



AFFILIATE SCHOOL QUALITATIVE DATA HIGHLIGHTS

The playing field across Canada is not equitable for all children and youth. An opportunity gap exists, and many children and youth step up to the plate with two strikes already against them. As a result, thousands of children and youth are not physically active enough and are missing out on the key benefits of sport & play such as, improved mental and physical health, increased success in school, fostering friendships and community, and increasing life skills. That's why all Jays Care programs are designed to combat systemic barriers to sport and play, advance inclusion and belonging, and foster a love of sport and physical activity. In doing so, the goal is that no matter the program a young person joins, they can step up to the plate and unlock their 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

Since 2021, Jays Care has established partnerships with more than 577 schools nationwide, providing accessible and trauma-informed baseball programming to over 21,000 students facing various barriers. The primary objective of the Affiliate Schools' qualitative data review was to analyze and interpret more than 850 open-ended comments received by the Jays Care Foundation (JCF) from partner schools throughout 2021 to 2023. The review's primary aim was to explore and identify highlights that align with JCF's Theory of Change (TOC) outcomes. Additionally, it aimed to identify outcomes that may have emerged beyond the TOC's initial scope.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative data analysis involves reviewing and coding data to identify key themes. For the scope of this review, a thematic analysis approach was taken with a focus on identifying outcomes within the open-ended highlights shared with Jays Care. What this means:

Reviewed and analyzed highlights reflective of:

- An outcome; a change or shift (+/- or 1/↓) in activity, mindset, access, and/or behaviour
- An outcome not explicit in JCF's ToC, but worth noting

Generally, did not analyze highlights that were:

- A testimonial
- A student nomination

Exceptions were made if a testimonial or nomination was reflective of an outcome.

Affiliate School Program	# of Respondents
Challenger Baseball	274
Girls At Bat	404
Indigenous Rookie League	76
RBI	120





ADVANCING EQUITABLE ACCESS



Through the data review, it was clear that Jays Care's action of *Advanc[ing] Equitable Access* is also an outcome; it is key to opening up opportunities for all other actions and outcomes in the TOC. For example, **through and by advancing equitable access**, Jays Care is able to prioritize their inclusion and belonging efforts and encourage physical activity, leading to all its three key outcome areas: an increase in life skills, more positive social connections, and a greater commitment to physical activity.

Based on what schools shared, there are signs and evidence that Affiliate School programming is advancing equitable access to extracurricular sport programming for students facing barriers.

Core themes that emerged from the data included:

- Students previously unable to participate in sport and play are now actively participating in Affiliate School programming.
- Teachers reported the program provided access to leadership opportunities that students would not have otherwise had, allowing students to show and develop their leadership skills.
- Students are provided a safe and inclusive space where they feel encouraged to participate in sports.
- The program is expanding into remote communities and where the availability of playing community sport has been scarce or non-existent.



“The resources and equipment provided help level the playing field of students with less skill/ability at the beginning of the program. Seeing students that struggled to close a glove was discouraging; however, with the new equipment they are having success. Once these students can catch with the velcro gloves, their throwing is improving, their confidence is improving and their attitude towards trying new things is off the charts. Every child is having success regardless of their initial abilities and is growing in their own unique way. (Challenger Baseball)

“In our town we have some children that have no transportation except the school bus, we have no public transportation. Having this program at school during our lunch break has taken away the financial barrier but also the barrier for those without transportation. For a lot of these students it is their first extracurricular and they and their families are beyond thankful. (RBI)

“90% of the students wouldn’t have had the opportunity to participate in a structured baseball program, had it not been within the school - this opportunity is a highlight in itself. (Indigenous Rookie League)

“[One] 16 year old student who is quiet in class but at Girls At Bat is a leader. She helps her peers and asks questions and shows a completely different disposition than in other environments. It’s fantastic that this program gives students an opportunity to feel comfortable and take on leadership roles. (Girls At Bat)

“We have one student who has down syndrome and has always struggled with [their] self confidence. Throughout baseball, [they have] found confidence in [themselves] and have become a leader in our group. [They are] now helping other students run the bases who are in wheelchairs, it has been a wonderful experience to witness. (Challenger Baseball)



A GREATER LOVE OF SPORT & PHYSICAL ACTIVITY



Based on what schools shared, there are signs and evidence that Affiliate School programming is fostering a greater love for sport and physical activity among students.

Core themes that emerged from the data included:

- Students that “typically” wouldn’t participate in sports or engage in physical activity are participating.
- Students who did not enjoy physical activity are now enjoying physical activity.
- Students are trying out for sports teams that they have not tried out for before.



“[One student] struggles with anxiety and stuttering. She has never attempted any sports before but was excited about Girls At Bat. She has attended every session and even asked if we could add a third day to our week. She has opened up to the older girls on our team and is pushing herself to try new things. She just recently tried out for and made our school basketball team and her Mom has shared what an impact Girls At Bat has made for her.” ([Girls At Bat](#))

“[This student] is a student diagnosed with ASD. This student is usually apprehensive to participate in large group activities, especially those that involve physical activity. Since the start of the program [they have] actively participated in every session with such eagerness. He has been seen to interact with peers outside of his specialized program even during recess.” ([RBI](#))

“Another highlight is the increase of activity for the students. They are expanding this, and even playing in the community, and at home, introducing the sport to other family members.” ([Indigenous Rookie League](#))

“[A student] age 13, has benefitted from the program. [Their] confidence has soared and [have] shown to really love sports. Her stand out moment is that her confidence has grown so much she has started to try out other sports, even joining after school sports clubs like basketball club and volleyball club.” ([Challenger Baseball](#))



AN ENHANCED SENSE OF BELONGING



Based on what schools shared, there are signs and evidence that Affiliate School programming is leading to an enhanced sense of belonging for the students involved.

Core themes that emerged from the data included:

- Students are forming new friendships and positive social connections within the program, transcending grade levels and extending beyond the program itself.
- Students are having an increased sense of connection to their school.
- Students' perceptions and attitudes towards their peers with different skills and abilities are undergoing positive shifts, seeing them in a new and positive light.

In addition, some schools shared highlights that reflect that Affiliate School programming has created a primary place of connection for newcomer students, helping these students establish a positive connection to their peers and school through sport.



“One of the students is a 12 year old girl who has struggled to make positive peer interactions. After joining the Girls At Bat program, she has started to make new friends and finally feels included. Her self-esteem was very low and she has also made gains to start to see herself in a positive light.” (Girls At Bat)

“Our students asked to institute our “Team Tradition” - a locally developed cheer - at the beginning and end of each session...As one of them put it, “it makes us feel like a team.” This is a huge benefit to our school, as one of our goals has been to increase collaboration in the class. To hear our students describe each other as a team, as opposed to a set of separate individuals, demonstrated the value and importance of instituting and continuing both the tradition and the program.” (Indigenous Rookie League)

“[One student] was new to Canada and was very shy when she came to school. Many of her classmates offered to play with her and get her accustomed to the new environment but she was hesitant to do so...A month later [she] is confident, social inside and out of the classroom and has become such a leader in the program.” (Girls At Bat)

“My challenger baseball team is made up of my small special needs class. We have limited opportunities to interact with the general population of the school, which limits my students' abilities to develop positive relationships with same aged peers. **We have been inviting students from the older grades to be our buddies and help make the program more successful. It is amazing to have the opportunity for my students to interact with the general education students. Students are more likely to say hi in the halls and at recess, now that they are getting to know my class.”** (Challenger Baseball)

“We have many newcomer students in our school. The program has given them a chance to succeed in an activity and meet new friends from other classes. Some of these students, since they are new to the school and country, can spend time by themselves at recess. This program has allowed them to actively engage with other students while learning new skills.” (RBI)



INCREASING LIFE SKILLS



Based on what schools shared, there are signs and evidence that Affiliate School programming is leading to an increase in life skills for students.

Core themes that emerged from the data included:

- Students are increasing their sense of self-confidence and that is extending into other areas of their lives.
- Students are demonstrating a growth in their leadership skills
- Students' perceptions of themselves and their abilities are positively shifting.
- Students have been increasing their ability to self-regulate.

In addition, some schools highlighted how the program is supporting newcomer students in practicing and enhancing their English language skills.



“[One student] is a very shy young lady who is twelve years old. The Girls At Bat Program has helped to increase her overall self-esteem both in the classroom and on the field. She is willing to put herself “out there” to make plays she would never have attempted in the past. This has carried into the classroom where she is willing to voice her opinion and ask for assistance when needed. Her whole demeanour has improved due to being involved in sport which has given her confidence in other areas of her life.” (Girls At Bat)

“[This student] has been positively affected [by] the Challenger Baseball program. This student has many behavioural challenges that has kept [them] from playing sports the last few years, despite [their] love for [sports]. Challenger baseball has allowed [them] to practice self regulation skills, get back to what [they] love to do, and be reunited with friends who [they have] been removed from. It has been such a joy to see [them] getting active and being a part of a group.” (Challenger Baseball)

“A student who has experienced many struggles within the classroom has recently shown tremendous growth and self-confidence in our baseball program. This program has given him the opportunity to develop new social skills with peers, and to develop positive relationships with his peers, teachers running the program, and a general increase in the sense of belonging towards the school.” (RBI)

“[One student has] struggled to fit in most of the year, [they] joined our group and has made friends, attends school more often, and is proud of her growth. She is really coming into her own self.” (Indigenous Rookie League)



ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS



In addition to the findings related to the Theory of Change, additional themes emerged from the data that are noteworthy. These include:

Some schools reported that, as a result of the programming, there was an:

- Increase in the sense of belonging within the school community
- Increase in positive in-class behaviors
- Increase in school attendance

A few comments indicated that coaches and educators experienced a:

- Shift in their perceptions and attitudes about who qualifies as an athlete or who can participate in sports

Additionally, a few schools highlighted how families:

- Feel more connected to their children and to the school itself due to the impact of the programming



“Another massive highlight has been the connection of staff to the students. The farther along our program goes, the more connected the students appear to feel about adults in the building.” (Indigenous Rookie League)

“Attendance is one area that our school struggles with. I have two male students who have less than 25% attendance. Since the program has started, both of their attendance has improved to almost 100%.” (Indigenous Rookie League)

“The Affiliate School Banner is being hung in the Gym. This is a great thing for the program as it gives our special education students some real notice and recognition within the school and in a public space.” (Challenger Baseball)

“One of the greatest impacts that the Challenger Baseball program continues to have is on our school community as a whole. The inclusiveness of Challenger has spread beyond just baseball and now all of the extracurricular activities that we offer are much more welcoming and open to students of all abilities.” (Challenger Baseball)

“[One student’s] mom stopped by the school for the first time ever yesterday and ended up talking to the principal. She is from a racialized family. Her mom indicated that this is the first time that [the student] has felt like she belonged at school and is very eager to go. As well, [the] mom indicated that this has made her feel safe and confident to go and visit the school in person.” (Girls At Bat)

“This program has promoted school unity and school pride. The school as a whole has noticed positive changes in behaviours and a more positive outlook towards school.” (RBI)



SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATIONS



It is clear that Jays Care Affiliate School programming is achieving its vision of leveling the playing field, and in doing so unlocking the potential of its students. Students who have not had access to sports programming - whether due to limited or no programming available and/or experiencing financial, physical, and/or cognitive barriers - are increasing their self-esteem and confidence, making new positive friendships, and developing a love for physical and activity sport. In addition, signs and evidence exist that the benefits of Jays Care programming is extending beyond the students themselves and is having a positive impact on the overall school culture, educators and students alike.

Further areas to explore include how and to what extent is Jays Care programming positively shifting the perception around those who can play sports, and what are the ways programming is contributing to creating stronger and more connected communities.