

RNS ANNUAL CONFERENCE

2026

**GET INSPIRED.
LEARN. CONNECT.**



CONFERENCE PROGRAM

OCTOBER 14-15, 2026

THE BEST WESTERN TRURO - GLENGARRY

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Recreation Nova Scotia gratefully acknowledges the Province of Nova Scotia for its ongoing partnership and support of our work. We value our continued collaboration and appreciate our shared commitment to strengthening recreation and building healthier, more connected communities across the province.

P'JILASI, BIENVENUE, WELCOME!



Welcome to the 2026 Recreation Nova Scotia Annual Conference!

This year, we are proud to gather in Nova Scotia's beautiful Fundy Region under the theme *Waves of Impact: Elevating the Value of Recreation in Nova Scotia*.

Like the powerful tides that define the Bay of Fundy, recreation has the ability to create lasting change. Every program, partnership, volunteer, and leader contributes to a ripple effect that strengthens communities, supports health and well-being, and creates opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to thrive.

We invite you to learn, connect, and be inspired alongside recreation professionals, volunteers, students, municipal leaders, and community partners from across the province.

Together, we'll explore new ideas, celebrate achievements, and discover innovative ways to elevate the impact of recreation in our communities.

Thank you for being part of this year's conference. We hope you leave with new knowledge, meaningful connections, and renewed energy to continue creating waves of impact across Nova Scotia.



Did You Know...

We'kwampekitk
(Truro Area, Colchester County)
translates to
"the bay runs far up"

Wékopekwithk
(Millbrook)
translates to
"as far as the water will flow" or
"the end of the water's flow"

As the conference will take place at the Glengarry in Truro, we acknowledge that the Town of Truro is in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaw People, and is subject to the Treaties of Peace and Friendship. The Town of Truro is situated in a region long inhabited by Indigenous Peoples, with neighboring communities like Wékopekwithk, Millbrook First Nation.

Conference Sponsors

Thank you to our generous sponsors for making this conference possible.

Award Banquet



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Bronze



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Schedule at a Glance

October 13 - Pre-Conference

2:00 - 7:00	Truro Golf & Country Club	See session description on page 7
4:00 - 6:00	Victoria Park Walk & Talk	See session description on page 7
7:00	Social at Belly Up	See session description on page 7

October 14 - Day 1

9:30 - 10:00	Registration	Conference Area Lobby
10:00 - 10:30	Welcome Ceremony	See session description on page 8
10:30 - 11:15	Opening Keynote	See session description on page 8
11:20 - 12:20	Breakout Session #1	See session descriptions page 8-9
12:20 - 1:25	Lunch & Exhibitor Showcase	Ballroom D/G/E & MacDonald Room A/B
1:30 - 3:00	RNS AGM	Ballroom D/G/E
3:00 - 3:30	Break/Travel to off site venue	
3:30 - 5:00	Off-Site Venue Walk and Talks or Additional In-Hotel Sessions	See session description page 11
5:30 - 6:00	Award Winner's Reception	Ballroom A
6:00 - 8:00	Award Ceremony and Banquet	Ballroom D/G/E
8:30 - 10:00	Regional Games	Ballroom D/G/E

October 15 - Day 2

8:00 - 9:00	Breakfast	Hotel Complimentary Breakfast
9:00 - 9:55	Demonstrating the Impact of Rec	See session description pages 13
10:00 - 10:55	Breakout Session #2	See session descriptions page 14-15
11:00 - 11:55	CPRA Framework Review	See session description page 15
12:00 - 12:15	Closing Ceremonies	Ballroom D/G/E 5
1:00 - 4:30	Recreation Foundations Training	See session description page 16

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Session Description

Pre-Conference

October 13

Optional

Truro Golf & Country Club

Date: Oct 13 | Time: 2:00-7:00 | Location: 86 Golf St, Truro, NS

Overview: Start your conference experience with a relaxing round of golf at the beautiful Truro Golf & Country Club. As a special pre-conference offering, attendees can enjoy discounted green fees while connecting with fellow recreation professionals in a casual setting before the conference begins.

24 Tee times available at an RNS Conference Special Rate between 2:06pm - 2:51pm.

Preferred tee times are not guaranteed.

Cost: \$40 Tax included for 18 holes, \$25 Tax included for 9 Holes, Power Cart Rates are \$36 tax included for 18 holes and \$18 tax included for 9 holes.

To be paid on site.



Optional

Victoria Park Walk & Talk

Scott Holman | Urban Forest and Victoria Park Supervisor

Date: Oct 13 | Time: 4:00-6:00 | Location: 29 Park Road, Truro, NS

Overview: The hike will highlight the ongoing impacts and recovery efforts following Hurricane Fiona, Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (HWA) prevention initiatives, healthy forest research, including an internal salamander study, and some of the unique traditions and "folklore" that have shaped Victoria Park over the years.

This will be a great opportunity to learn more about the park's natural environment, history, and ongoing stewardship efforts.



Optional

Pre-Conference Social at Belly Up

Date: Oct 13 | Time: 7:00 | Location: 214 Robie Street, Truro

Overview: Join us for a relaxed pre-conference social featuring good food and great company. Enjoy a meal, catch up with colleagues, and ease into the conference before things get underway.

Costs are the responsibility of the conference delegate and are payable on site.



Day 1 October 14

Conference Opening

Welcome Ceremony

Time: 10:00- 10:30 | Location: Ballroom D/G/E

Overview: Our Opening Ceremony will feature greetings from local and provincial leaders, including Mayor Hinton of the Town of Truro and The Honourable Dave Ritcey, Minister of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage. Together, we'll set the stage for two days of learning. We can't wait to welcome you!

Opening Keynote

The Power of Connection: How Recreation Supports Mental Wellness

Starr Cunningham | Mental Health Foundation of Nova Scotia

Time: 10:30-11:15 | Location: Ballroom D/G/E

Overview: Connection is one of the strongest contributors to mental wellness and recreation professionals foster connection every day. Drawing on community initiatives across Nova Scotia, including the Mental Health Foundation of Nova Scotia's Body Movin' campaign, this session will explore how recreation strengthens belonging, reduces isolation, and supports mental wellness through connection, movement, purpose, and engagement. Attendees will gain practical strategies to communicate and elevate the impact of their work in getting people moving while helping build healthier, more connected communities.

Breakout Session #1 Options

Date: Oct 14 | Time: 11:20-12:20

Inclusion is a Team Sport: Collaborative Approaches to Municipal Recreation

Bekah Craik, Hannah Terasco, and Corrie Melanson | Active Abilities Canada and Sea Change ColLab

Overview: Creating inclusive recreation opportunities requires more than accessible programs—it requires the leadership, relationships, collaboration, and organizational culture that make inclusion part of everyday practice. In this interactive session, participants will explore how collaboration, co-design, and organizational change can help municipalities move from good intentions to meaningful action. Through real-world recreation scenarios, guided discussion, and practical activities, participants will reflect on their own organizations, identify opportunities for change, and learn approaches they can adapt within their communities. Participants will leave with practical tools, fresh ideas, and one meaningful action they can begin putting into practice right away.

Elevate your Impact on Nova Scotians Affected by Dementia

Beth House | Alzheimer Society Nova Scotia

Overview: Join Beth House from the Alzheimer Society NS to learn how Recreation professionals can elevate their impact for the 18,800 Nova Scotians living with dementia in your communities. Discover simple ways to be more inclusive and accessible, options for further free education and how ASNS can support you. A dementia friendly community supports, respects and includes people living with dementia and their partners in care in the places they live, work and PLAY.

Shared Digital Infrastructure for Connected Communities

Laura Duggan | PlayFinder

Overview: Communities recognize the value of recreation, investing significant time and resources into programs, facilities, natural spaces, equipment, and events, yet opportunities often remain underutilized as access is fragmented across organizations, municipalities, and platforms - creating barriers to participation and limiting their collective impact.

This session explores how shared digital community recreation infrastructure is strengthening collaboration, supporting recreation professionals and community volunteers, improving access, and generating meaningful data to inform planning and investment.

Through real-world Community Access case studies from Nova Scotia, participants will discover how connected communities are creating network effects that make recreation easier to discover and access within and across county boundaries while laying the foundation for provincial and national collaboration.

Beyond Participation: Creating the Conditions for Impact

Jessica Spooner | Blue Bark & Co.

Overview: Recreation organizations invest significant effort in attracting participants, but what if lasting impact depends on investing just as intentionally in the people who create opportunities for others?

Drawing on graduate research and the transformation of Cycling Nova Scotia's Women on Wheels program from 25 to 115 members in 18 months, this session explores how training, practical resources, peer connection, and ongoing support can unlock capacity and expand recreation opportunities.

Participants will examine what happens when organizations move beyond simply delivering programs and instead create the conditions for people to contribute, connect, and sustain opportunities in their communities. Attendees will leave with a practical framework for identifying untapped capacity and strengthening the people and relationships that multiply recreation's impact.

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Off-Site Venue Walk/Talks & Additional Sessions

Date: Oct 14 | Time: 3:30-5:00

Off-site

Railyard Mountain Bike Park

Location: 627 Young Street, Truro, NS - Transportation on your own

Overview: Join this guided walk through the Railyard to learn how volunteer efforts and strategic investment transformed the trail network into a four-season recreation and tourism destination. The session will highlight completed improvements, community benefits, and priorities for sustainable growth.

Meet by the Washrooms (the Purple Container)

Off-Site

No. 2 Construction Battalion Athletic Facility

Location: 57 Golf Street, Truro NS - Group walk from hotel or transportation on your own

Overview: Tour the No. 2 Construction Battalion Athletic Facility and discover how this historic site was transformed into a modern, accessible sport and recreation venue. This informal guided walk and talk with Ashley Simms highlights its athletic legacy, revitalization, commemorative name, and lasting community impact.

On-Site

Why Recreation Facilities Have a Key Role to Play in Inclusion?

Gilles Roure | ZeroLimits

Overview: This presentation outlines a three-part structure addressing disability and recreation. The first part identifies the various barriers that prevent people with disabilities or mobility challenges from participating in activities and sports. The second part zooms in on one specific barrier, the high cost of adaptive equipment, and unpacks the different factors that drive those costs up. The third part shifts focus to recreation facilities themselves, examining the key role they play in fostering inclusion, going beyond just the financial dimension to look at how and why these spaces matter for accessibility more broadly.

On-Site

Plogging: Community and Environmental Impacts

Jesse Sharratt and Kelsey Harvey | University of Cape Breton

Overview: “Plogging” combines physical activity, such as walking or running, with picking up litter. In this session, we will introduce you to plogging, how people engage with plogging (including the tools people use), and how to adapt plogging for people of different ages and abilities, as well as urban and rural communities. You will experience plogging and be introduced to resources, such as WorldLitterRun.com, a platform to turn plogging into measurable community benefit: ploggers pick, taggers log, businesses fund the cleanup of the areas in which they operate, and the money flows to charities the ploggers choose.

Awards

Banquet & Ceremony

HOSTED BY



Jeff Douglas



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About Jeff Douglas

He's a born storyteller with a background in theatre and narration. Born in Truro, N.S., Jeff Douglas has travelled the country, tackling projects as disparate as mushing dogs in Yukon to jumping out of planes with search-and-rescue personnel from the 442nd Squadron.

He was the host of the award-winning unscripted series *Ancestors in the Attic*, *Working Over Time*, and *Things That Move*. Jeff's received three Gemini nominations, and a Kari Award for his popular commercial work — which includes playing Joe Canadian in the now-legendary "I Am Canadian" campaign.

Jeff was co-host of *AS IT HAPPENS* since 2010. He's also the voice of CBC TV's *THE STATS OF LIFE*.

He returned to his home province in June 2019 to host Mainland Nova Scotia's afternoon show, *MAINSTREET*, on CBC Radio One.

Day 2 October 15

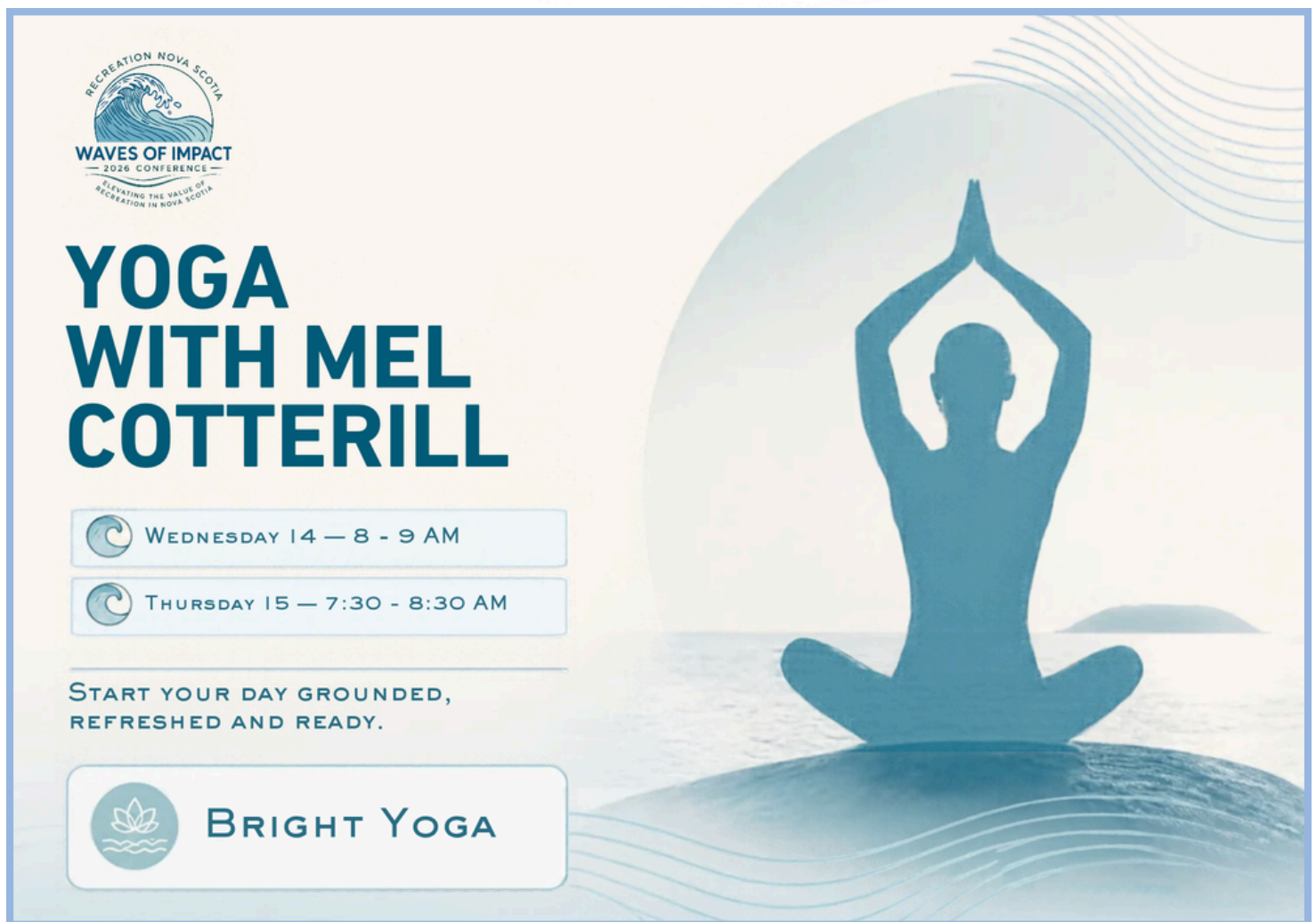
Panel

Date: Oct 15 | Time: 9:00-9:55

Demonstrating the Impact of Recreation

Panelists: **Dawn MacNevin, Luc Cousineau, Christena Curry, Lori McCracken, and Kathy Wells**

Overview: Recreation plays a vital role in community quality of life, health, well-being, connection, and belonging. This engaging plenary panel brings together recreation leaders and decision makers to explore how we capture, measure, and communicate recreation's impact in ways that demonstrate its value and build the case for investment. Panelists will share perspectives and practical approaches for using data, outcomes, and community stories to show decision makers why recreation matters—and why investing in recreation is an investment in thriving communities.



The graphic features a silhouette of a person in a yoga pose (Padmasana with Anjali Mudra) against a background of a large sun or moon over water. The text is arranged on the left side, with the event title in large bold letters, followed by dates and times in two boxes, a motivational quote, and the organizer's name with logo in a box at the bottom.

 **WAVES OF IMPACT**
2026 CONFERENCE
ELEVATING THE VALUE OF
RECREATION IN NOVA SCOTIA

YOGA WITH MEL COTTERILL

 WEDNESDAY 14 — 8 - 9 AM

 THURSDAY 15 — 7:30 - 8:30 AM

START YOUR DAY GROUNDED,
REFRESHED AND READY.

 **BRIGHT YOGA**

Breakout Session #2 Options

Date: Oct 15 | Time: 10:00-10:55

Retention of Permanent Rec Employees: Is It All About the Money?

Jen Heddon | Cole Harbour Place

Overview: This interactive session explores the factors that influence job satisfaction and employee retention among permanent employees in the recreation sector. Drawing on research conducted in Nova Scotia by Jen Heddon, the presentation examines whether compensation is the primary driver of retention or whether other workplace factors play an equally important role. Participants will gain insights into the impact of work-life balance, supervisory support, working conditions, and compensation on employees' decisions to remain with their organization.

In addition to reviewing key research findings, attendees will engage in facilitated group discussions and collaborative activities to reflect on their own workplace experiences and share strategies for addressing retention challenges. Through peer learning and practical dialogue, participants will identify actionable approaches that recreation leaders and organizations can use to enhance employee satisfaction, strengthen retention efforts, and build a more sustainable workforce.

Fit 4 Life and Fit 4 Tots: Physical Literacy Enriched Play Spaces

Dr. Angie Kolen | St. Francis Xavier University, Human Kinetics

Overview: This presentation will share the successes of two popular movement programs Fit 4 Life and Fit 4 Tots. Fit 4 Life is a low organized games program offered after school 3 days per week to children in grades 3 and. Fit 4 Tots is a movement exploration program offered as a drop-in program for children not yet in school. Both programs are created with physical literacy in mind and are used as experiential learning tools for university students and to promote physical activity in the Antigonish community.

You Need Program Evaluation, We Can Help! Work with Universities

Luc Cousineau | Dalhousie University

Overview: Curious about how to evaluate your programs but short on time, capacity, or expertise? This session explores how recreation organizations can partner with universities to conduct meaningful program evaluations that support decision making and demonstrate impact. Discover how academic partnerships can support program evaluation needs while creating hands on learning opportunities that introduce students to the breadth and impact of recreation programming across Nova Scotia. Learn about a collaborative model that benefits practitioners, supports student development, and strengthens connections between the recreation sector and post-secondary education. The session will share lessons learned from a successful university-municipal partnership in Nova Scotia and provide practical ideas for developing similar collaborations.

The Role of Recreation in Addressing Complex Social Issues

Josie Hatfield and Anna Haanstra | Tri-County Youth Wellbeing Network and CCTH

Overview: The partnership and mission-driven work of the Tri-County Youth Wellbeing Network (YWN) demonstrates how recreation facilities and youth-centered spaces can be powerful partners in addressing youth disconnection. Following the 2023 Youth Wellbeing Summit that used a tailor-made 8 domains of wellbeing framework, more than 50 local youth identified low levels of wellbeing and insufficient welcoming places and spaces where they felt they belonged and welcomed. In response, the YWN, with its front-line service providers coalition, partnered with the local recreation facility to launch regular Teen Takeover Nights—an initiative that has become central to the network's success in putting youth voice at the heart of collective efforts to improve youth wellbeing. This presentation explores how recreation's greatest contribution may not be the programs it delivers, but the sense of belonging it creates, and the role recreation can play as a key partner in building healthier, more connected communities for young people.

Plenary Session

Date: Oct 15 | Time: 11:00-12:00

Renewed Framework for Recreation & Parks in Canada

Date: Oct 15 | Time: 11:00-12:00 | Location: Ballroom D/G/E

Overview: The Canadian Parks & Recreation Association (CPRA) heard from more than 2,500 people across Canada through 2024-2025 to help craft a renewed Framework for Recreation & Parks in Canada, with a purpose of guiding and inspiring the collective work of the sector.

While The Framework will still be in draft form until early 2027, this session will draw upon key ideas from the renewed Framework for exploration in a Nova Scotian-context.



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Training

Date: Oct 15 | Time: 1:00-4:30

Recreation Foundations Training

J. Griffin Consulting | Location: Ballroom D/G/E

Overview: RNS's new leadership training seeks to equip recreation leaders with the skills, confidence and judgment to lead and adapt programs. The training helps leaders understand children, read situations with care, and design environments where participants feel safe, welcomed, and able to participate in ways that work for them.

This training provides an experiential, immersive, and engaging experiences designed as a play-based experience that models the type of environment we hope leaders can create in their programs. Participants don't just hear about best practice, rather, they experience it, practice it, and apply it to real-life scenarios based on the realities of recreation programs in Nova Scotia.



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KEYNOTE SPEAKER

STARR CUNNINGHAM

MENTAL HEALTH FOUNDATION OF NOVA SCOTIA

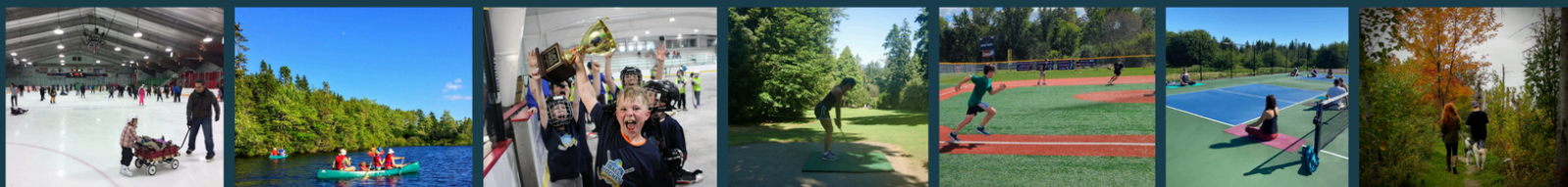
Starr Cunningham is the President & CEO of the Mental Health Foundation of Nova Scotia. She is an Atlantic Top 50 CEO Award winner, graduate of the ICD-Rotman, Directors Education Program (ICD.D), and a National Recipient of a Difference Makers - 150 Canadians Leading for Mental Health Award.

Starr serves on the Atlantic Bell Let's Talk Community Fund Advisory Committee and the International Women's Forum Atlantic Executive. A Director of the Board for St. John Ambulance Nova Scotia & Prince Edward Island, Starr is invested into the Order of St. John and is a member of the National Honours & Awards Committee of the Priory of Canada. Starr is a King Charles III Coronation Medal and Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Medal recipient for her work in mental health. A best-selling children's author and multiple journalism award winner, Starr is a strong voice and recognized personality across the Atlantic region



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Speaker Bios

Meet some of the presenters who will be sharing ideas, experiences, and insights throughout the 2026 conference.

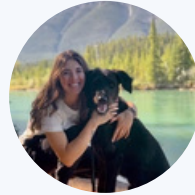


Bekah Craik

Active Abilities Canada

Inclusion is a Team Sport: Collaborative...

Bekah Craik (she/her) is the Project Manager for the Municipal Guide for Disability Inclusion in Recreation and Physical Activity at Active Abilities Canada. She is passionate about building inclusive communities where everyone feels welcomed, valued, and able to participate fully. With a background in accessibility, adaptive recreation, and community development, Bekah has led accessibility and inclusion initiatives across municipal and community settings, working alongside schools, health organizations, nonprofits, and government partners to advance equitable participation. She is committed to helping municipalities build the knowledge, partnerships, and capacity needed to create lasting systems change through inclusive recreation.



Hannah Terasco

Active Abilities Canada

Inclusion is a Team Sport: Collaborative...

Hannah Terasco (she/her) is the Community Facilitator with Active Abilities Canada, supporting municipalities and recreation professionals in creating more inclusive recreation opportunities. She is passionate about fostering environments where individuals feel welcomed, supported, and connected through recreation, sport, and physical activity. With a background in adapted physical activity, physical literacy, and community outreach, Hannah is committed to reducing barriers and promoting meaningful participation. She is dedicated to helping communities create opportunities where everyone can experience belonging through movement and recreation.



Corrie Melanson

Sea Change CoLab

Inclusion is a Team Sport: Collaborative...

Corrie Melanson (she/they) is the Strategy and Learning Lead at Sea Change CoLab. With more than 20 years of facilitation experience, Corrie designs, facilitates, and evaluates dynamic learning and change processes that build on individual and organizational strengths. Drawing on expertise in adult education, universal design, culturally responsive practices, and participatory evaluation, Corrie creates inclusive learning experiences that foster engagement, possibility, and collective action.



Beth House

Alzheimer Society Nova Scotia

Elevate your Impact on Nova Scotians w...

BRec is the Education Lead at the Alzheimer Society Nova Scotia. She facilitates education, delivers public presentations and supports clients on the Dementia Helpline. With a therapeutic recreation background specializing in geriatric populations, Beth spent 20 years working in long term care, enhancing quality of life for the residents she served. Beth has held various volunteer roles on provincial Therapeutic Recreation Boards and with Nova Scotia Horticulture for Health Network. When Beth is not working, she is busy in her garden or with her husband, two kids, and dog Rory.



Laura Duggan

PlayFinder

Shared Digital Infrastructure for Conn...

Laura Duggan is the Co-Founder of PlayFinder, a Nova Scotia social enterprise dedicated to improving access to recreation through innovative digital solutions. With a background in education, recreation, and community development, Laura works alongside municipalities, non-profit organizations, and provincial partners to strengthen collaboration, reduce barriers to participation, and build connected recreation ecosystems. She is passionate about helping communities leverage shared digital infrastructure and meaningful data to increase participation, support volunteers, and enhance the long-term impact of recreation across Nova Scotia and beyond.



Dr. Kelsey Harvey

University of Cape Breton

Plogging: Community and Environmental..

Dr. Kelsey Harvey, PhD is an Assistant Professor of Experiential Studies in Community and Sport at Cape Breton University. A social gerontologist by training, her research is at the intersection of physical activity, community, and education in later life. Her current and past projects include research on interprofessional health and social service education in Canada, learning in and about nature through plogging/walking while picking up litter, and identity and social belonging in group fitness for older exercisers. She uses community-based and participatory methods to ground her research in the lived experiences and daily realities of older people.



Jessica Spooner

Blue Bark & Co.

Beyond Participation: Creating the Cond...

Jessica Spooner is a recreation and community development practitioner, researcher, program leader, and consultant with experience across outdoor recreation, nonprofit organizations, post-secondary education, and provincial government. She holds a Master of Community Development from Acadia University, where her research explored barriers, belonging, and the experiences of women creating hiking opportunities for other women. Jessica has designed, grown, and transitioned community recreation initiatives, including Project Hike, Women on Wheels, and Trail Magic. Her work focuses on translating research into practice, strengthening the people and relationships that make recreation possible, and creating conditions for inclusive, connected, and sustainable recreation communities.



Jesse Sharratt

Atlas Atlantic

Plogging: Community and Environmental..

Jesse Sharratt is the founder of Atlas Atlantic, a Dartmouth-based venture studio that builds software and infrastructure for civic, nonprofit, and volunteer organizations. He is the builder behind WorldLitterRun.com, the platform he developed over six months with Luke MacDonald to turn plogging into measurable community benefit: ploggers pick, taggers log, businesses fund the cleanup of the areas they operate in, and the money flows to charities the ploggers choose. The platform now runs registration and event operations for FundPlogging activations, including the Blue Nose Marathon's 2026 plogging program. He co-founded LAUFT, which scaled to national contracts with the Government of Canada. He serves as Board Chair of LOVE Nova Scotia and President of Canadian Parents for French, Dartmouth Chapter. He plogs with his two young sons in tow.



Gilles Roure

ZeroLimits

Why Recreation Facilities Have a Key...

After a quite long carrier as a representative and a sales manager, Gilles Roure lost interest in selling anything just to make a living, which brought him to occupy other positions... until he was given the opportunity to represent the adaptive equipment brand Joëlette and Co in Canada. What started as a second occupation, quickly grew in him as he saw the joy felt by those trying equipment and discovered activities they never tried, or by those able to do something they had not done for year or decades. Not only did he find purpose in what he was doing, but he realized that there had to be more unknown equipment allowing people with disabilities and mobility challenges to engage in activities which were impossible before. Some research led him to find other amazing products such as the Hippolib for horseback riding, and the Ice Perf for ice skating. After introducing himself as a Joëlette and Co partner "only" for a couple of years, these new partnerships and the desire to give and find happiness on a full time basis led him to the creation of Zero Limit



Sam Ellsworth

St. Francis Xavier
University, Human Kinetics

Fit 4 Life and Fit 4 Tots: Physical Lit...

Sam Ellsworth is fourth year Human kinetics student at StFX. He is currently participating in Fit 4 Life as a volunteer. He intends to become a physiotherapist and Fit 4 Life gives him the opportunity to get experience working with kids, and promoting physical activity.



Dr. Angie Kolen

St. Francis Xavier
University, Human Kinetics

Fit 4 Life and Fit 4 Tots: Physical Lit...

Angie Kolen, PhD., 3M National Teaching Fellow, is a professor in Human Kinetics at St. Francis Xavier University. Since 2002, she has been actively creating physical literacy enriched movement experiences with her students and elementary school children in an afterschool program called Fit 4 Life and in a movement exploration program called Fit 4 Tots.



Jen Heddon

Cole Harbour Place

Retention of Permanent Rec Employees..

With a strong background in public administration and management, I bring over a decade of experience in leadership roles within the public service and recreational facilities sectors. My educational journey includes a PhD in Business Administration, as well as advanced degrees from Dalhousie University and Saint Mary's University. Over the years, I have honed my skills in cross-functional team leadership, customer service, and collaborative problem-solving through roles such as General Manager at Cole Harbour Place and previous positions with Halifax Regional Municipality and the Department of National Defence. At Cole Harbour Place, our mission is to serve as a cornerstone for community wellness by promoting healthier lifestyles. As one of Nova Scotia's premier independently run recreation facilities, we offer diverse programs designed to meet the needs of individuals across all age groups in our community. By fostering an inclusive environment that encourages participation and well-being, we aim to enrich lives through activity and connection.



Luc Cousineau

Dalhousie University

You Need Program Evaluation, We Can...

Demonstrating the Impact of Rec.

Dr. Luc S. Cousineau is Program Director, Instructor, and Internship Coordinator for Recreation Management in the School of Health and Human Performance at Dalhousie University. His research explores how gender and power help to structure our online and offline communities. His teaching and mentorship focus on creating confident, connected, and professional members of the recreation professions through accessible, inclusive, and engaging learning environments. Alongside media appearances with Canadian news outlets, his work has been featured in popular media ([Busted Podcast](#) and [The Conversation](#)) and academic publications [Surveillance & Society](#), [Leisure Sciences](#), [Qualitative Inquiry](#), [The Research Handbook on the Sociology of Leisure](#).



Josie Hatfield

Tri-County Youth Wellbeing Network

The Role of Recreation in Addressing...

Josie is the Youth Wellbeing Network Coordinator, working to strengthen youth voice, connection, and leadership across the Tri-Counties, while supporting network partners in collaborative projects. With an Honours Bachelor of Science in Psychology, from the University of Toronto, she brings a fresh, early-career perspective grounded in curiosity and learning alongside the communities she serves. She is a passionate advocate for youth and believes young people are already leading change in real and meaningful ways. In her role, Josie focuses on collaboration, bringing people together to build capacity, and turning shared ideas into meaningful action that supports youth across the Tri-Counties. She's known for her high energy and positivity, and is always up for a good side quest. She also has a well-meaning belief that just about anything can be improved with a solid TikTok promo



Anna Haanstra

CCTH

The Role of Recreation in Addressing...

Anna Haanstra is CCTH's Regional Manager on the beautiful South Shore. As a facilitator, evaluator, and geeky project manager, she works with a variety of partners to link recreation with broader work on community wellbeing and quality of life. Anna focuses on collaboration, strategic steps, slow unfolding of the way forward and turning sticky questions into shared action. She believes the best ideas are built together—and that every great workshop should include snacks and at least one wall covered in sticky notes.



Dawn MacNevin

Past ED of NS's Accessibility Directorate at the Department of Justice

Demonstrating the Impact of Rec.

Dawn was a senior leader with more than 40 years of experience in public service, organizational leadership, community engagement and turning ideas into action. Most recently, and before her retirement this Spring, she served as Executive Director of Nova Scotia's Accessibility Directorate at the Department of Justice, where she led work to advance accessibility across the province. But long before accessibility became her focus, Dawn was part of the Recreation Nova Scotia story. From 1998 to 2009, she served as Recreation Nova Scotia's first Executive Director - helping build the organization. So, in many ways, this conference brings her back to an important part of her career.



Christena Curry

Municipality of Cumberland,
Director of Recreation

Demonstrating the Impact of Rec.

K'we, nin teluisi (Hello, my name is), Christena Curry. I am a Pictou Landing First Nation band member and was born and raised in Pictou County. I now reside in Salmon River with my husband, son, and our 2 dogs and 2 cats.

She was previously the Manager of Parks, Recreation & Youth for Millbrook First Nation, overseeing 13 full-time staff and their recreation programming, community facilities, youth engagement, and community events. She was with Millbrook since 2020, when she was originally hired as their Physical Activity Coordinator and built the department through the years.

She holds a diploma in recreation leadership, a bachelor's degree in sport and recreation studies, and a master's in sport and recreation studies. Her research background is in municipal partnership development between recreation and sport delivery systems. Additionally, Christena has served on the Recreation Nova Scotia Board of Directors for three terms and currently sits on the Community of Practice board of Nova Scotia Women and Girls in Sport and Recreation. She also holds a seat with Soccer Canada's Indigenous Working Group, focused on increasing soccer in L'nu communities. Christena was inducted into the Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq Sport Hall of Fame in 2023 as a coach and a builder and in 2025 she received the Young Alumni Achievement Award from the University of New Brunswick for her work in recreation and sport. She started in a new role at the Recreation Director for the Municipality of Cumberland.



Lori McCracken

Director of Public Health at Nova
Scotia Health, Northern Zone

Demonstrating the Impact of Rec.

Lori McCracken (she/her) is a Registered Nurse who has spent her career in various community health positions and leadership roles. She is currently the Director of Public Health at Nova Scotia Health, Northern Zone which covers the geography and communities from East Hants to Cumberland and including Pictou County. This is a beautiful geography which Lori is lucky to also call home, and resides in Bible Hill.

Outside of work, Lori is also a wife, mother, and caregiver. She has strong value on recreation using this to care for herself while also being the primary support for her 18-year-old son who has physical, neurological and intellectual differences. Admittedly, finding appropriate and inclusive recreation options for her son can be a bit more challenging, but taps into innovation and community connections to maximize the opportunities.

In her leisure time, Lori enjoys yoga, meditation, gardening, golfing, reading, crafting, and walking. You will often see her strolling with her son along the Cobequid Trail or in Victoria Park. As part of the panel, Lori will integrate population health data with her lived experience, as recreation is a strong driver on social connection.



Kathy Wells

Councillor, Town of Amherst

Demonstrating the Impact of Rec.

I was born on the West Coast, but I grew up in Amherst and attended school here from Kindergarden to Grade 12. After high school, I attended Teachers College in Truro, obtaining my Bachelor of Education degree. I returned home and taught in Springhill, Wallace and Pugwash before becoming Principal of Cumberland North Academy. Last November, I retired after 32 years in Education.

My husband and I have made Amherst our home and are raising our son Cal here. We live in the downtown core because we wanted to be close to all of the amenities and recreation facilities Amherst has to offer.

I am going into my third year as a Town Councillor in Amherst. My passion is children, and families. I want our town to be safe, active and I support opportunities for Amherst to be a place where families want to live.

Recreation and fitness have always been a part of my life. I spend my summers on the ball field and winters in the gym cheering on my son while he plays basketball. I am a member and a volunteer with our YMCA and worked with our Town Recreation Department often as Principal. I am an avid skier and have recently taken up pickleball!