for kids to play. We accomplish this through two primary strategies: investing in inclusive play spaces and providing diversity, equity, and inclusion training for baseball coaches and leaders. Discover more about our efforts to revolutionize the way the game is played throughout this section.

- 1 *Field Of Dreams*
- 2 *Top of the First*

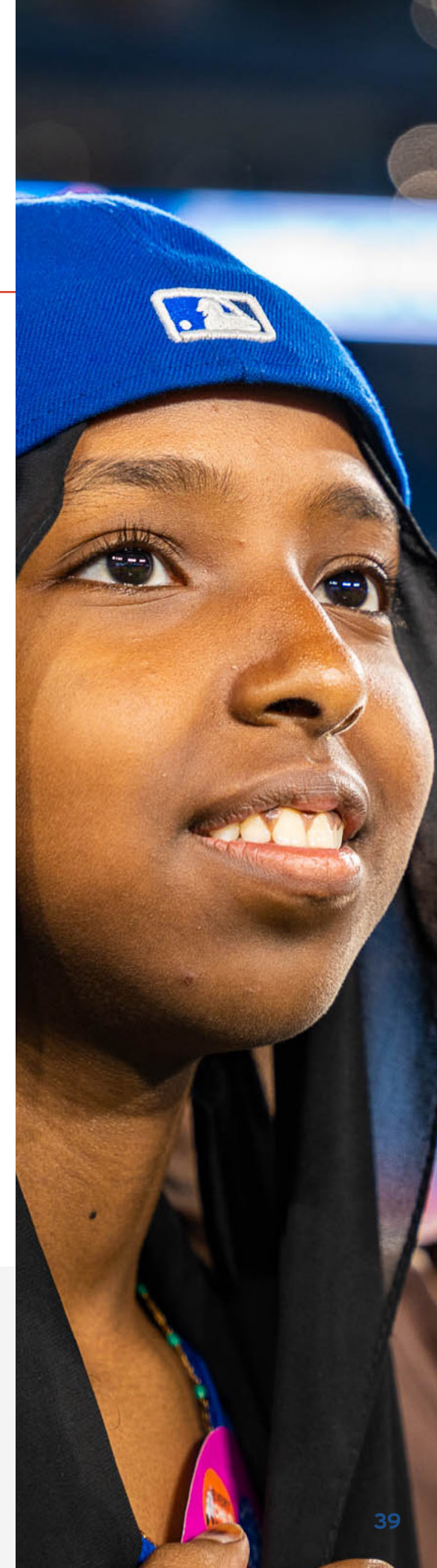




# TOP OF THE FIRST

Welcoming, safe, and inclusive environments for youth athletes begin at the organizational level by fostering inclusive cultures.

Top of the First is Jays Care's diversity, equity, and inclusion certification program designed to equip baseball/softball coaches, administrators, and volunteers with the knowledge and tools to take those first steps to change the game. In doing so, they aim to create programming spaces that are more equitable, inclusive, and accessible for all athletes. This first of its kind certification program offers a variety of training, tools, and professional development credits. Designed in partnership with the *Toronto Blue Jays*, Anima Leadership and Dr. Janelle Joseph, the program is helping coaches to re-imagine their playbooks and level the playing field. We are grateful for the support of TD in making Top of the First possible.



# FIELD OF DREAMS

Having a safe space to play is vital to a child's well-being.

Safe spaces not only provide children and youth with a place where they can participate in physical activity and exercise, they also serve as a venue to socialize and learn new skills. Field Of Dreams, made possible by TD, is a granting program dedicated to designing, refurbishing, and building safe and accessible spaces where children and youth can play and develop important life skills. This grant initiative aims to reduce barriers to sport and play and increase opportunities for children and youth to be physically active, while also bringing teams together and creating stronger communities. Field Of Dreams levels the playing field by reimagining how we can create and build spaces where all children and youth can play.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Research conducted for the 2021 Schoolyards Count report revealed that approximately **25%** of schoolyards across Ontario were deemed 'inadequate' for play, with one in five schoolyards also found to be 'unsuitable' for sports.

# 15

new projects funded in 2023

# \$1.5M

invested in various fields across Canada in 2023

## DID YOU KNOW?

According to MLSE Foundation's 2022 Change The Game Research 2.0, **82%** of youth report not having anyone they feel they can talk to about experiences with racism or discrimination in sport. This perception increases among Black youth (**89%**), Black women and girls (**92%**), Indigenous youth (**93%**), Indigenous women and girls (**95%**), and youth with a visible disability (**94%**).

# 30

workshops hosted

# 506

individuals trained representing 400+ baseball leagues and associations



# COMMUNITY EVENTS

Bringing our Blue Jays  
community together.

Baseball has the power to transform lives, and those who play the game know this better than most.

Every year, *Toronto Blue Jays* players, coaches, and alumni actively engage with the *Jays Care* community, creating opportunities for children and youth facing barriers across the country. These meaningful interactions create unforgettable experiences for children and youth participating in *Jays Care* programs, as they have the opportunity to play alongside, and be recognized by the very athletes who inspire them, both on and off the field.

## WINTER TOUR

Winter Tour provides *Blue Jays* players and personnel the opportunity to acknowledge fans from coast-to-coast-to-coast and to give back to those communities, all while celebrating the game of baseball. This year, *Toronto Blue Jays* superstars, Vladimir Guerrero Jr., Jordan Romano, Kevin Kiermaier, Santiago Espinal, Adam Cimber and Chris Bassitt, participated in an adaptive baseball clinic designed to connect Challenger Baseball athletes from across the GTA with their sporting idols. Players and athletes alike enjoyed an unforgettable experience, creating lifelong memories, and reinforcing the sense of community within the *Blue Jays* family.

## ALL STAR SERIES EVENTS

All Star Series Events invite athletes from across *Jays Care* programs to Rogers Centre and onto the field to participate in the ultimate 'Big Leaguer' experience. Throughout these events, athletes engage in several fun and inclusive baseball activities and activations designed to celebrate them like the All-Stars they are. This year, *Jays Care* hosted 5 All Star Series Events, celebrating over 2,804 athletes, coaches, teachers, and parents from across Canada.

## COMMUNITY CELEBRATIONS

Every summer *Jays Care* staff travel across the country to visit, celebrate, and motivate our partners and athletes directly in their communities. Over the course of a visit *Jays Care* staff run engaging baseball programming designed to encourage youth to remain physically active and inspire coaches to level up their programming. This year, *Jays Care* made over 115 community stops across 7 provinces and territories, impacting over 6,000 individuals. Thank you to WestJet and Enterprise Car Rental for their generous support in ensuring *Jays Care* staff can travel safely across Canada.



## DONOR HIGHLIGHT

### WestJet

For several years, WestJet, the Official Airline of the *Toronto Blue Jays*, has generously supported *Jays Care* with in-kind donations that raise crucial funds and substantially reduce travel expenses, making sport and recreational programming possible for thousands of children across Canada.

In 2023, WestJet celebrated *Jays Care* athletes, coaches, and volunteers by supporting Community

Moments during select games at Rogers Centre and in conjunction with our Community Celebration which took place in more than 100 communities across Canada. Thousands of children in schools and leagues participated in programming led by *Jays Care* staff and hundreds of coaches, educators and volunteers joined in-person training sessions!

We thank WestJet for their generosity and are proud of our partnership which makes sport and play accessible for children in more than 500 communities across the country.



# WRAP AROUND SUPPORTS

We recognize that not all children and youth step up to the plate equally, and that some may require additional support to fully unlock their potential.

That's why, annually, we offer a wide range of wrap around supports to athletes and families in Jays Care programs to further reduce the barrier to participate in our programs, and to help young people feel prepared to step up to the plate and succeed, both on and off the field.

## WINTER ALL STAR AWARDS

The Winter All Star Awards reduces barriers to sport and play by providing children and youth across *Jays Care's* programs with the winter gear necessary to play and be active outdoors all year long.

- » **1,225** Challenger Baseball families impacted
- » **338** families living in Toronto Community Housing impacted
- » **1,995** students attending priority schools in the Greater Toronto Area impacted

## TURN THE PAGE

Turn The Page, in partnership with First Book Canada, enhances access to books and educational resources through a free book fair-style event that celebrates local educators and fosters a love of reading among students and communities.

- » **1,517** educators received books to fill their classrooms
- » **165,000** books were distributed across Ontario and New Brunswick
- » **2,575** Lego resources made their way to classrooms

## TAKE ME OUT TO THE BALL GAME

Take Me Out To The Ball Game helps remove barriers for children and youth so they can experience the magic of a *Blue Jays* game firsthand. *Jays Care* offers ballpark experiences through the *Jays Care* Community Clubhouse, ticket reallocation from our generous fans, and through our partnership with Kids Up Front.

- » **5,490** individuals hosted in stadium
- » **2,941** individuals hosted in the *Jays Care* Community Clubhouse
- » **2,549** individuals hosted in Kids Up Front donated seats

## RESPITE SUPPORT

The Respite Support Initiative provides Challenger Baseball families with over 60 hours of free respite care for their athletes, aiming to alleviate financial burdens, enhance athlete skill development, and extend caregiver respite time.

- » **61** Challenger Baseball athletes received respite support
- » **2,700+** hours of respite support provided

## TED ROGERS COMMUNITY SCHOLARSHIPS

The Ted Rogers Community Scholarship provides young people across *Jays Care* programming with the opportunity to be nominated for post-secondary scholarships. This includes a one-time grant of \$1,000, to be directly disbursed to the recipients' educational institution. We are grateful for the support of Rogers to support *Jays Care* athletes with community scholarships.

- » **35** scholarships awarded
- » **\$35,000** total awarded through scholarships

## BOUNCE BACK FUND

The Bounce Back Initiative, supported by The Sprott Foundation, assists Indigenous partners of *Jays Care* Foundation in overcoming challenges linked to food insecurity. Funding can be used to strengthen existing programs or create new ones, all with the goal of addressing food insecurity and promoting Indigenous food sovereignty.

- » **\$339,737** granted to **40** Indigenous communities across the country.

## FAMILY NIGHT AT HOME

The Family Night At Home Initiative enhances family connectedness through the power of food and play. Weekly, families receive hot and nutritious meals paired with family play programming, transforming mealtime into relationship-building moments.

- » **600+** meals served to **40** Indigenous families
- » **525+** meals served to **35** newcomer families
- » **3,400+** meals served to **240** families living in priority neighbourhoods in Toronto
- » **240** meals served to **16** Challenger Baseball families





STORY HIGHLIGHT

# ★ Coach John Leadership and Community Engagement

In conversation with Coach John, Coach John Leadership and Community Engagement, Ontario.

Coach John, from Coach John Leadership and Community Engagement, has been leading Jays Care programs for several years. This year, he had the opportunity to bring kids from his program to the Jays Care Community Clubhouse for a full game day experience:

*"I started the Coach John Leadership and Community Engagement Initiative in my community to help kids have positive memories as they grow up. Being an immigrant, I had a rough start, trying to connect with the system and the culture. It was a huge shift from what I had known. That's why I wanted to create positive experiences in my community and help the kids. It starts with them."*

*Jays Care offered one of our groups an opportunity to visit the Clubhouse and watch a Blue Jays Game*

*at the Rogers Centre. For many of these kids, they had never done anything like this before. At the time, 12 or 14 of them were living in a shelter, and I knew they were going to be so excited once they found out. They all thought we were going to be in regular seats and weren't expecting the VIP treatment they received. As soon as they walked into the Clubhouse everybody's behaviour changed. They couldn't believe it, they just kept screaming in excitement.*

*Two of the boys who came were having a tough time at school during this time. They were always fighting and getting suspended. They generally don't listen, except when sports are involved. Taking them to the Clubhouse was a way to show them love on another level. While they may feel the world is against them at times, we wanted to show them that in this program you can be celebrated, you can be like the players you admire on the field, you can be successful. For those kids, the experience of being at the game was priceless."*



# SUPPORTER RECOGNITION

Jays Care sincerely appreciates and acknowledges all supporters who generously contribute to making sport and play a reality for thousands of children and youth across Canada.

- |                           |                           |                         |                          |
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