

Sport and Belonging Research Project

Plain Language Research Report





2024

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Special Olympics partnership to understand, promote, and support belonging through organized sport participation for young adults with intellectual disabilities

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About this project.

Sport and Belonging 2019 - 2024

Project Applicants:

Rebecca Renwick, PhD*;

Kelly Arbour-Nicitopoulos, PhD**;

James Noronha, JD (candidate)***.

*Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy, University of Toronto

** Faculty of Kinesiology and Physical Education, University of Toronto

*** Special Olympics Ontario

About this project.

Sport and Belonging 2019 - 2024

This research was a project done between the University of Toronto and Special Olympics Ontario.

Thank you to our research participants and our Sport and Belonging team members.

Thank you to the Connaught Foundation at the University of Toronto for funding this project.



UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO

Connaught Fund

**Our team
members.**

Our inclusive research team.

This research project was done by an inclusive research team. Inclusive research happens when people with lived experience are actively involved and a part of a research team.

This makes sure the research team works in a respectful way. Athletes with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) were a part of our research team. Athletes with IDD were a part of the project from the start to the end.

Our inclusive research team.

Our research team was inclusive because:

- Special Olympics (SO) athletes with intellectual and developmental disabilities were team members.
- The project looked at an important issue to SO athletes and what we learned could be helpful to them.

Who was on our team?

These are our team members from Special Olympics Ontario. The SO athletes were team members from the start to the end of the project.



Ben Caplan
Athlete



Callum Denault
Athlete



Victoria McDonald
Athlete



Jennifer Findlay
Community Partner



James Noronha
Community Partner

Who was on our team?

These are our team members from the University of Toronto. They were a part of the project until it ended.



Dr. Rebecca Renwick
Principal Investigator



Dr. Kelly Arbour-Nicitopoulos
Co-Investigator



Francis Routledge
Research Coordinator
and Assistant



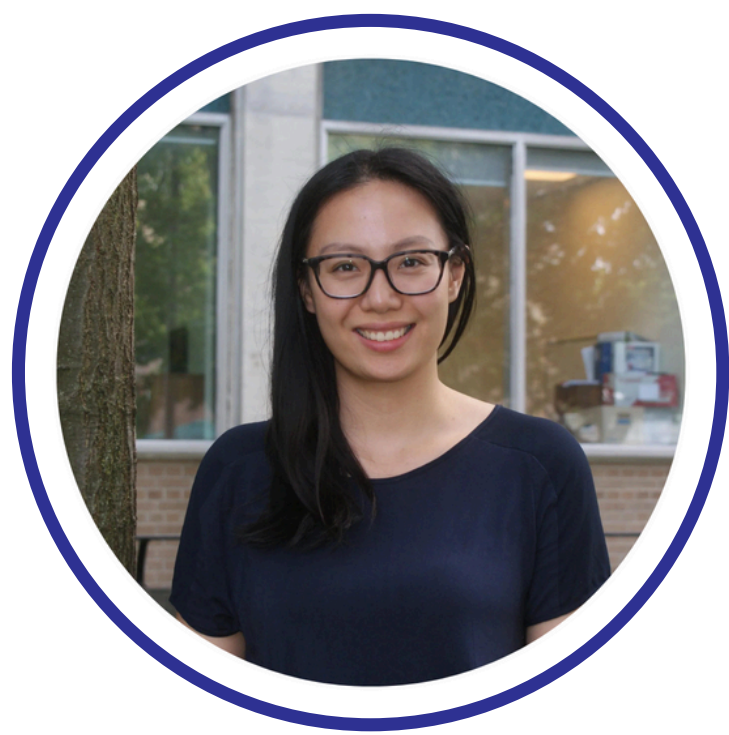
Dr. Laura St. John
Research Coordinator



Runqen (Helen) Zheng
Research Assistant

Who was on our team?

These are our team members from the University of Toronto. They were a part of the project when it started.



Zhou Chen



Dr. Denise Dubois



Rebecca Finkelstein



Kathleen Lai



Roxy O'Rourke



Yi Wen Shao



Rachel Spitzer

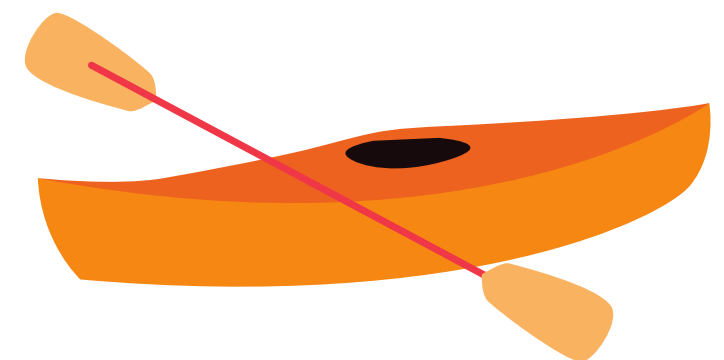
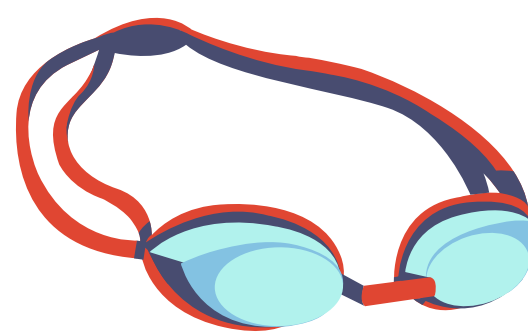
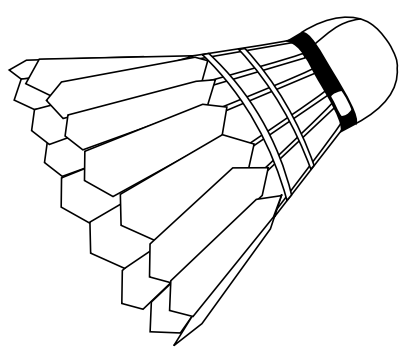


Michelle Zhao

The project.

What was the project about?

We wanted to learn about SO athletes' experiences of finding belonging by participating in sports.

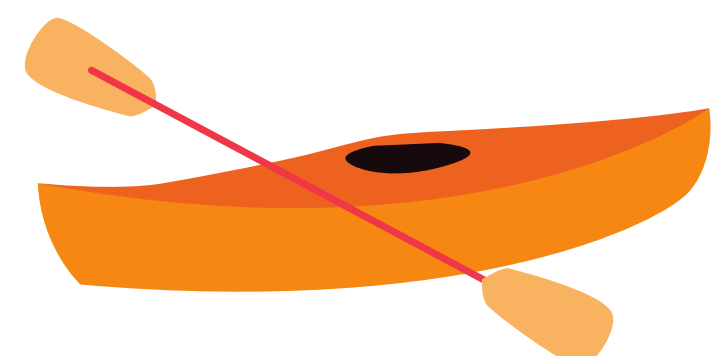
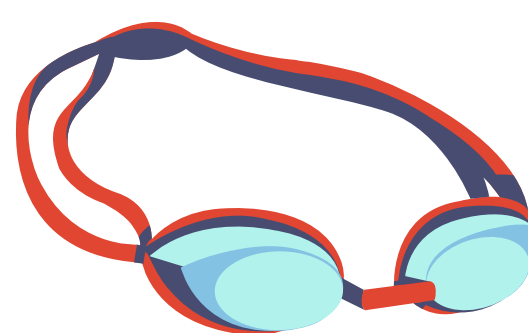
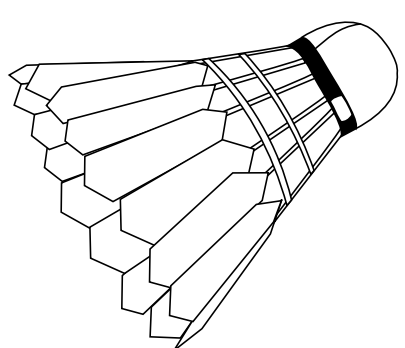


What was the project about?

We talked with 20 athletes (10 men and 10 women) from Special Olympics Ontario who were young adults (ages 18 to 36) living in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

They all played SO sports for 1 year to more than 20 years. Some (7 athletes) played team sports such as soccer.

Some (3 athletes) played sports done alone like swimming. Half of the athletes (10 athletes) played both kinds of sports.



What did we ask?

We asked the athletes about their experiences of belonging through playing sports inside SO and in the community outside of SO.

We asked them about these experiences at these 4 times:

- Before joining SO
- When joining SO
- Now in SO
- Future hopes and goals for participating in sports in SO and outside SO

What we learned.

Big Idea 1

What did we learn?

The athletes talked about 3 big ideas or themes about how they found belonging through sport.

Support from loved ones.

We learned that support from loved ones when playing sports is important for athletes to feel belonging. Loved ones are people like family and friends.

This can look like:

- Motivating athletes to meet new people and make friends
- Cheering athletes on during practices and games
- Encouraging interest in sports



What we learned.

Big Idea 2

Being part of a team.

Being a part of a team is important for athletes to feel belonging in sports.

Being a part of a team means you:

- Make friends and trust people on your team
- Reach goals together, like going to competitions



What we learned.

Big Idea 3

Chances to find your likes and interests.

Athletes said it's important to have an inclusive place to find what sports they like and are interested in. It's also important to get tips and advice about it from coaches.

This helps athletes build their confidence in themselves and their sport.



**Sharing what
we learned.**

Our website.



Sport and Belonging for Special Olympics Athletes

[Home](#) [Our Team](#) [Project](#) [Special Olympics Ontario](#) [Blog](#) [Resources](#) [Past Projects](#)

Sport and Belonging (S&B): 2019 – 2024

This inclusive research aimed to learn about how belonging happens for them through participation in Special Olympics organized sports from the perspectives of Special Olympics athletes (18 – 35 years) who have intellectual and developmental disabilities. The research was carried out by a collaborative partners from the University of Toronto and Special Olympics Ontario. The S&B project concluded in March 2024. We invite you to explore the project website and download any materials of interest.



Videos.



Sport and Belonging Video



Coaches Video



Athletes Video

Blogs.

Our website blog.

Sport and Belonging Blog



[What is Belonging?](#)

Written by Victoria McDonald, Helen Zheng, and Laura St. John

With contributions from the Sport and Belonging Team
October 2022



[The 4 W's and The H of Sport and Belonging](#)

Written by Helen Zheng and Laura St. John

With contributions from the Sport and Belonging Team
June 2023



Sport Information Resource Canada.

How organized sport can foster and support finding belonging for young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities

February 21, 2024
by Francis Routledge, Runqun (Helen) Zheng, Callum Denault, and Rebecca Renwick

Disability



Thank you.

Rob Bellavia of Robert Bellavia Art created the logos for the project with input from the inclusive research team members.

Email.

If you have questions about the project,
please email the project co-investigator, Kelly:

kelly.arbour@utoronto.ca

Images.

This report was made on Canva.

Here are the artists who made the pictures:

©ginkaewicons via Canva.com



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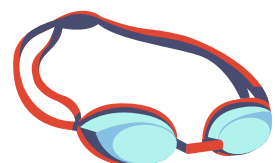
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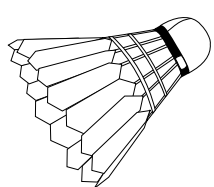
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