

Applied Major Project

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Executive Summary

This research examines the answer to the research question: how have rising costs of living affected youth participation in sports in Williams Lake, and what additional strategies can non-profit organizations implement to support families seeking access to sports? Through understanding the decline in youth sports participation, with a focus on financial accessibility, cultural shifts, and rising costs, this paper will provide recommendations for Williams Lake nonprofit organizations to continue offering sustainable support to families in the community. Interviews with representatives from BGC, Minor Hockey, Kidsport, and the Williams Lake Skating Club revealed that participation in organized team sports has decreased, particularly in hockey, where divisions now have fewer teams than before COVID-19. Secondary research confirms increasing costs for registration, equipment, and operational expenses could be contributing to the decline. Kidsport representatives noted a decrease in grant applications but an increase in the total amount of funding requested, indicating financial strain on families.

A key finding is the lack of awareness and accessibility of financial aid programs, such as Kidsport, Jumpstart, and Indigenous band funding. Many families either do not know they qualify or are hesitant to apply. While the Williams Lake Skating Club has maintained participation levels, more families are delaying fee payments, suggesting affordability concerns. The cost of equipment is another major barrier, with informal initiatives like Facebook-based exchanges helping, but a structured, community-driven program could further increase accessibility and awareness.

Facility observations highlighted the absence of advertising for financial aid programs in local arenas, limiting outreach efforts. Additionally, a cultural shift toward family recreation instead of competitive team sports has influenced participation trends. To address these challenges, the research suggests increasing awareness of funding options, expanding equipment-sharing programs, and advocating for greater financial support from not just other local organizations, but provincial and national sources.

Strengthening these efforts can help make youth sports more inclusive and financially sustainable for families.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to answer the research question: How have rising costs of living affected youth participation in sports in Williams Lake, and what additional strategies can non-profit organizations implement to support families seeking access to sports? The research intends to explore the impact of increased living costs on youth sports participation in Williams Lake. The research examines financial and social barriers families face and investigates how these challenges affect accessibility to sports activities. By analyzing existing research, community data, and community member perspectives, the study identifies important trends and areas where support is needed in rural communities like Williams Lake. These findings will lead to recommendations for local non-profits, helping them develop strategies to enhance affordability and inclusivity in youth sports programs.

To ensure clarity in this research paper, several key terms must be operationalized so that readers can accurately interpret the findings. The first term is 'youth'. Since different organizations define youth using varying age ranges, this paper adopts KidSport's definition of individuals 18 years old and under (KidSport, 2022). In this context, 'youth' refers to individuals 18 and under who participate in sports. The term 'child' may also be used interchangeably with 'youth' throughout the paper.

The second term requiring clarification is 'family' or 'families'. For the purpose of this research, a family is defined as a unit consisting of at least one adult and one child, but it may also include multiple children, two adults and a child, or other caregiving arrangements. 'Family' is not restricted to biological parents; it may include grandparents, extended relatives, or non-biological guardians, such as foster caregivers. Defining this term is essential for understanding how rising costs of living impact family structures and their ability to support youth participation in sports.

The third term, ‘non-profit organization’, must be clearly defined to establish the role and objectives of organizations such as KidSport, which aim to assist communities. In this research, non-profit organizations are those that provide services to support families in need without the intent of generating profit. According to the Cambridge Dictionary (2025), a non-profit organization is “not intended to make a profit, but to make money for a social or political purpose or to provide a service that people need.” This definition is crucial, as the recommendations in this study are directed toward non-profits to help them improve affordability and accessibility in youth sports programs.

The final term to be operationalized is ‘participation’. Without clarification, this term may lead to misinterpretations. For example, when discussing “families participating in youth sports”, some readers may assume that all family members are actively engaged in the sport itself. However, in this paper, ‘participation’ encompasses a broader scope, including the involvement of family members in supporting youth engagement, such as transporting a child to hockey practice. While the youth is the one physically participating in the sport, their family plays an essential role in facilitating their participation.

Background/Context

There is limited research on recreation and sport participation in rural communities like Williams Lake, making this study particularly relevant. Williams Lake is a small city in the Interior of British Columbia with a population of just over 10,000 residents, including an estimated 2,300 youth (Townfolio, 2022). One of the key non-profit organizations supporting youth sports participation in the community is KidSport. KidSport’s vision is to create “a Canada where all children have the opportunity to participate in sport” (KidSport, 2025). Its mission is to provide financial assistance to children for sport registration fees and equipment costs, emphasizing the role of sport in fostering social, mental, and physical well-being. By increasing access to quality sport programs, KidSport aims to strengthen communities across Canada (KidSport, 2025).

In Williams Lake, KidSport plays a vital role in ensuring that financial barriers do not prevent youth from engaging in sports. The local chapter is led by Rick Miller, who has served as chairperson since 2017 (Interview, 2025). The researcher became involved with the Williams Lake KidSport chapter in 2020 and has since observed the increasing demand for financial assistance. This demand grew significantly when Jumpstart, another financial assistance program, ceased having local representation and as organized sports resumed following the COVID-19 pandemic.

To support the mission and vision of KidSport, this research project will analyze interviews, community data, and observations to develop recommendations for KidSport and other non-profits seeking to enhance accessibility to youth sports. Given the researcher's four years of involvement with KidSport, there is an inherent bias toward viewing non-profits as a primary solution to addressing financial barriers in youth sports. However, to ensure a comprehensive analysis, this study also acknowledges the importance of exploring alternative avenues of support beyond non-profit organizations. Recognizing and mitigating this bias is essential to producing balanced and objective findings.

Literature Review

Extensive research has demonstrated the benefits of youth participation in sports, including physical health, mental well-being, social development, and academic performance. These benefits extend beyond the sport, as skills learned through these sports often transfer to other aspects of a young person's life (Hempill, et al. 2019) such as teamwork and work ethics. Studies, like from Dobrin, D. (2014), indicate that financial challenges are a significant barrier to participation, with low-income families being disproportionately affected. For example, research done by Fortune & Oncescu (2024) and A. J. Brinkley (2024) highlights the role of community recreation organizations in fostering inclusion for low-income families and youth who may be excluded in schools or community sport programs and these organizations' struggles being able to afford to

support these families through fee subsidy programs. Additionally, studies by Kroshus et al. (2021) and Murata & Côté (2023) explore the impact of families' socioeconomic status and their likelihood and willingness to have their children participate in organized sports and activities. Families who struggle to make ends meet are more likely to struggle to afford registration fees, equipment, transportation, and the other costs that are associated with organized sports.

Organizations such as Kidsport conduct annual impact statements of their effects on the communities they operate in and include report testimonials from families who state they would not have been able to register their children in sports without financial assistance (KidSport, 2023). These studies collectively reinforce the argument that financial constraints are a significant barrier to youth participation in sports and that community and nonprofit programs play a vital role in mitigating these challenges. Programs like Kidsport who provide direct financial support to cover some of the costs of registration fees, BGC who provides equipment support, and the Foundry who provides support to families who wish to complete the Kidsport application all provide a wrap-around support to the families in their communities.

Areas of Controversy

While the importance of financial support programs is widely acknowledged as discussed in Weigandt, K. (2022), there is ongoing debate regarding the most effective methods of implementation. Some researchers, such as Alam & Abdurraheem (2023), argue that fee subsidies are the most practical solution, allowing families to directly access support when needed. Others, such as Brinkley (2024), advocate for broader systemic changes, such as increased government funding for sports and recreation programs or the development of community-driven initiatives, including partnerships with schools to expand access. While fee subsidies and equipment support programs exist, BGC has observed a decline in the number of youth accessing their resources, suggesting that financial aid alone is not enough (Godin, 2025). The organization highlighted logistical barriers such as transportation issues, safety concerns, and the requirement for youth to physically come into their building for support. These

challenges reinforce the argument made by Brinkley (2024) that structural changes, including improved transportation solutions or partnerships with schools and community centers, may be necessary to enhance accessibility.

Another area of controversy is the tension between focusing on organized and competitive youth sports like Minor hockey and figure skating versus youth recreation activities like community recreation events and general fundamental sports classes, with the funding available. Some literature suggests that financial barriers primarily impact competitive sports, where registration fees, equipment, and travel expenses are significant (Weigandt, K., 2022). However, other studies, such as Harrington, et al (2017) argue that even recreational sports programs are becoming less accessible due to rising program costs, limiting opportunities for families who cannot afford enrollment fees.

Gaps in Literature

Despite the increasing body of research on accessible recreation, gaps remain in understanding the specific link between rising living costs and youth sports participation. While studies have explored sports affordability and broader economic changes separately, limited research directly connects these factors—aside from Piątkowska & Biernat (2023) and Robert Walker et al. (2023), who examined the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the industry, without specifically discussing cost of living.

Additionally, while national and provincial data on sports accessibility exist from nonprofits like KidSport (2023), these studies are impact assessments rather than academic research. Despite their valuable insights into community outcomes, there remains a gap in region-specific academic studies focusing on Williams Lake and similar rural communities, where accessing resources can be more challenging.

Another gap in literature would be around the possible positive effects of nonprofits updating their policies regularly because there seems to be no relevant research on whether or not updates and re-evaluating policies benefit the organization

and the communities they serve. Although there are suggestions from the government on how to run a nonprofit (Government of Canada, 2025), there is no legal requirement to update policies. Similarly, there's a gap in literature around whether the overall nonprofit organizations' policies consider the difference in need between a rural community or an urban community. For example, Kidsport is a National program that services rural communities like Williams Lake and large cities like Vancouver, all having to follow the same policies for operating and supporting their communities.

Summary of Literature

Overwhelmingly, in most of the research in this review, the literature included evidence of the importance of participation in sports and recreation activities by youth and for their development. It also emphasized how a family's socioeconomic status affects their participation in youth sports, for example, in Tahiraj, E. et al (2024). Most researchers noted the positive effect of work done to remove barriers and increase access to these sports and recreation opportunities. Importantly, addressing financial barriers proved to be a common theme across much of the research.

Evaluation of Sources

The sources referenced in this review include scholarly articles, professional field-based resources, and statistical databases. Many of the scholarly sources, such as those published in Leisure Studies, British Journal of Educational Psychology, and Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, provide peer-reviewed evidence on financial barriers in youth sports and the benefits of sports for youth. Additionally, statistical reports from BC Stats (2025) offer valuable economic context to the effects of cost of living on British Columbians as well as changes over time but don't include statistics related to economics and sports or recreation specifically. All sources are equally invaluable to nonprofit organizations like Kidsport, and other community recreation organizations, to provide research-based evidence on the importance of their services.

Topic relating to Community Recreation

This review is extremely relevant to community recreation, as it explores how economic challenges influence youth participation in local sports programs. Given that non-profit organizations play a crucial role in delivering accessible recreation, understanding these economic barriers can produce more effective program design and funding allocation. By examining community-level strategies, this research can contribute to policy discussions and practical interventions that enhance youth access to sports as the industry grows and changes. Non-profit's being able to adapt their policies quickly will allow them to be responsive to these industry changes and community needs.

Methodology

The primary research plan utilized three key methods: interviews, content analysis, and observations. Interviews were conducted with representatives from local sports organizations and nonprofits to gather diverse perspectives on the experiences of families regarding youth sports participation in Williams Lake. This triangulated approach was chosen to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing participation in youth sport. The researcher encountered challenges in obtaining in-depth responses from interviewees. Although the interview questions were designed to elicit detailed insights, the initial three interviews did not provide the expected depth of information. Nonetheless, these interviews were valuable in offering perspectives on the operational challenges faced by local organizations and the broader community context.

Four interviews were conducted with the following people:

1. Derek Godin - BGC Williams Lake
2. Tanis Rosa - Williams Lake Minor Hockey Association
3. Marissa Bruneau - Williams Lake Skating Club

4. Rick Miller - Williams Lake Kidsport

Derek Godin's interview was completed over Messenger video chat on March 1st, 2025. His interview was recorded but the recording did not save on the researcher's device so notes were taken in the immediate minutes following the interview to ensure accurate transcriptions. Being the representative for another youth organization in Williams Lake, the interview questions were tailored to the services BGC offers youth (Appendix A).

Tanis Rosa's interview was completed over Facetime on March 1st, 2025. Her interview was successfully recorded by a voice memo on an iPhone. Tanis is the representative for Minor Hockey, which is a sport that Williams Lake Kidsport heavily supports. It was important to have a perspective from the organization that works closely with Kidsport and the interview questions were tailored to gain perspective from a youth sports organization in the community.

Marissa Bruneau's interview was completed over Messenger video chat on March 2nd, 2025. Her interview was successfully recorded by a voice memo on an iPhone. Similarly to Minor Hockey, Marissa's interview questions were written from a perspective of a youth sports organization that receives support from Kidsport. Marissa and Tanis's interview questions were the same (appendix B).

Rick Miller's interview was completed over Facetime on March 2nd, 2025. His interview was successfully recorded by a voice memo on an iPhone. The interview questions were tailored specifically to describe the experience of Kidsport and how they're able to support the community (appendix C).

The second method of primary research conducted was content analysis, focusing on public documents from the Williams Lake Minor Hockey Association and KidSport BC. The purpose of the content analysis was to examine the financial records of youth sports organizations over multiple years to identify trends in participation numbers and any fluctuations in fees. This method was essential to understanding the

financial landscape of youth sports in Williams Lake. However, challenges arose during the analysis due to inconsistencies in the public financial documents. The records available were not uniform from year to year, and no additional years of financial data were made public. As a result, the researcher was unable to compare financial trends across multiple years and instead analyzed the available documents as separate data points. Another challenge encountered was the researcher's limited accounting knowledge, which hindered the ability to fully interpret the financial details within the documents.

The two pieces of content from Minor Hockey were:

1. 2020 - 2021 Financial Statement
2. 2022 - 2023 Financial Statement

In addition to analyzing the financial content from the Williams Lake Minor Hockey Association, the research also included an analysis of impact statements from KidSport BC over several years. The goal was to compare the number of youth supported and the amount of grant funding provided to youth across the province. Similar to the challenges encountered with the Minor Hockey documents, the KidSport impact statements presented difficulties. The public documents available were limited to only two years, and the titles of these documents varied, raising questions about whether the content being analyzed was consistent across the years. This discrepancy limited the ability to make direct comparisons between the data sets.

The two pieces of content from Kidsport were:

3. 2023 Annual Report
4. 2022 Impact Statement

The final method of primary research was observation. A significant challenge in this aspect was that the researcher was unable to conduct observations in Williams Lake and instead had to focus on a different community. Additionally, identifying a relevant observation to align with the research question proved difficult. The researcher

selected the Nanaimo Minor Hockey Association schedule for observation, as the times and locations of practices were publicly available online (Nanaimo Minor Hockey Association, 2025). However, the inability to directly observe activities in Williams Lake limited the scope and relevance of this data to the research context.

The following practices were observed:

1. U11 Division B practiced on the Cliff McNabb arena from 6:30 - 7:45 pm on Friday March 7, 2025,
2. U13 Tier 1 practiced on the Frank Crane arena from 5:00 - 6:15 pm on Thursday March 6, 2025
3. U15 Tier 1 practiced on the Frank Crane arena from 6:30 - 7:45 pm on Thursday March 6, 2025.

During these practices, the researcher made several key observations. These included the types of equipment the children were using, the presence of advertisements for funding support within the arena, the number of parents staying at the practice, any noticeable differences in transportation among families, paid advertisements on the rink boards, and whether the jerseys worn by the players displayed any sponsors. These observations provided insight into the community's support for youth sports and the financial implications of participation.

Findings and analysis

Primary Research Findings: Interviews

During the interview with the Minor Hockey representative, several key findings emerged regarding the impact of financial barriers on youth sports participation in Williams Lake. One significant observation was the decline in participation since the COVID-19 pandemic, with Minor Hockey's team divisions shrinking from 6 to 3-4 teams per age group. The interviewee attributed this decline to the restrictions during the pandemic, where children were only allowed to practice and not play games, which diminished the enjoyment and appeal of the sport. This interview also highlighted the

role of funding organizations such as Kidsport, Jumpstart, and Indigenous bands in helping to cover the cost of fees for players. However, a major barrier noted was the lack of advertising for these funding opportunities, which prevents some families from realizing that financial assistance is available. As the interviewee shared, “Some people assume they make too much money but actually don’t and could qualify.” This reflects a common misconception about eligibility for financial assistance programs. Furthermore, she noted that Minor Hockey has set aside leftover funds from previous seasons to assist families with funding in the following year. However, she emphasized the need for better advertising about these resources, as many families are unaware of the assistance available. The idea of providing help discreetly was also discussed, as some families may be reluctant to ask for support due to pride. To address this, she proposed having an equipment exchange program, which would allow families to share or recycle gear, reducing the financial burden. The representative also initiated a Facebook page called “Buy, Sell, or Give Away,” where parents can source affordable or donated gear, which Tanis believes would encourage more families to register their children for sports. These findings point to the critical need for increased visibility of financial assistance programs and community-driven solutions, such as gear exchanges, to support low-income families in accessing sports opportunities.

The interview with the BGC representative provided insight into how another nonprofit organization supports local youth in Williams lake. The Williams Lake BGC provides financial support for local youth by assisting with registration fees and supplying equipment to those who do not have access to their own. Despite these efforts, the organization has seen a decline in the number of youth accessing its resources in recent years. One of the primary challenges BGC faces in supporting youth is ensuring they physically come into the building to receive assistance, which can be a barrier for some families. The rising cost of living has had a significant impact on youth participation in sports and recreational activities. Many families are struggling financially, living paycheck to paycheck, and simply cannot afford to enroll their children in sports programs. Additional barriers include transportation challenges, road conditions, and safety concerns for youth who may need to travel into town on their own. To address issues of affordability and accessibility, BGC sees strong potential in forming

partnerships with other nonprofit organizations such as Denisiqi Services Society and Foundry. Additionally, working closely with the city's recreation center to run joint programs could help expand access to sports and recreation opportunities for local youth. Despite the challenges, collaboration among community organizations remains a key strategy for ensuring youth have the opportunity to participate in sports.

The interview with the Skating Club representative provided insight into the current state of youth sports participation and the role of financial assistance within the Williams Lake Skating Club. The interviewee, who has served as an assistant coach for two years, observed that while the number of participants in the skating club has not declined, there has been an increase in families paying fees later than usual, often a couple of months after the due date. This delay in fee payments may indicate financial strain on families but also highlights a trend of families still finding ways to prioritize sports participation despite financial challenges. She emphasized the importance of Kidsport as a significant supporter for families in the Skating Club, noting that Kidsport helps many families overcome financial barriers to participation. In addition, the club has worked to keep fees “as cost-effective as possible” and also engages in fundraisers to support their operations. Despite these efforts, the interviewee pointed out that the operational structure of the club has remained relatively consistent, which suggests that the financial strategies in place have been somewhat effective in maintaining participation levels. In terms of resources, she mentioned that helmet rentals are available in the community, helping families who may not be able to afford to purchase equipment. Furthermore, the cost of ice rentals is cheaper during school hours for user groups than outside of school hours, which benefits organizations like the Skating Club when booking ice time. The interviewee also highlighted the club's collaboration with Kidsport, stating that they “collaborate with Kidsport quite a bit,” emphasizing the importance of partnerships with funding organizations to ensure accessibility. The Skating Club also provides shared equipment, such as figure skating dresses, skate bags, and skate guards. These items are mostly donated, but the club sometimes purchases them as needed. She also shared that the consignment approach for figure skating dresses, where members can exchange or borrow dresses, significantly reduces the financial burden on families. This strategy is similar to other community-

based solutions, like those used in Minor Hockey, where equipment sharing is crucial for making sports more accessible. Her insights underscore the importance of community collaboration and shared resources in keeping sports accessible for low-income families. These efforts, combined with funding support from organizations like Kidsport, play a significant role in helping families participate in youth sports, even when financial barriers exist.

The interview with the Kidsport representative revealed significant insights into the financial landscape of youth sports participation in Williams Lake, particularly in relation to KidsportBC funding. The interviewee, who has been closely involved in distributing Kidsport grants, observed a notable decline in the number of children participating in organized sports, particularly in more competitive activities like hockey and gymnastics. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the funding allocated was 12-15k per year, but now the budget has increased to 20k per year, with grant amounts rising from \$250 to \$300 per family. Despite the increase in budget, he noted that the number of applications has decreased from roughly 120 to 90, suggesting that fewer families are applying for support, which may indicate a decline in overall participation in competitive youth sports. The interviewee attributed this decline to a shift in youth interests, with children becoming more involved in family activities and opting for recreational rather than competitive sports. Specifically, the high costs associated with gymnastics and hockey, including both registration and equipment, have made these sports less accessible for many families. This concern about cost aligns with the findings from other interviews, where families cited financial barriers as a primary obstacle to participation. The interviewee's perspective mirrors this, noting that while the dollar value of grants has increased, the actual number of applicants has not, suggesting that even with the increase in funding, financial barriers continue to impact families' decisions to enroll their children in organized sports. He also highlighted a structural limitation for Kidsport, as the organization is constrained by Sport BC guidelines and insurance policies, which limit the types of sports they can support. This limitation, coupled with the challenges of securing sustainable funding sources in a small town, further exacerbates the financial struggles of youth sports organizations. He pointed out that long-term solutions must involve increased support from provincial and national governments to ensure

sustainability. Additionally, he suggested that sports clubs themselves should collaborate with organizations like Kidsport to maintain a reciprocal funding system, though he acknowledged the constraints on sports clubs as volunteer-run organizations. His insights illustrate a recurring theme in the research: while financial support is crucial for youth sports participation, the costs of participation and the shifting preferences of youth away from competitive sports to more recreational activities are creating new challenges for community organizations. These findings underscore the importance of adapting funding strategies to accommodate the evolving needs of families and the community, while also calling for more governmental support to address the financial barriers to sports participation.

Primary Research Findings: Content Analysis

The first two pieces of content analyzed were the 2020-2021 and 2022-2023 financial records from the Minor Hockey Association. The 2020-2021 Balance Sheet revealed that the highest participation rates were seen in the U13 and U15 age divisions, while the female-only divisions had the lowest participation, as indicated by the amount of revenue generated from registration fees. The balance sheet also highlighted operational costs, including office supplies and payroll, which are essential for the organization's day-to-day functions. It is important to consider these costs, especially in the context of external price increases such as inflation or rising utility costs. If these costs rise over time, it may be necessary to increase registration fees to cover the additional expenses.

Similarly, the 2022-2023 Profit and Loss Statement identified new expenses, such as gaming licenses and referee fees. Referee fees, in particular, could be influenced by changes in the cost of living, and if referees demand higher pay to match inflation, these increased expenses would need to be accounted for. Consequently, to maintain financial stability, registration fees might need to be raised to absorb these additional costs. This underscores the interconnectedness between rising operational costs and the subsequent financial burden placed on families through increased fees, a

theme that was reflected in other primary research findings regarding the impact of rising costs on sports participation.

The next two pieces of content analyzed were the Kidsport Impact Statements, specifically the 2022 Impact Report and the 2023 Annual Report. The 2022 Impact Report provided detailed information about the organization’s achievements for the year, including BC-wide impact, general statistics and demographics of the youth supported, the communities with active Kidsport chapters, and the top-funded sports in that year, among other key data. The 2023 Annual Report presented similar information, making it possible to draw comparisons between the two years.

A significant finding from the comparison was that over 2,300 additional youth were supported in 2023 compared to 2022, illustrating the increasing demand for financial assistance in youth sports. The total grants awarded also saw a notable increase, with over \$242,000 in 2022 and over \$373,000 in 2023, a substantial rise that underscores the growing financial need for families seeking assistance. This data reflects an upward trend in both the number of youth supported and the amount of funding required, highlighting the increasing financial barriers faced by families and the expanding role that organizations like Kidsport play in addressing these challenges.

Primary Research Findings: Observations

The observations that were noted about the players on the ice are indicated in the table below:

Age Group	Equipment	Parents Attending	Transportation
U11	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All wearing helmets with cages• All wearing the same uniform -	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 12 players on the ice, 8 adults in the stands or lobby	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No players were noted to have left the building without an

	<p>no differences in quality noted</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jerseys were not branded with a sponsorship logo 		<p>adult accompanying them.</p>
U13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All wearing helmets with cages All wearing the same uniform but with different pinnie colours and were not all uniform Jerseys were not branded with a sponsorship logo 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 16 players on the ice, 11 adults in the stands or lobby 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No players were noted to have left the building without an adult accompanying them
U15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All wearing helmets with cages Not all jerseys were the same, there were a mixture of different colours Jerseys were not branded with a sponsorship logo 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 18 players on the ice, 1 adult in the stands or lobby 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Players were met in the parking lot at the end of practice, only 1 player left the building with an adult accompanying them

Facility Observations:

- Rink Board Advertising: Both Cliff McNabb and Frank Crane arenas featured a significant amount of rink board advertising, primarily from general businesses, including radio shows, GlobalNews, and political entities. However, no advertisements were seen from nonprofit organizations like BGC or Kidsport at either facility.
- Lobby Posters: In the public lobby areas of both facilities, no advertisements were displayed for funding support for shared equipment programs, which could potentially increase awareness of resources available for families in need.

These observations highlight the lack of visible support from nonprofit organizations and funding assistance programs in the arenas and public spaces, pointing to a possible missed opportunity in raising awareness about available resources for families facing financial barriers. Additionally, the presence of limited parental attendance and transportation observations suggests areas where family support may be a factor in sports participation.

Analysis - Primary and Secondary research

The primary and secondary research indicates that the cost of living has negatively impacted youth participation in organized sports. In the interview with the Kidsport representative, Rick Miller (2025) noted a shift in how families approach recreation, prioritizing general recreational activities as a family rather than enrolling children in structured youth sports. This trend aligns with Weigandt (2022), who discusses how rising registration fees, equipment costs, and other financial barriers have pushed families toward more cost-effective recreational options they can do together. This shift was further supported by insights from Minor Hockey. Tanis Rosa (2025) noted a decline in the number of teams per division, stating that where there used to be six teams, there are now only three or four in each age group. Similarly,

Miller (2025) reflected on his past experience as a referee, recalling how he used to see many different jersey colors on the ice, whereas now there are fewer teams competing in each division. These observations confirm a decline in participation across multiple sources, reinforcing the connection between financial barriers and decreased involvement in organized youth sports. Beyond participation numbers, the accessibility of financial support programs also emerged as a barrier. The Minor Hockey representative noted that there is a lack of awareness about available funding sources, which means some families who could qualify for assistance may not be applying (Rosa, 2025). This was evident in the content analysis of the arena facilities, where no visible advertisements for Kidsport or other financial aid programs were present in the public spaces or on rink boards. This supports the notion that funding accessibility is not just about financial availability but also about effective communication and outreach to families in need. Overall, both primary and secondary research confirm that financial barriers and changing recreational priorities are key factors influencing youth sports participation. While funding programs exist, their impact is limited if families are unaware of them or hesitant to apply. This suggests that improving awareness, outreach, and accessibility of funding opportunities could be an essential strategy in mitigating the decline in youth sports enrollment.

This aligns with findings from the literature review, which highlights that fee-payment programs provide direct financial support to families seeking to participate in organized sports (Alam & Abdurraheem, 2023). Kidsport follows this model, and content analysis of its impact statement and annual review confirms its significant role in supporting local families (Kidsport, 2023). However, the financial need for these programs is increasing, as evidenced by the Kidsport representative's interview (Miller, 2025). Miller noted that while total funds distributed in Williams Lake have increased, the number of individual grants awarded has decreased. This suggests that registration fees and other costs have risen, requiring families to apply for larger amounts of financial aid. This aligns with the observed decline in participation in minor hockey and the financial constraints noted in secondary research, further reinforcing that affordability is a growing barrier to youth sports involvement.

Another key finding from both primary and secondary research is the lack of awareness and accessibility of financial assistance programs for youth sports. The interview with the Minor Hockey representative revealed that many families are unaware of funding opportunities such as Kidsport and Jumpstart, and some hesitate to apply due to stigma or the assumption that they do not qualify (Rosa, 2025). Similarly, the Kidsport representative emphasized the need for better outreach and promotion of these programs to ensure more families can access support (Miller, 2025). This aligns with findings from the literature review, which states that barriers to participation are not solely financial but also include a lack of information on available resources (Weigandt, 2022). Furthermore, content analysis of arena advertisements and facility notice boards showed a complete absence of promotions for funding programs, reinforcing the idea that financial aid is not being effectively marketed within the community. Addressing this gap through better communication strategies and partnerships with local organizations could improve access and increase participation in youth sports.

Another significant finding from both primary and secondary research is the role that equipment accessibility plays in youth sports participation. The interview with the Minor Hockey representative highlighted that many families struggle with the cost of hockey gear, and while some informal initiatives, such as a Facebook “buy, sell, or give away” page, exist, there is no structured equipment exchange program in place (Rosa, 2025). Similarly, the Williams Lake Skating Club representative noted that their club has a lending system for figure skating gear, which helps families reduce costs and makes the sport more accessible (Marissa, 2025). This finding aligns with existing research that identifies equipment costs as a major barrier to participation in organized sports (Alam & Abdurraheem, 2023). The content analysis of facility observations further supports this, as there were no advertisements promoting equipment-sharing programs at the arenas, despite their potential to lower costs for families.

Recommendations

1. Kidsport, and other nonprofits who provide support, should continue to be accessible to the community and work with the local sports organizations to include Kidsport information directly on applications to ensure each family is aware of the opportunities for funding support.
2. A representative from Kidsport should attend local youth network meetings to ensure the other nonprofits are aware of the services provided and can provide support to the families that Kidsport cannot. Kidsport could share applications that were denied at these meetings. The “Communities That Care Network” is the first table Kidsport should work with because this network includes all major organizations in Williams Lake who support families.
3. Kidsport should follow up with the sports organizations that fall under SportBC to create a formal agreement to increase their registration fees by \$2 per registrant for a donation to Kidsport each season to remain a sustainable organization
4. Volunteers should create a network with other local nonprofits like BGC, Denisiqi, school district and Three Corners Health Society to share challenges the organizations are facing when supporting families. For example, if a family was denied access to Kidsport funding, these applications can be brought to the meeting to determine how the other organizations can provide them support.
5. Using Williams Lake Skating Club’s shared equipment model, Minor Hockey should create the same opportunity for families with hockey equipment.
6. The Provincial Kidsport committee should continue to lobby the provincial and National government for financial support in their fundraising campaigns.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the decline in youth sports participation is a multifaceted issue influenced by financial barriers, changing cultural attitudes, and the lasting impact of COVID-19. Interviews with representatives from Minor Hockey, Kidsport, and the Williams Lake Skating Club highlighted a clear decrease in organized team sports participation, particularly in hockey, where divisions have seen a reduction in the

number of teams. While fewer families are applying for financial aid through Kidsport, the total funding requested has increased, demonstrating the rising costs of registration and equipment. Additionally, some families are opting for more casual recreational activities over structured competitive sports, further contributing to the shift in participation trends.

Financial accessibility remains a critical challenge, with many families unaware of available funding options or hesitant to apply due to perceived income limitations. The need for better promotion of financial aid programs, such as Kidsport, Jumpstart, and Indigenous band support, was emphasized in multiple interviews. Furthermore, the Williams Lake Skating Club's experience of families delaying fee payments suggests that even for those who do participate, affordability remains a concern. Kidsport's increasing grant distribution highlights the growing financial need among families, but limitations in funding sources and eligibility restrictions create additional barriers to support.

The high cost of sports equipment is another significant obstacle, particularly in hockey and figure skating. While some informal equipment exchange initiatives exist, such as the Facebook "Buy, Sell, or Give Away" page, there is no widely accessible, structured program to support families in acquiring gear affordably. The skating club's model of lending equipment demonstrates a viable approach that could be expanded across other sports to improve accessibility. Moreover, facility observations revealed a lack of advertising for financial aid and equipment-sharing programs, indicating a missed opportunity to increase awareness among families who might benefit from these resources.

Overall, the findings underscore the need for proactive solutions to address financial and accessibility barriers in youth sports. Strategies such as improving communication about funding options, creating structured equipment exchange programs, and advocating for additional financial support at the provincial and national levels could help mitigate the decline in participation. By taking a more collaborative and

community-focused approach, local sports organizations can work toward making youth sports more inclusive and financially sustainable for families.

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Appendix A - BGC Interview Questions and Notes

- In what ways does Williams Lake BGC support local youth's access to sport?
Provide support for registration fees and equipment for youth who don't have access to equipment.

- What ways has Williams Lake BGC adapted their policies/procedures in the last few years?
Besides covid policies, nothing has changed.

- Have you seen an increase in youth accessing your resources in the last few years?
There has been a decline in access to resources.

- What limitations do you feel BGC has in supporting local youth?
Having the kids come into the building to provide the support is the challenge.

- How do you see the impact of increasing living costs on youth participation in your programs?
Completely impacting participation. Parents are living paycheck to paycheck and can't afford to put their children in sports.

- Are there specific barriers that families face in accessing your services?
Travelling into town, road conditions, if youth are needing to travel on their own, parents worry about their safety.

- In your opinion, what are the most effective partnerships or collaborations with other organizations that could help address the challenges of affordability and accessibility for youth sports in Williams Lake?
Working with other non-profits like Denisiqi Services Society and Foundry as well as running programs in partnership with the city's rec center

Appendix B – Minor Hockey and Figure Skating Interview Questions

1. Have you noticed a decline in youth sports participation in Williams Lake over the past few years? If so, what factors do you think contribute to this decline?
2. What financial assistance programs currently exist for families struggling to afford any costs associated with your sports organization (e.g., KidSport, Jumpstart, local grants)?
3. How has WLMH/Figure Skating responded to the affordability crisis? Have any programs been modified or expanded to help families?
4. What additional strategies could non-profit organizations implement to help lower costs for families?
5. How can non-profits and local sports organizations collaborate to provide inclusive opportunities for all youth?
6. How effective would shared equipment programs, uniform exchanges, or community

Appendix C – Kidsport Interview Questions

1. Have you noticed a decline in youth sports participation in Williams Lake over the past few years? If so, what factors do you think contributes to this decline?
2. Have you seen an increase in requests for financial assistance or subsidies for participation? Can you describe the differences over time?
3. Are there specific sports that have been more affected by rising costs compared to others?
4. What additional strategies could non-profit organizations implement to help lower costs for families?
5. What limitations do you feel Kidsport has to support families?
6. What ways has Kidsport adapted their policies/procedures in the last few years?
7. Can you think of any long-term solutions for ensuring youth sports remain accessible

Appendix D - Field Notes

