

MEN AS ALLIES OF WOMEN IN SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Men have an important role to play in supporting the participation and leadership of girls and women in sport and physical activity. In 1994, David Morrison, a father of two young girls, became a champion of gender discrimination when he spoke out against the inequity of financial funding for female sporting clubs in his hometown of Coquitlam, BC.

At the time of the complaint, Mr. Morrison was a director of the Omega Gymnastics Club in the City of Coquitlam, and his nine year old daughter trained at the privately owned, non-profit club. After numerous failed attempts to gain funding from the City of Coquitlam for the club, Mr. Morrison lodged a sex-discrimination complaint with the provincial Human Rights Commission (HRC) on the basis that the city consistently provided a disproportionate amount of public funds to male-only sports, in this instance, hockey.

“I did what I felt was right for all young girls and women wanting an equal chance to be active,” Mr. Morrison said. “I plan to continue my efforts by helping other municipalities implement similar programs.”

The HRC supported Mr. Morrison’s complaint. “The issue for us is equity,” said then Deputy Chief Commissioner, Harinder Mahil. “They [the City of Coquitlam] should not keep providing services and facilities to male-only sport. Female sport has to be encouraged.”¹

“It has been recognized by all levels of government that there is inequity. There [have] to be systemic changes in order to provide opportunities for females in sport.”²

Through mediation, the City of Coquitlam acknowledged that their funding policy had adversely affected female sporting clubs and by 1999 the case was finally settled. The parties reached an agreement which resulted in the development of an unprecedented five-part Gender Equity Program that was implemented by the City of Coquitlam.

The program involved appointing a Gender Equity Committee to focus on the issue with sport and recreation, and a Gender Equity Coordinator for the City to ensure the Committee fulfilled its mandate and to liaise with the wider community. The City also established a \$50,000 Gender Equity Fund, made available for five years through grants or tax exemptions to sports groups who encouraged the participation of girls and women in sport and physical activity.³

¹ Robinson, Laura (1999). *Level the Playing Field*. Retrieved from: <http://danielson.laurentian.ca/drdnotes/4217ch08.htm>

² Ibid.

³ McQuarrie, Fiona A.E. (2002). *Increasing Gender Equity in Sport Participation: A Government Program in Progress*. Retrieved from: <http://lin.ca/Uploads/cclr10/CCLR10-75.pdf>

In 2001, the second annual report submitted by the City of Coquitlam to the BC Human Rights Commission highlighted that the amount of girls and young women (ages 0-17) participating in city-run programs had increased by 14 per cent, and the number of female sport and recreational groups renting public facilities had increased by 20 per cent.⁴

Through Mr. Morrison's complaint, the City of Coquitlam was forced to self-examine and re-evaluate their funding practices. The case resulted in complete overhaul of the City's strategic planning and development to involve the community in creating programs that meet their needs, and was groundbreaking in promoting gender equity in sport funding allocation on a municipal level.

In 1999, Mr. Morrison was awarded the CAAWS Breakthrough Award for his initiative in raising awareness about the inequalities between male and female sport programs in his community.

Mr. Morrison's commitment and perseverance to gender equity in sport is testimony of how men can be allies to further the participation of girls and women in sport and physical activity. For more practical ideas on how men can support women's involvement in sport and leadership, visit CAAWS' newly launched [What Men Can Do](#) website.

⁴ Ibid.