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“GIVING BACK TO THE COMMUNITY”:

**YOUNG AND ESTABLISHED LEADERS’ PERSPECTIVES OF
THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE ARCTIC WINTER GAMES**

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LARGER RESEARCH PROJECT: “GIVING BACK”

This report is part of a larger research project exploring the experiences of young adults who give back to their communities. It stems from previous research on Francophone games across Canada illustrating the distinct conditions of possibility in minority contexts that modulate the impact of sporting programs on youths' integration in the community, creating in some a desire to give back to the community (Dallaire, 2014; Dallaire, 2003). Indeed, Francophone organizers underscore the capacity of their events to elicit a long-term community or organizational engagement¹ among participants as one indicator of the games' success. They tell the “success stories” of former participants who return as coaches, Chefs de Mission, organizers, or volunteers out of commitment to youth, the community and sport. The sport program thus becomes a space where youths/adolescents are invited to reinforce their sense of belonging, and where young adults invest personally as they contribute to community development. Through this SSHRC and Sport Canada funded project, we hope to broaden the analysis of youth community engagement (and delve deeper into one aspect of community engagement, “giving back”) beyond Canada's Francophonie to understand how and why other young adults (and older adults in the case of the Arctic Winter Games) that have benefited as participants from diverse youth sporting initiatives return and make a personal investment as leaders.

The goal of the larger project is thus to:

- explore how these leaders define and conceive of the community they wish to contribute to, how they think youths in different minority situations fit within the community they wish to contribute to and how they make sense of their community engagement through sport programs.
- undertake a comparative analysis of the experiences of young adults (18-35 years old) who invest in sport leadership roles as a form of community engagement.

The case studies (3 in total) focus on community partners that run sport programs for youths and that attract former participants as volunteers or employees. The different case studies explore how the young adults (and older adults in the case of the Arctic Winter Games) involved as leaders of these programs conceive of the “community” they wish to contribute to and how it motivates their engagement, whether the community in question is a cultural, organizational, regional, gender or other “community.” The analysis also pays attention to how they make sense of the responsibilities and actions of their leadership role, beyond a dedication to sport, as an expression of their commitment to youths, the community and/or the community partner.

Case # 1 explores the experiences of young leaders working at Boys and Girls Club of Ottawa (BGC Ottawa). The BGC Ottawa is a local club of Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada (BGC Canada) and has several locations in the Ottawa area that provide after-school and weekend programming, including sports and physical activities and a summer camp (Camp Smitty), for children and youth (6-18 years of age) in need. Their mission is “to provide a safe, supportive place where children and youth can experience new opportunities, overcome barriers, build positive relationships and develop confidence and skills for life” (BGC Ottawa website, 2020). Our analysis shows that most young leaders² saw the BGC Ottawa as the community they were engaging with and contributing to, rather than a neighbourhood or

¹In this report, community engagement is defined as the act of working to make a difference in the day-to-day life of a person's community, through political and/or non-political means. This work can take paid and unpaid forms. According to Flanigan and Levine (2010), “Civic [Community] engagement of young adults is important both for the functioning of a democratic society and for individual development.” (p. 173). They go on to say that generational theories suggest that young people must engage with their communities to learn how to keep them operational once they become the leaders (Flanigan & Levine, 2010). Engagement thus helps individuals feel a sense of belonging to their communities and a sense of purpose as they act towards community change that reflects community needs and desires.

² In Case #1 and #2, young leaders consisted of older teenagers or young adults (ages 17-27) working with the BGC Ottawa or the JA.

the city of Ottawa, and felt strong sense of belonging to the BGC Ottawa. Young leaders want to and feel obligated to give back to the community (BGC Ottawa) that gave them so much. While young leaders are giving back, they are, at the same time, still in the process of becoming 'good citizens' through their work as 'community leaders'. They continually grow, learn, and get closer to becoming the type of people ('good citizens') they expect the members to be through their work. Importantly, young leaders are reflexive about their identities as well as how the BGC Ottawa contributes to these identities. The BGC Ottawa's work is thus cyclical – young leaders gained many of their qualities through their experiences as members and are now reflexively working to foster these qualities in younger generations. This is crucial for the continued success of the BGC Ottawa. Established leaders³ were also interviewed. A comparison of established leaders' and young leaders' interview responses reveals consistency with respect to what BGC Ottawa represents. This suggests that BGC Ottawa established leaders and young leaders consider the BGC Ottawa as the community to which they are giving back to and share the same values, which are to produce 'good citizen' and 'community leaders'.

Case # 2 explores the experiences of young leaders associated with the Jeux d'Acadie (JA). The Jeux de l'Acadie (JA) is a sport program that features regional competitions leading to a large annual sporting event that acts as a community building strategy to attract and retain Francophone youths and to strengthen the Acadian Francophone minority throughout the Canadian Atlantic Provinces. Interestingly, our analysis shows that no young leaders explicitly responded that they were giving back to the Acadian and Francophone communities or that their work promotes the importance of the integration of Francophonie in these communities, which is the mission of the organizing body of the J.A, la Société des Jeux de l'Acadie (SJA). Some young leaders' responses mentioned Acadia, francophones from the Atlantic provinces of Canada or francophones more generally but were complicated. Instead, the development of youth and the promotion of sports practice are at the heart of their commitment. Multilayered responses indicate that some participants are aware of the complexity of the question and that they trouble their own responses suggests that they show some reflexivity with respect to their relationship to the JA. However, even if the communities to which they expressly intend to contribute and their individual objectives differ, all leaders share the explicit desire to offer future generations the memorable experience they had at the Games. This means that even if few of them mention the development of the Francophonie or the Acadian community as the explicit target of their action within the Games, they nevertheless adhere to this aim of the Games. Indeed, it may be that the Francophonie or Acadian community is so prevalent at the Games that it may be implicit and taken for granted. Hence, former participants do not necessarily feel the need to highlight it. Furthermore, the young adults realize that their Games experience is made possible by the volunteer work of so many people. This is what encourages them to commit to ensuring the survival of the Games (and therefore, implicitly, for the development of the community). Their commitment is also a way of maintaining links with the Games and with sport. They feel useful and valued by their contribution to the Games and derive satisfaction and pride from it. As with Case #1, established leaders were also interviewed, and the same themes emerged for established leaders regardless of the length of their commitment to the Games or their age.

³ Established leaders consisted of administrators, managers, and volunteers in top leadership roles.

CASE STUDY #3 – ARCTIC WINTER GAMES (AWG)

Our third case study, and the one detailed in this report, explores the community engagement experiences of both young and established⁴ adult leaders working with the AWG. We included older, established leaders in the main body of work in this case because of the limitations we faced resulting from the global COVID-19 pandemic. As we all know, in March 2020, all community sport programs and events were suspended. The AWG 2020 scheduled to be hosted by Whitehorse, Yukon, were cancelled and the AWG 2022 scheduled for Wood Buffalo, Alberta, were pushed back to 2023. Our conversations with a variety of community organizations revealed that the suspension of programming during the pandemic meant that it was difficult to recruit former participants between 18-25 years old to take part in the research project. Many had lost touch with the organizations they had previously been connected to. To maintain the project, we interviewed young and established leaders, most of whom are former participants of the AWG, working as volunteers (committee members, mission staff, managers, coaches, officials, etc.) and see their involvement in the AWG as a way to give back to the AWG and the greater circumpolar North community.

The crux of our work in this case study and the research project in general explores the concept of giving back, a key aspect of community engagement, and a new concept to be applied to the AWG in a research context. Researchers have taken interest in the AWG for decades, as it is a unique multisport event. The AWG have been both criticized and lauded in research projects. For example, both Paraschak (1997) and Giles (2008) argued that, like other multiport events like the Canada Games, the AWG were created to serve Eurocanadians through the development of Eurocanadian sport. They noted that the emphasis on sport, cultural and social development rather than competition and the inclusion of Arctic Sports and Dene Games represents a welcome alternative to other major games, however, the small number of Indigenous participants at each competition⁵ and the history of the AWG (created by non-Indigenous sport leaders and politicians, with little input from Indigenous peoples) suggests yet another colonial project. Alternatively, Ferez et al. (2018) suggest that the AWG is an event that is torn between “Olympism” and challenging the status quo of westernized sports events, through its continued focus on Indigenous culture and the inclusion and promotion of Arctic Sports and Dene Games. Fuchs (2022) and Thomsen et al. (2018), also claim that although the AWG were developed from a Eurocentric, liberal (and thus colonial) idea about sport, the AWG strongly challenge the contemporary Olympic and Western sports model by claiming to be “considered as more than a, or at least an alternative kind of, sports event” (p. 106). They further argue that the AWG focus on friendship and comradery among young peoples of the North, while at the same being a sporting competition, is unique in the sporting world. According to Fuchs (2022), the AWG “are part of a trend that calls for the organisation of events that place the local level and the interest of the populations at their heart, within a project that combines sport, culture, and education: ‘humanised’ Games, in a way” (p. 7). Fuchs (2023) further contends that the AWG’s social, cultural and youth development objectives, that allow such a focus on the northern community and territorial specificity, sustains their contribution to community development and volunteer engagement. They become a manifestation of a capable and mobilized Arctic (or northern) community.

Using different lenses than the researchers comparing AWG to other multisport games, Hinch and de la Barre (2005) assessed whether the AWG could (and perhaps should) be turned into a national cultural tourist attraction. They determined that by the mid-2000s, they had not yet become one, but could in the future, depending on the desire of AWGIC and host organizations to make them so. Ren and Rasmussen (2017) analyzed the impact hosting the 2016 games had on Nuuk, Greenland. They suggested that hosting such an event had the potential to lead to large scale change in Greenland, with respect to social capacity building, Greenland’s reputation for being a “competent” nation and Greenland’s volunteer

⁴ In this case study, young leaders consist of adults ages 22-36 and established leaders consist of older workers who we refer to using two labels – managers and contingent leaders. Descriptions of both groups are elaborated on in the methodology section.

⁵ Paraschak points out that this number has increased with each edition of the AWG; Lankford and Neal (2002, 2010, 2014) - see below – also found this.

sector. Lankford, Neal and various research assistants (2002, 2010, 2014) completed a series of reports that examined the personal, social, and community benefits of the Games over multiple games. They used questionnaires distributed to participants and coaches to explore their experiences and consistently determined that there is “strong rationale for the continued development and advancement of the Games” and the findings of their research “support the mission and values of the Games as established by the International Committee” (2010, p. 5). As outlined by Lankford, et al. (2010), these findings suggest that participants experience benefits related to excitement, challenges, and positive experiences⁶ (p. 18), to enhanced self-esteem and personal outlook⁷ (p. 24), to providing healthy, challenging and competitive opportunities for youth⁸ (p. 29), to sense of belonging and strengthening of community ties⁹ (p. 33) and to promoting socialization and cultural awareness¹⁰ (p. 38).

While Lankford et al. explored the experiences of participants and some coaches through their survey data and determined that the AWG are immensely beneficial to these youth participants, their longitudinal work has not yet addressed the experiences of young and established leaders. An important avenue to explore with respect to leaders’ experiences is to find out why these leaders return to work for the AWG after having participated in their youth – i.e., why they give back and help keep the AWG going. This type of analysis requires a turn to qualitative data (shared through in-depth interviews) and a deep exploration of the complex concept of “giving back”, which has not yet been explored with respect to the AWG. The concept has, however, been explored in other sport contexts, for example by Dickson, Benson and Turviel (2014) in their analysis of mega-event volunteers at the Olympic Games, in which they suggest that giving back plays a major role in the context of event volunteering and is linked to volunteer legacy. Welty Peachey et al. (2014) also spoke about giving back with respect to Sports for Development and Peace (SDP) workers’ motivations for contributing to a multinational sport-for-development event. Work in sport studies referring to the concept of “giving back” is thus helping sport scholars and organizers understand that workers and volunteers undertake (paid and unpaid) work in their communities in part because they want to give back to others, that this giving back often extends beyond sport and that giving back may ultimately help people feel more connected to their communities. To further understand peoples’ experiences and their connections to their communities, it is important to continue to ask questions about why workers and volunteers choose to give back (motivation) and how they make sense of their experiences.

Before describing peoples’ motivations for giving back to the community (research question #2) and feelings about how their work contributes to the AWG mission and values (research question #3), we take a step back and unpack the concept of community (research question #1). What is community? How do the young and established AWG leaders understand the AWG community, and do they feel they are giving back to the AWG community through their work? Do events like the AWG help people have a heightened sense of belonging to their communities (AWG or otherwise)? How can AWG attract former participants to volunteer in the future, knowing more about how people perceive the concept of community?

⁶ Involvement gives participants opportunities to enjoy sports, a chance to compete with others, new adventures and excitement and a chance to see other towns and places; provides interesting experiences which they can tell their friends about; brings happy memories after the Games; provides youth with a physical challenge; helps youth learn more about sports and is fun.

⁷ Involvement helps youth to want to do better in school, makes the community a better place to live, brings family closer together, helps youth understand themselves, brings the community closer together and helps youth develop leadership skills

⁸ Involvement challenges youth through sports, keeps youth physically fit, helps youth develop skills and abilities in sports, gets youth involved with other youth in sports

⁹ Involvement helps youth be a role model for others in the community, provides other role models to look up to, encourages communities to support youth who are involved, helps youth to see the emphasis placed on other youth, helps build excitement and involvement of the people in a community, helps youth control their free time

¹⁰ Involvement provides for better understanding of other cultures and opportunities for cultural experiences, helps youth take pride in their own culture, interact with different cultures, youth learn something new about someone else, meet new people and make new friends, develop pride in being “northern”

We contextualize the third case study by first outlining the Arctic Winter Games history, mission, and vision, as gleaned from Arctic Winter Games informational materials (e.g., website, etc.) and academic research articles (e.g., Ferez et al. 2018, Filice, 2011). Next, we explain the methodology and research questions. The results are then presented and discussed; we open this section with data that explains how young and established leaders describe the AWG, including what “community” they perceive to serve while working for the AWG and what their sense of belonging is, with respect to the AWG. The analysis then turns to the young and established leaders’ (aged 22-73) experiences at the AWG. We attempt to explain how these leaders make sense of their responsibilities and actions in their leadership roles as an expression of their commitment to children and youth in their “communities” – in other words – the essence of their motivation to support and help others. To contextualize these experiences and help explain how and why the AWG young and established leaders continue their involvement with the club, recruitment and training processes are discussed. We conclude by examining the positive impact that the AWG is having on its participants as well as young and established leaders by asking the AWGIC and Host Societies to explore a few ideas we believe might help them continue to strengthen the “AWG community” through their work while at the same time acting as innovators in the larger Canadian sport community by continuing to deeply challenge sport and physical activity systems.

Our goal with this report is to shed light on how young and established leaders involved with the AWG feel about giving back to their community (however they define it) and provide those associated with the AWG with some ideas for cultivating this notion of giving back among peoples of the circumpolar North.

AWG – HISTORY, MISSION, AND VALUES

The Arctic Winter Games is a biennial sports and cultural event hosted by and for people living in the circumpolar North (above the 55th parallel of latitude). According to the AWGIC website, “the AWG bring together, in one community, a multitude of visiting athletes, coaches, cultural participants, volunteers, media, visitors, officials and community leaders from around the circumpolar and northern world for seven days of athletic competition, cultural exchange and social interaction” (AWG, 2008b). There are approximately 2,000 athletic and cultural participants, 1,500-2,500 volunteers as well as several paid employees involved with each edition of the AWG.

The AWG came to be because athletes from the Yukon and the Northwest Territories were remarkably outmatched by athletes from Canadian provinces to the South at the inaugural (and celebration of Canada’s centennial) Canada Winter Games in Quebec City in 1967. Fueled by disappointment, Cal Miller, the financial advisor to Team Yukon came up with the idea of creating games for athletes of the North. Together with the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner of the Northwest Territories, Miller proposed the new games (Ferez et al. 2018). Miller then called the Yukon Commissioner who obtained a meeting for Miller with the Canadian Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs. The Governor of Alaska was also involved and was in full support of the idea – he agreed that athletes of the circumpolar North were consistently eclipsed in competitions by athletes from the South. The Arctic Winter Games Corporation (AWGC) was thus created to oversee the organization of the first AWG (Filice, 2011).

The inaugural AWG were held in 1970 in Yellowknife, the capital of the Northwest Territories (NWT), coinciding with the centennial of the NWT (Ferez et al., 2018). Delegations from the Yukon, Northwest Territories and Alaska competed at those games. Over the next sixteen years, the Yukon, NWT and Alaska sent delegations and rotated hosting duties for most editions of the Games, however, two more delegations, including Northern Quebec and Greenland (Denmark) occasionally joined as “observer” delegations. The first three Games in the 1980s went back to the original three delegations. After the 1984 Games, meetings were held to find a way to make the Games more exciting by adding more athletes – three delegations consistently attending meant that excitement was waning. Northern Alberta, Saskatchewan, British Columbia and Manitoba were invited - only Northern Alberta was able to secure funding to send a delegation to the 1986 Games. When the Games were hosted by Alaska in 1988 there continued to be limited enthusiasm and financial support from both the Alaskan government and corporate sponsors. There was also volunteer burnout and participant indifference (AWG, 2008b). During the Games, a meeting was held with government partners. After the Games, a report was produced detailing commitments that both governments and the AWGC would fulfil. These included: continued financial support from all governments, the development of turn-key hosting documents, more focus on marketing and media exposure, northern cultural events and Arctic Sport, the introduction of Dene games events, the acceptance of Alberta as a full partner in terms of sending participants and committing to host future games, inviting Greenland, Northern Quebec and Russia to participate in future Games, maintaining the number of participants per delegation, continued operation on a two year cycle and regular meetings to evaluate and plan for the future (AWG, 2008b). The Games in 1990 were extremely successful because of the fulfillment of these commitments. Since then, the AWG have taken place every two years (other than during the Covid-19 global pandemic, in which the 2020 edition was cancelled and subsequent Games were held in 2023 and 2024 with a plan to stage the Games every two years post 2024), have been hosted in 11 different communities, and featured contingents from Greenland (Denmark); Alberta, Northwest Territories, Northern Quebec/Nunavik Quebec, Nunavut, Yukon (Canada); Alaska (United States); Chukotka, Magadan Oblast, Tyumen, and Yamal Peninsula (Russia); and Sápmi (northern Norway, Sweden, Finland).

The AWCG, which eventually became the Arctic Winter Games International Committee (AWGIC) is the standing committee that “oversees the development and implementation of the Games.” It also functions to “act as guardian and interpreter of the general philosophy, policies and rules of the Games; invite and review bids from communities wanting to host the Games; select sports for each set of Games and prepare the technical package of rules, categories, events, team composition, medals to be awarded, and competition format; enter into formal agreements with Host communities which stipulate the terms under which the Games are awarded and oversee the preparations of a Host Society for the Games” (AWG, 2008c).

Host societies stage “the Games in accordance with the terms of the contract signed by the Host Community and the Arctic Winter Games International Committee” (AWG, 2008d). They recruit between 15-25 directors and between 1,500-2,500 other volunteers, as well as some paid employees, are responsible for funding all aspects of the AWG (e.g., the sporting, cultural and social events, housing, feeding and transporting the participants)¹¹ and for developing the cultural program for the AWG.

The fundamental purpose of the AWG is “to involve as many participants as possible either in the Games themselves or in the team selection trials, and to provide a forum of competition for those other than elite athletes with competitive opportunities in the south. The cultural component of the Games adds the unique opportunity for fellowship for the participants and host communities (AWG 2008a)”.

The **mission** of the AWG is represented by the three interlocking rings of the logo:



¹¹ Host societies fund the AWG through annual levies from the six Governments with representatives on the AWGIC (Alberta, Alaska, Greenland, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and Yukon), annual fees paid by Guest Contingents (e.g., Nunavik, Sápmi), cash grants and donations in kind from the Government of Canada, Territorial/Provincial Governments and the host municipalities – if hosted in Canada – and funding from state and the municipality/borough - if hosted in Alaska. Greenland’s participation is funded by Home Rule Government of Greenland through the Greenland Sports Federation. Private sector donations are also crucial for the staging of the AWG.

Sport development/athlete development:



The achievement of individual excellence in athletics and/or winning in team competitions, "is not a primary objective of the Arctic Winter Games. Instead, the fundamental purpose of the Games is to encourage maximum participation by all cultures in a broad range of athletic activity" (AWG Bid Manual, 2020, p. 4).

"Athletic competition features sports that enjoy worldwide popularity alongside northern and traditional Aboriginal events. In combination with the selection trials run by each contingent, the Arctic Winter Games are a significant part of northern sport development" (AWG 2008b). "Increasing level of skill is expected to result from, rather than be, the primary driver of participation" (AWG Bid Manual 2020).



Cultural exchange:



"Cultural programming at the Arctic Winter Games includes participants from all contingents who come together to learn from one another and to celebrate and demonstrate their unique artistic talents. Combined with the important opportunity provided for performing and visual artists from the host region to showcase their talents to the world, the Games are a significant part of northern cultural development" (AWG, 2008a).



Social interaction:



"The Arctic Winter Games are common ground for promoting cultural and social interchange among northern peoples; and for providing a vehicle for education, understanding, and friendship between all peoples from the circumpolar world. The exchanges through athletic and cultural participation, as well as opportunities for social exchanges among contingents are intended to complement rather than replace other opportunities." (AWG Bid Manual, 2020, p. 4)



The **values** of the AWG include cultural awareness and understanding, fair play, access and equity, integrity, respect for self and others, partnerships, personal development, and community development (AWG 2008a, AWG Strategic Plan, 2016, p. 3).

While all the values are integral to the AWG, **fair play** has been highlighted in the AWG policies and practices and a special prize was created to acknowledge contingents who exceptionally engage in fair play throughout the AWG. According to the AWGIC website (2023), "the Bill Hodgson Trophy is presented to the contingent that demonstrates the best understanding of the philosophy of the Arctic Winter Games and most exemplifies the spirit of fair play during the Games week. Mission staff, Chefs de Mission's, assistant Chefs de Mission's, coaches, AWGIC directors, media, Host Society board members and senior staff vote during Games week to decide the winning contingent." In addition to the Bill

Hodgson trophy, “participants who demonstrate an understanding of the philosophy of the AWG and exemplify the spirit of fair play throughout the Games are awarded special recognition pins by Chefs de Mission, head sport officials or members of the AWGIC. The AWGIC provides these pins. It is the responsibility of the Host Society to assist the AWGIC in promoting the distribution of the Fair Play Pins” (AWGIC website, 2023). Furthermore, the AWG were declared a True Sport event in 2023, which means the organizers committed to the values outlined by the True Sport Foundation, an organization supported by the Federal, Provincial, and Territorial Ministers responsible for sport, recreation, and fitness through the Canadian Strategy for Ethical Conduct in Sport — A True Sport Contribution. According to the True Sport website (2023a), “a True Sport event is an opportunity to express your commitment to values-based sport by incorporating the True Sport Principles into all aspects of the event, thereby contributing to positive and memorable experiences for everyone. Fostering environments where the True Sport Principles are at the forefront communicates your belief that sport has the potential to instill character, strengthen communities, and increase opportunities for personal excellence.” When declared a True Sport event, “Play Fair” acts as one of the guiding principles¹².

Importantly, the deep reflection and strategies that have been put in place for ensuring fair play as part of the Games' structure can have lasting impacts on participants and it provides the context for participants to have fun and want to return as volunteers to “Give Back” (another True Sport Principle). In what follows, we explore these lasting impacts and motivations for giving back. To kick off this exploration, we outline our methodology.

¹² The True Sport Principles include:

Go For It: Rise to the challenge – always strive for excellence. Be persistent and discover how good you can be.

Play Fair: Understand, respect, and follow the rules. Play with integrity – competition is only meaningful when it is fair.

Respect Others: Show respect for everyone involved in creating your sporting experience, both on and off the field of play. Win with dignity and lose with grace.

Keep It Fun: Find the joy in sport and share it with others. Remember what you love about sport and why you play.

Stay Healthy: Always respect and care for your mind and body. Advocate for the health and safety of yourself and those around you.

Include Everyone: Recognize and celebrate strength in diversity. Invite and welcome others into sport.

Give Back: Say thanks and show gratitude. Encourage your sport group to make a difference in the community. (True Sport website, 2023b).

METHODOLOGY

This report, which represents the third phase of data collection for the larger project, highlights key findings from interview data with:

- 5 Managers and/or Board Members – AWGIC (subsequently referred to as “managers”)
- 8 Contingent leaders (mission staff, officials) and experienced coaches – AWG (subsequently referred to as “contingent leaders”)
- 6 Young coaches (aged 22-36) – AWG (subsequently referred to as “young leaders”)

Reminder: We included older, established leaders in the main body of work in this case because of the limitations we faced resulting from the global COVID-19 pandemic. To maintain the project, we recruited young and established leaders to take part in interviews, most of whom are former participants of the AWG, working as volunteers (committee members, mission staff, managers, coaches, officials, etc.) and see their involvement in the AWG as a way to give back to the AWG and the greater circumpolar North community.

Interviews with Managers

Five semi-structured interviews were conducted with members of the AWGIC or the Host Society. Interview participants ranged in age from 35 to 73. One participant held a full-time job outside of their work on the AWGIC or Host Society, another participant was retired and the employment of the other three participants was related to the Games. Two of the five managers were former AWG participants. Participants were recruited by email communication following a virtual presentation at a meeting of the AWGIC + Chefs and assistant Chefs de Mission. One semi-structured interview was conducted with each participant. Interviews were conducted virtually and averaged 75 minutes.

Interviews with Contingent Leaders

Eight semi-structured interviews were conducted with contingent leaders – 5 mission staff, 1 official and 2 coaches. Interview participants ranged in age from 40 to 60. Five participants held full-time jobs outside of their work with the AWG while the employment of three participants was related at least in part to their responsibilities for the Games. All eight contingent leaders were former AWG participants. Participants were recruited by the Chefs de Mission. One semi-structured interview was conducted with each participant. Interviews were conducted virtually and averaged 69 minutes.

Interviews with Young Leaders

Six semi-structured interviews were conducted with young leaders – all coaches. Interview participants ranged in age from 22 to 36. All participants held full-time jobs outside of their work with the AWG. All of the young leaders were former AWG participants. Participants were recruited by the Chefs de Mission. One semi-structured interview was conducted with each participant. Interviews were conducted virtually and averaged 59 minutes.

All interviews were conducted by Christine Dallaire, along with Salman Alavi as an observer for most of them, between November 2022 and February 2023 and were digitally recorded and transcribed. Pseudonyms were assigned to each interview participant.

Of note: Some managers and contingent leaders were employees (paid by provincial governments, sport organizations, the AWGIC or the Host Society), while others from these groups and all the young leaders were volunteers. For the paid employees, their work with the AWG was thus part of their job, however as explained in their interviews, their involvement and commitment to community development clearly extends beyond their “jobs” to the point of sacrifice and selflessness seen in community engagement

(Willemez, 2013) and other youth association work (Dallaire, 2014) and thus can be (and is, in this report) compared to the involvement of the volunteers.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1) What discourses of “community” do the managers, contingent leaders and young leaders draw on to describe the AWG and their place within it?
 - a. What are the AWG?
 - b. What community are they working with? The AWG? The Circumpolar North? The region in which they live? A specific group?
 - c. How do they situate themselves in this community? What is their sense of belonging?
- 2) What are the AWG managers, contingent leaders, and young leaders’ motivations?
 - a. How have the managers, contingent leaders and young leaders’ experiences sparked their desire to give back?
 - b. Do they conceive of their work as community engagement? How?
 - c. Recruitment
 - d. Training
- 3) What meanings do managers, contingent leaders and young leaders ascribe to their sporting responsibilities as practices of engagement towards youth and the “community”, beyond a love of sport?
 - a. Are the managers, contingent leaders and young leaders modelling the cultural awareness and understanding, fair play, access and equity, integrity, respect for self and others, commitment to partnership, personal development and community development they expect the athletes to?
 - b. What kind of person do they want to be?

The interviews were analyzed for content that would provide answers to the research questions outlined above to understand the managers, contingent leaders, and young leaders’ community engagement through their work in sport and recreation programming. Steph MacKay analyzed the information gathered by listening to the audio recordings of each interview to immerse herself in the feel and context of each interview and gain a better sense of how participants conveyed their answers. She then continued the analysis by working with the transcripts. She wrote the first full draft of this report, to which Christine then contributed, before it was submitted to the AWGIC, Host Society and Chefs de Mission for the Mat-Su 2024 AWG for further comment.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Methodology

The interviews with managers, contingent leaders and young leaders provided us with rich data and interesting findings presented in this report and in academic articles (in progress). The depth and relevance of the data collected is a direct result of the generosity and engagement of former participants involved in various roles with the AWG. It is their commitment to the AWG that motivated their participation in the interviews which ensured depth and authentic reflection in the interview conversations. This purposeful recruitment served the overall research project’s objective of gaining a better understanding of young (and in this case, established) leaders’ engagement by exploring the experiences of leaders currently involved in community development through their leadership roles in the AWG. However, the focus on former AWG participants considered “champions” of civic engagement within the organization means that their views may not be representative of all leaders and managers who have worked or who are currently working for the AWG. This research report does not offer an overall assessment of all AWG worker and volunteer experiences. Another disadvantage of the recruitment strategy privileged for the overall research project is our lack of data to demonstrate or assess the extent to which the AWG impacts engagement outside of the Games. Indeed, its former participants are also engaged as young and established leaders in activities, associations, school programs and other organizations beyond the AWG partly because of the leadership experience they acquired while working at the AWG. The limitations of our methodology prevent us from addressing the broader impact of the AWG in fostering community engagement in the Circumpolar community at large.

KEY FINDINGS

RESEARCH QUESTION #1 – THE AWG – AN EVENT OR A COMMUNITY?

According to Bauman (2013), “whatever the word ‘community’ may mean, it is good ‘to have a community’, ‘to be in a community’” (p. 1). What does the word “community” mean, though? Glover and Sharpe (2020) call on those researching communities to think about the notion of ‘community’ before exploring specific cases, particularly because it is a concept that has shifted with time. What remains stable is that the notion of community is sentimental and conjures up feelings of warmth, familiarity, and safety, and a “fitting in” vibe, which are essential to meeting humans’ fundamental need for meaningful social connection and a sense of belonging. While community used to refer to people living in a defined geographic locations’ connection to one another, the term arguably shifted in the last half of the 20th Century to refer to people’s shared experiences in their consciousness. Geography still plays a role in many communities (e.g., in the case of the AWG, participants are limited by geography); however, others are not bound by borders or landscapes and fluidity of members and ideas are central components (Glover & Sharpe, 2020; Rich, Spaaij & Misener, 2021, etc.). In current times, “quite literally”, wrote Bessant (2014, p. 471), “people think, talk, and act community into existence in the course of their everyday interactions”. Unfortunately, while opportunities for joining communities have expanded with increased communications technologies, feeling a strong sense of community is becoming more elusive than ever. For example, in 2019, The Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health of Ontario suggested that people – particularly young people – are feeling more disconnected from their communities than ever before. To understand why people are increasingly feeling detached, it is crucial to explore what communities people feel connected to and how people think about their relationship to their communities.

Researchers have considered whether the AWG is a “community” constructed of smaller communities. For example, Fuchs (2022) discusses how the AWGIC “reflected the desire to portray the image of a united Arctic community, respecting the unique features of each population or territory represented, and looking to the future” (p. 4). Fuchs (2022) also notes that the AWGIC declared that the “AWG brings our Circumpolar World closer together” by ‘strengthening and showcasing our Communities’ and ‘promoting northern unity and cultural understanding” (p. 4). Furthermore, the AWGIC seemingly describes the AWG as a community on its website, which provides the public with formal descriptions of the role and purpose of the games, strategic direction and plan of organizations involved, benefits of the games, social and economic impact, history, hosting and technical information, organizational bylaws and other aspects of the AWG. The Host Society, does so as well, through its website that identifies the Host Society personnel, describes and provides a link to the AWGIC website, presents the mascot and theme song, provides information about tickets, the torch relay and education programs, as well as the sports and events (including cultural events) taking place at the Games, events, participating contingents, information for media, sponsors, volunteers, spectators, etc. Social media platforms also play a role in constructing the AWG as a community by providing the public with news updates and stories about the AWG while in progress, as well as upcoming events and issues related to the AWG, while in preparation for the next AWG. This online information gives people a glimpse at what the AWG are all about, and how they act as a community, from the perspective of those who are part of the AWGIC or Host Society and/or manage these platforms. While it is remarkable that researchers and those involved with the governance and organization of the AWG deem them a community, if we go with Bessant’s notion that communities are constructed by people, it is also important to find out how the people involved with the everyday operations of the AWG feel about it. How do the leaders and managers who make the AWG happen understand it? What discourses of community do the managers, contingent leaders and young coaches draw on to describe the AWG and their place within it? In other words, what are the AWG? Are they a community unto themselves? If not, what community do leaders see themselves as a part of? How do they situate themselves in this community? What is their sense of belonging with respect to AWG?

What are the AWG?

When asked to describe the AWG, in their own words, to someone who has never experienced them, interview participants did not explicitly use the word “community”. Instead, they identified 40 themes, which suggests that the AWG represent different things to different people. Many themes were related, and thus grouped together in the analysis.

Interview participants' most common responses fit into three categories: athletic competition, cultural exhibition, and social interaction among circumpolar peoples, which align with the mission of the AWG, symbolized by the three interlocking rings of the Arctic Winter Games Official Logo.

Athletic Competition

More than half of the interview participants discussed the level of competition at the AWG, in some way, with most of them explaining that while it is a lower level than competitions that include athletes south of the 55th parallel, such as Canada Games, it is a high (and appropriate) level for Northern athletes – there is parity amongst participants. That more than half of the interview participant mentioned this makes sense given that the AWG were created when it was determined that teams from the North were at disadvantage due to relatively small athletic pools, lack of facilities and infrequent training opportunities compared to teams from the South at the 1967 Canada Games. When asked how AWG differs from the Canada Games, one coach explained:

“
Well, you walk into Arctic Winter Games, and we could be the best team here. And you're looking to win gold. When we went to the Canada Games, everything was about let's not embarrass ourselves. Let's not embarrass our territory. Let's not embarrass our families. So, it was very much like, you know, our coaches wouldn't specifically say that, but we knew that we were the underdogs. And whatever is below the underdogs, that's kind of what we were...so the Arctics make you feel like you belong because you do. (Jesse, Contingent Leader)
”

Echoing Jesse's comment about athletes feeling like they belong, many interview participants suggested that the AWG are more inclusive (with respect to what level of athlete can participate) than other sports events because (in many cases) participants do not have to be a top athlete to go:

“
And that's another nice thing about the Arctic Winter Games. It's not geared toward the best of the best. (Kerstie, Contingent Leader)
”

However, with regards to Arctic sports and Dene Games, an Arctic Games official explained that AWG is one of the highest-level competitions for athletes:

“
...everybody in Alaska knows that they want to go to Arctic Winter Games because they know that level of competition is there for them, really there for them. So, you’ll see normally on even years is Arctic Winter Games, so you’ll see the year before in April and July of the even years the number of athletes that compete is higher because they know that that’s the selection-based year for Arctic Winter Games for the next year. (Colette, Contingent leader)
”

This makes sense given there are fewer opportunities for Arctic sport and Dene Games athletes to compete when compared with other sports (other notable events include the World Eskimo Indian Olympics (WEIO) and Native Youth Olympic (NYO) Games). However, it is important to note that Arctic sports and Dene Games are purported to have a different competitive philosophy than non-Indigenous sports, as explained by Colette:

“
Colette: I mean, it’s just like any Arctic sports competition anywhere that I’ve ever been to, it’s just a big community of sports, you know, playing games and seeing who can kick the highest and the farthest and jump. I mean, it’s just... it’s not that western civilization competition of football, basketball, hockey, especially not like hockey. It is so not like any of those sports.
”

Christine: Tell me more about how it’s not like hockey.

Colette: There’s no fighting.

Christine: (Laughs).

Colette: It’s a friendly competition. You know, you support each other even if they’re your competitor to go higher, faster, longer, stronger. Everyone gives each other advice to gain a better advantage against you or against other opponents and competition. You’re not going to see that in hockey. And it’s not just hockey but any of the sports – basketball, a majority of the winter sports – that athletes participate in Arctic Winter Games. Besides Dene games.
”

According to Colette, Arctic sports and Dene Games competitors help each other achieve their best, even if it’s to their own detriment or to the detriment of other competitors. Personal bests and achieving challenging feats are the ultimate goals, rather than beating a competitor.

One interview participant (Graham, Contingent Leader) used the term “meaningful competition”, which aptly captures how many interview participants spoke about the level of competition at the AWG in both categories of sports (i.e., “mainstream sports” and Arctic sports and Dene Games) – that there is parity amongst participants, that this parity helps participants develop their sport skills, and that participants feel good about taking part. That interview participants felt this way suggests that the AWG are honoring the “athletic competition” aspect of their mission (and logo) by meeting at least some of their sport development goals, and staying true to their focus to involve as many participants as possible.

Cultural Exhibition

Additionally, when asked how they would describe the AWGs, almost all 19 interview participants referenced cultural exchange aspects of the AWG, which represents the second ring of the AWG logo. Some participants spoke about the importance of the cultural sports (including the Arctic Games and Dene Games) and events (including the Cultural Gala, art show and aspects of the Opening and Closing ceremonies). Other participants pointed to the destination feature of the AWG, where athletes travel (often great distances) outside of their hometowns and experience different cultures by visiting other regions or even countries. For example,

“
Yeah, I think what’s really unique about the Arctic Winter Games is [that] it’s not just about sport. It’s as equally as important to incorporate culture, both from having cultural participants, but as well as having it in a different region every two years so they get to experience, you know, having it either in their home region which is amazing because they get the support of their hometown, or to have it in a region that is completely different. And again, they may not have had the experience or the opportunity to experience even travel if it weren’t for this competition. (Constance, Manager)
”

One participant even suggested that the cultural aspects of the AWG contribute to some of The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (2015) Calls to Action (87 to 91¹³):

¹³ 87. We call upon all levels of government, in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, sports halls of fame, and other relevant organizations, to provide public education that tells the national story of Aboriginal athletes in history.

88. We call upon all levels of government to take action to ensure long-term Aboriginal athlete development and growth, and continued support for the North American Indigenous Games, including funding to host the games and for provincial and territorial team preparation and travel.

89. We call upon the federal government to amend the Physical Activity and Sport Act to support reconciliation by ensuring that policies to promote physical activity as a fundamental element of health and well-being, reduce barriers to sports participation, increase the pursuit of excellence in sport, and build capacity in the Canadian sport system, are inclusive of Aboriginal peoples.

90. We call upon the federal government to ensure that national sports policies, programs, and initiatives are inclusive of Aboriginal peoples, including, but not limited to, establishing:

- i. In collaboration with provincial and territorial governments, stable funding for, and access to, community sports programs that reflect the diverse cultures and traditional sporting activities of Aboriginal peoples.
- ii. An elite athlete development program for Aboriginal athletes.
- iii. Programs for coaches, trainers, and sports officials that are culturally relevant for Aboriginal peoples.
- iv. Anti-racism awareness and training programs.

91. We call upon the officials and host countries of international sporting events such as the Olympics, Pan Am, and Commonwealth games to ensure that Indigenous peoples' territorial protocols are respected, and local Indigenous communities are engaged in all aspects of planning and participating in such events.

“

Christine: So to people who have never gone to the Games, what did you mean by culture?

Mairin (Manager): Well, there's a couple of components to it. There are cultural team members that come, so cultural delegates. They all attend from each jurisdiction, and they create a gala that's done on Thursday and Friday at the end of the week. They work as a collective and they work individually as well within their team, but they also work as a collective, putting on this gala. So that's one piece of the cultural aspect.

But then a lot of them, there's always like an art show that's put on. Now with reconciliation being such a big part of the Games, which only just started in 2020, which I'm very proud of that we implemented it, is also a part of demonstrating the local indigenous groups for each area. And people are starting now to understand there's truth and reconciliation all over the world. The Sámi People are going through their own reconciliation. It just opens people's minds and eyes to things that they might not have seen before, and culture of course can do that.

”

Indeed, the 2023 Host Society did highlight their commitment to the path of Truth and Reconciliation by choosing to implement Calls to Action #87 and #91 in addition to Beyond 94 by planning an Indigenous Sport Gallery to showcase the history of Aboriginal athletes, through engaging local Indigenous communities in planning and participating in the Games and by showcasing Indigenous culture through its sociocultural programming such as the Cultural Gala, Cultural Pop-ups, and various activities including local Indigenous community showcase events. In addition, three special Truth and Reconciliation pins were produced and distributed at events honouring Truth and Reconciliation. These pins included the Orange Shirt pin, created to raise awareness about residential schools' tragic legacy, the Red Dress pin, created to raise awareness about violence against Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit people and the TRC pin, featuring the Seven Sacred Teachings, which the Host Society adopted as their guiding principles, and moccasins, which represented walking towards reconciliation and fully supporting and respecting calls 87 and 91.

The use of multiple languages at the AWG was also mentioned by two interview participants, in relationship to culture, which yet again suggests an air of inclusivity (this time with respect to people coming together from a variety of linguistic backgrounds):

“

Culture is also wrapped up in language and there's certainly lots of languages. Although our operational language is English, we do have official languages in Canada, of course, that we have to respect when it comes to the Organizing Committees, but there's also all sorts of indigenous languages that are spoken. You could hear it, you can see it written, and it's again starting to be at the forefront of all things about Arctic Winter Games. (Mairin, Manager)

”

“

Yeah, lots of different cultures and even if we can't speak the same language, you're going to speak some sort of language without talking. (Ree, Young Leader)

”

Social Interchange

Thirteen of the 19 interview participants spoke about social interchange aspects of the AWG, by referencing friendships that develop between participants or interactions that occur, especially during pin and clothing trading.

“

Events you go to, kids on the street walking, the interaction socially, culturally, competitively, the spirit of camaraderie. You see friendships being developed. And then when you come to the end of the Games, to watch all these kids...

Let me back up. When they come in for opening ceremonies, they come in as each of their team units. It's very orderly. When the Games are closing, they come in en masse. It's just a sea of colour, it's kids literally standing out there, taking off their clothes and exchanging uniforms. Just... it's crazy! So anyway, it's just, it has an energy that I haven't seen in other places; and it really is that pride in being a northerner. (Sean, Manager)

”

When compared with other major games,

“

Kit (Contingent Leader): There's like 2,000 athletes. The pin trading is crazy. So that, you don't see that at other Games. I mean, I've been at Western Canadians, I've been at a couple nationals....there's no clothing frenzy trading like you have at the Arctic Winter Games. It's just, it's crazy, like crazy fun. And I've never seen that at any other Games....and well, now, with social media, their phone numbers, right?

Christine: Mm-hmm. Would you say that the clothes and the pins exchange and trading is used to get to know other people? Is that what's different at the Arctic Winter Games...

Kit: A thousand per cent. A thousand per cent, because even my shiest badminton players, by the end they're like out there going, you know, will you trade? You know, in badminton they trade each other's shirts at the end. Coaches kind of, if we want to trade shirts, we do, whatever. But like it's an avenue into getting someone to talk to somebody. Even if they don't speak English, you just show, like you put your hand out. I've got this pin today.

”

Notions of friendships, collegiality and comradery were discussed by 12 of the interview participants as being key aspects of the AWG, and what differentiates them from other major sports events.

Responses detailing athletic competition, cultural exhibition and social interchange fit with the mission of the AWG, as symbolized by the three interlocking rings of the AWG Official Logo. This suggests that the AWG's mission is understood and being taken up by managers, contingent leaders and young leaders. However, given that the interview participants did not explicitly use the word "community" to describe the AWG, we dug deeper in the data to determine if (and where) discourses of community emerged.

The friendships and social exchanges described arguably construct a sense of community, which more than half of the interview participants spoke about. One manager used the term "Northern pride" to describe this sense of community (Sean, Manager). Many interview participants spoke about this sense of community using different terminology, such as "people of/in the North". Within their responses, participants explained that people of/in the North have deep experiences in common, which humble them, such as living in cold (and often harsh) climates with very few amenities (which can require travelling long distances to access). These common experiences act like a glue that binds people together. For example, Colette (Contingent Leader) describes "people in the North" and Kit (Contingent Leader) suggests that "we're all in the same boat":

“

I think people in the North are just a different breed of people too. People who live and make their lives in the North are a lot more generous with their time and their possessions and it may not be, you know, like your actual physical possessions but, well, with that too. I mean, most people in the North will give you the shirt off their back. So, I think that's another reason why Arctic Winter Games is so special is that everybody really comes from that sort of background, being just from the North. Because it really isn't any different when you go from, in Alaska when you go from communities in Alaska to any community in the North, it's the same. I mean, it really is the same community. Just a different accent. (Colette, Contingent Leader)

”

“

When you go down south, you have, you seem to have – and again, I'm stereotyping but I know I'm dead on because I've seen it a trillion times – is they're privileged. They think they're the best and they're rude and ignorant. They can be very rude and ignorant. And up North, honestly, I think maybe the most ignorant team might be Alberta because we get to go, you know, there are Calgary and Edmonton club players on there, and they're hoity-toity, but as far, but Alaska Basketball, man, they're very... they think they're the best in the world too.

But other than that, you know, all the kids are like from really small communities, and I think that's the big point is that everybody melds with each other because we're all in the same boat. We all come from the North, we all come from cold, we know cold weather, we know what it's like to have to travel hundreds of kilometers to get. Like we're 200 kilometers away from a Costco, right? (Kit, Contingent Leader)

”

These quotes necessitate a turn to the concept of solidarity, which is the development of a collective identity based on shared interests, aims and values and a caring and willingness to act on these interests, aims and values, even if it involves sacrifice (others who share this collective identity must sacrifice for the group, too) (McDonald & Spaaij, 2021). Another important aspect of solidarity is having a sense of belonging to the group and a tendency to see oneself as part of the group (Shelby, 2005). Both Colette and Kit reference this sense of solidarity through their comments and this notion of solidarity with others in the North is exuded by many interview participants throughout their interviews.

Furthermore, when compared to other multisport games, such as the Canada Games, participants consistently suggested that the AWG are “more like a community” and “friendlier”.

“

So the Arctic Winter Games for me are my favourite because it seems as though there's a bit more joy. There's less sort of... there's a bit more joy that teams are... Like when you see the Arctic Winter Games, you really just need to go and watch the Arctic sport competition where they support one another. They would give the shirt off their back to their competitor. It's such a cool thing to see. You know, the one-foot kick, someone will actually finally hit the seal and their competitor will run up and high-five them. You just don't see that anywhere else. So that's what I mean about when we focus almost less on performance and more... There are certainly those more traditional sports that really want to win, and they really want to. But then there is Arctic sport and there used to be dog mushing and there is, you know, snowshoe biathlon which you just don't see anywhere else. And the speed skaters, for instance, they've said for years all the jurisdictions want to stay in the same classroom. They all want to stay together. You'd never, ever see that in any other high-performance multisport Games. So, it's just more of a sense of community and I don't really know how else to put it, but I just, the feeling that I get when I'm there, my heart's just bigger, for some reason when I'm there. And I do like to see our athletes feel proud of their... I do like to see them feel proud of their performances, and they do have the ability to do that more easily against other Northern athletes than they do against massive jurisdictions. (Theresa, Contingent Leader)

”

Like Theresa, four other participants spoke about the AWG as a community. For example,

“

As I've said the Arctic Winter Games really is a big community now, it's that northern pride. It truly is the premier sports and cultural event for the Circumpolar World. (Sean, Manager)

It's more of like a community whereas Canada Games is a more high-level sport competition, I find. (Mariah, Manager)

I'd say it's about bringing people together, like similar but different people because it's all just the northern countries. It's very exclusive. Bringing people together from different cultures and different sports and kind of making a community out of it almost. (Melly, Young Leader)

”

However, often when speaking about the AWG as a community, interview participants troubled the concept. For example, Melly (Young Leader) suggested that the AWG create / build a community around the games at large, while, at the same time, create / strengthen smaller communities that come to the AWG:

“

No, that's a good point. I mean, it's really cool to go and represent Alaska. Like I always had a lot of pride in being Team Alaska and like wanting to win even, even though it doesn't sound like that's a big part. It's always, you always want to, and you want to represent where you're from well. But that's just not all that it's about, you know? So much of it is about the Games as a whole. Why you're going, who you're meeting, what you're doing, everything there. Not just oh, I'm here to represent Alaska. Like yeah, you are, and that's a big part but there's a lot of big parts, or a lot of small parts. I don't know. (Melly, Young Leader)

”

This echoes Thomsen, Ren and Mahadevan's (2018) findings that notions of panarctic community and identity are tangled with other identity positions, including national and regional. We discuss this in more detail below.

What community are you giving back to?

Interview participants also explained how they see the community to which they are contributing. Interestingly, despite having unanimously positive descriptions of the AWG (with a few explicitly identifying the AWG as a community in this question), they rarely identified the AWG as the community to which they felt they were giving back to. In other words, while interview participants spoke about people of/in the North, the struggles that bind them together, and the AWG as a community in and of itself, they did not see the AWG as the community to which they were contributing. The communities they most often identified include: the local community in which they live, young athletes in general or the young athletes they work with specifically, and their sport community (including coaches, volunteers, parents). For example,

“

I'm giving back to my community. I want, like my Peace River community and surrounding area. That's why I do everything that I do is because they need good referees, they need good coaches. So if someone doesn't step up to the plate, and I'm willing and want to, then giddy up. (Kit, Contingent Leader)

”

“

I'd say I definitely do it for the athletes and I think they have a big ripple effect to maybe if they have a good coach they can visualize themselves to be a coach one day because as people age out and people get older, someone needs to fill those coaching roles. (Shania, Young Leader)

”

Three interview participants identified “people who have not yet had the opportunity” as the community to which they are contributing.

“

I'm involved for the people that haven't had the opportunity yet to... I'm involved for the community. I'm involved for, I don't know, it's a hard question. Yeah. I suppose it's the people that have not yet had the opportunity. (Mairin, Manager)

”

Four interview participants stated “me” as the reason they were giving back to the AWG. While they did not identify “me” as a community per se, they explained that they felt extremely happy to be at the AWG and to see others have the fun they experienced as participants and thus felt that they were giving back to themselves, in addition to others.

Importantly, 14 interview participants identified multiple communities to which they were contributing, which can be associated with participants' multiple identities – i.e., sense of belonging to multiple different groups (see Kang & Bodenhausen, 2015). For example, Graham (Contingent Leader) identified three communities – the community in which he lives, the local hockey community and kids who have not yet had the opportunity as the communities to which he was giving back to:

“ I wanted to go back to the community first and foremost, and I wanted to help grow that community. I got involved in hockey because it was easy for me, because it was something I knew, I was comfortable in that environment. It was easy for me to be a part of the Yukon Hockey Association and bring tournaments to Faro. But for the most part, I wanted to provide an environment much like I had where everybody was so, it was like a close-knit family and everything that you did, everybody was buying into it and supportive. I wanted to try to create that. And it’s easy sometimes to do that through sport or an event. I wanted to go back, yeah. And then you see all these young kids. Some of them aren’t so fortunate. Some of them are. It didn’t matter to me. I wanted to make sure that they all have the same opportunity. So that was super important. And then to give back to hockey because I was just given so much through my time in the Yukon. Like I had an opportunity to go to all these different provincial championships. Arctic Winter Games, I got a chance to go to Sweden to play hockey I think when I was 15 years old. All these wonderful experiences I wanted to make sure I give back because I know it’s important because I have three kids. You know, you’ve been afforded all these great opportunities. In the end, you need to come back, and you need to give back to your fellow..., to your community, to your sport, to your... You know, even in your job, you’ve got to find a way to help people every step of the way. (Graham, Contingent Leader)

”

While Graham and other interview participants referred to multiple communities (and thus multiple identities) when they acknowledged regional communities (e.g., contingents and communities where they live), sport communities (e.g., hockey, in Graham’s case), communities in need, etc., some also referenced communities that appeared to be complimentary but, as argued by Thomsen et al. are not (and are actually tied to contradictory identities, also referred to as hybrid identities - see Dallaire, 2006). When interview participants spoke about the AWG community and/or a panarctic community and their regional community (and the identities tied to those communities), while subtle, it became clear that attempts to create a panarctic identity are challenged rather than promoted when contingents are separated visually (e.g., using uniforms) and through the competitive format of most athletic events at the Games. Indeed, Thomsen et al. (2018) suggest that at the AWG “panarcticism and nationalism/regionalism are clearly enrolled in an intricate and frictious relationship” (p. 112). While appearing as though they are multiple and complimentary identities and “although panarctic identity building is an explicit purpose of the games—as stated in the AWG constitution—participants and spectators . . . enacted parallel and contrasting identities in a seemingly knee-jerk relapse to national/regional positioning (Thomsen et al. p. 111). In other words, while the sentiment of a community consisting of all “people of the North” is presented and promoted, it is hard to achieve when national/regional communities (and identities) are strongly promoted, as well. However, that most interview participants referred to multiple communities (and identities tied to those communities) rather than contradictory identities suggests that the AWG offers a milieu that allows the manifestation of a sense of belonging to more than one group – it does not expect participants to commit only to a panarctic community (and identity) while at the Games, despite some attempts to create such a community (see Thomsen, et al., 2018).

It is important to recognize, here, that although the interview participants claimed to be giving back to different communities, most were giving back (at least in part) because of a commitment to social justice. According to Camire et al. (2022), “social justice is often described as too nebulous and too versatile to

be constricted to a single concept” (p. 1062). However, for the purposes of this report, we define social justice as the philosophical belief that all people deserve equal rights and opportunities and acting on these beliefs requires purposeful attempts at assessing and challenging systems and sociopolitical forces that determine what opportunities (or lack of opportunities) are available to people. Darnell and Millington (2019) suggest that sport can serve as a space for addressing issues related to social justice. In the case of the AWG, while it may be that white privileged people occupy most Chefs de Mission and contingent leader positions, and while interview participants in these positions had a different mix of communities to which they felt they were giving back to, there was a true concern and at least effort by most to ensure that all youths (including less privileged youth) have access to the AWG. One interview participant, Mairin spoke explicitly to this point. Importantly, this is not new to the AWG. Peoples’ primary motivations for contributing to community projects are often related to social justice values (see Basok, Ilcan & Malesevic. 2002). Research (see Einfeld & Collins, 2008) further suggests that educating community project volunteers on social justice issues is crucial for pushing those agendas forward. This is something Mairin also spoke about, and we address in our discussion section.

What is your sense of belonging, with respect to AWG?

Participants also described the community to which they felt the strongest sense of belonging. Eight interview participants stated one community or group to which they most strongly felt a sense of belonging. Eleven participants felt a sense of belonging to more than one community. The most common responses included feeling a sense of belonging to the community in which they live, to their province / territory / state, to their Arctic Winter Games contingent or to their sport club, their sport, or sport in general. For example,

“
I’m a Yukoner. That’s what I feel. Yeah. (Province / territory / state). (Sonia, Contingent Leader)
”

“
That was a neat thing, getting to do that. So yeah, you’re representing your community and your Association, but in terms of the Arctic Winter Games, yeah, it’s Team NWT, but on the inside you’re pretty proud for your community and of your community, I guess. (Jesse, Contingent Leader)
”

“
That’s a good question. I don’t know. Probably right now to the girls’ hockey team specifically just because I have a lot of responsibility there. But like if I think about Arctic Winter Games as a whole, in general, I feel like I just belong to Arctic Winter Games as a whole, you know? I don’t know. Probably all three, but number one would be girls’ hockey, and then I’m also involved with Team Alaska and then I’m also involved with everything, as a whole, but kind of depending on how you look at it or what specific part of it you’re looking at. (Melly, Young Leader)
”

Again, multiple identities came up for many interview participants while contradictory identities (see Thomsen et al., 2018) came up for some.

Four participants felt a sense of belonging related to indigeneity. For example,

“
Christine: So you’ve basically just answered my next question, but if I ask you your sense of belonging, you would say that you’re Innu? That’s your first form of...?”

Ree (Young Leader): Inuk, Inuk, yes. ”

“
No, but we’ve lived here probably on and off for 30 years. I’m also Indigenous Métis to the NWT. This is where my roots were in Fort Reliance many, you know, hundreds of years ago. So, there is that. But it’s funny because when we first got up there, and you don’t notice it so much, but sometimes there’s a lot of resentment towards you as being perceived as being white. And understandably, right? I mean, lots of these people got burnt by the oil and gas going in there and then pulling out and leaving a shell of a town sort of thing. But, all of a sudden, they find out you’re Métis, you’re Aboriginal and they slowly start to accept that. And then, yeah, you go from there.
(Chester, Manager)

One of these interview participants stated that their sense of belonging relates to advocacy for Indigenous peoples. When asked what her sense of belonging is with respect to the AWG, she responded:

“
Colette (Contingent Leader): Advocate. The last few months, that role for me has kind of changed because we realized that they were trying to take out the adult athletes in Arctic and Dene games for 2024... it’s supposed to be just a youth competition, I guess. And when we asked the question who was making these decisions and were there any Aboriginal people making these decisions on the International Committee or on the Technical Committee, I couldn’t... there were none. And I think with the, what is the movement going on in Canada with the making everything right with...?”

Christine: Reconciliation.

Colette: Reconciliation. They thought “Oh, this is not part of our reconciliation to our Native people”, and they finally decided that, “Okay, we’re not going to take out the older athletes because it’s our responsibility to teach and coach and show them the true essence of what Arctic sports and Dene games are all about.” You can’t get that from a 20-year-old. That is just not part of it. The officials’ responsibility as well. So, advocate for our Aboriginal people and our Aboriginal sports is my biggest, my biggest role for my sports.

Colette’s response affirms that the notion of social justice is what makes her feel like she belongs at the AWG and acts as a crucial motivating factor. Colette’s perceived connection to the AWG as an advocate makes sense given that, as previously mentioned, scholars (e.g., Paraschak and Giles) and leaders working with the AWG (see Arctic Winter Games, 2008b) claim that throughout AWG history, there has

not been enough Indigenous input or Indigenous athletes participating. Importantly, concern for social justice and inclusion of youths from all parts of the region did emerge in other interviews, often without explicit reference to distinction between Indigenous and non-Indigenous youths. For example, athletes' social class was also mentioned as something interview participants thought about. Like Colette, some AWG leaders thus feel they belong at the Games and see their work as an opportunity to address some of these injustices. While interesting, this is not specific to the AWG - sport workers' focus on social justice has been documented by sport scholars, most evidently those exploring SDP projects (e.g., Darnell, 2011; Welty Peachey, et al. 2014). Colette's sense of belonging and taking up of the role as advocate for Aboriginal people and sports is an important part of her identity. Notably, it is one that is shared by others, as the staging of the 2023 Games clearly and ostensibly put Indigenous communities and cultures and the forefront of the Opening and Closing Ceremonies, the Cultural Gala, and throughout the sociocultural programming of the Games. Furthermore, leaders (e.g., Mairin, Manager) claim that meaningful discussions continue to take place at the AWGIC level (and perhaps other levels) regarding the responsibility to incorporate Truth and Reconciliation (including Calls to Action) into the AWG.

Interestingly, only three participants suggested they felt a strong sense of belonging to the North.

“
Well, I'm a Northerner, you know, so that's just part of my fabric. (Sean, Manager)
”

Ultimately, interview participants descriptions of the AWG were aligned with the three rings of the logo and their comparisons to other major games suggest the AWG are “friendlier”. The AWG are seen as a “community” by some. However, that most interview participants didn't identify the AWG as the community to which they are contributing suggests that they may not see the AWG as one community but rather a conglomerate of many communities – some tied to multiple identities, some tied to contradictory identities.

The questions then become:

Does the AWG want to be seen as a community unto itself, or is it more about using the AWG to construct a panarctic community (and identity)?

Does the AWG want to be the “community” to which leaders come and contribute to?

Also, does the AWG want to be seen as a “community that challenges other sporting communities, because it takes a “friendlier” approach to sport and physical activity?

In 2023, the AWG was deemed a True Sport event, which means they committed to incorporating the True Sport Principles into all aspects of the event. Some aspects of this designation refer to community building, such as the "Include Everyone" and "Give Back" principles. However, it is important that the AWG consider what they are truly trying to achieve, with respect to notions of community and identity within the global sporting world.

After exploring how interview participants conceive of the AWG and the communities to which they give back, we now move to our assessment of their participant experiences and motivations for giving back.

RESEARCH QUESTION #2 – EXPERIENCES AND MOTIVATIONS

Of the 19 interview participants, 16 participated in the AWG. Everyone who participated at the Games had extremely impactful experiences.

What do you remember the most?

When asked what they remembered the most about these experiences, 10 participants spoke about their development as an athlete. For example,

“

Colette (Contingent Leader): The competition was so much more competitive for me because I was really good at all of the events. I really didn't have much competition here in Alaska. So it was really a lot of fun to actually be able to push myself, and that's still what is great today is the athletes that are good here, you know, there's two or three of them that are really good. And when they go to Arctic Winter Games, they actually have to be on their tiptoe, you know, their top shape to compete. And that, they look forward to that because, you know, when you do compete against other people and you don't have the competition, you don't necessarily push yourself as hard. So that's the greatest thing about competition at Arctic Winter Games.

”

Others spoke about the cultural aspects of their experiences. For example,

Christine: Very interesting. Now, I want to come back to you mentioned, so your own experience of experiencing different cultures.

Constance (Manager): Mm-hmm. I will say that that was probably, and I think this is why again it's so important to me, that was probably my most immersive experience in culture when it comes to different countries and different ways of life and different aspects of sport because I have not done anything else like that before. I have been mission staff for Arctic Games since then. They were in the Yukon, which is not a far stretch from Fort McMurray...and moving on in my adult life, I'm not incredibly adventurous in terms of travel, so like I said, coming back to it, it was my only experience, even though it was in my hometown, to meet, you know, the Nordic region of Sápmi, the athletes of Greenland who came in traditional dress, to watch things like Arctic sports and dene games and to understand the real life association of their sport and to just really think like life isn't just about a ball in a court. Like people make do with what they have, that sport is, you know, a lifelong activity that you don't need to play inside the boundaries of a court. Yeah, it was probably the, like I said, the most immersive event that I have seen. Since then, like kind of since, probably for the last three or four years where we have started cultural sensitivity training and being more immersive in truth and reconciliation, I think I've been a lot more exposed to that sort of thing. But up until that point, it was the most exposure I had gotten really to other cultures.

Christine: Even living in northern Alberta.

Constance: Yeah, even living in a place like Fort McMurray that is surrounded by, you know, residential areas. Even growing up here, yeah.

Still others mentioned the social interaction aspects of the Games:

Terran (Young Leader): I was actually talking to someone about this the other day. Like I don't really remember too much of the basketball. I just remember being with my friends and the stuff you do outside the gym and stuff like that. I have glimpses of what the Games, the actual basketball games were like, but more so just like the camaraderie and building friendships and stuff like that is what you kind of end up remembering the most.

Christine: You're not the only one. Pretty much everyone I've... some people kind of remember their competitions, but most people say that they don't really remember what actually happened in their competitions.

Terran: Yeah. I could tell you where we placed, but I couldn't tell you the scores or how I played or someone else played or anything like that.

Those involved in Arctic Sports and Dene Games spoke about the strong connections between participants over very long periods of time:

“

Ree (Young Leader): It was the basic things that I remember is just wanting to see everyone. Like I made friends. Like Inuit games, Arctic sports, it's I would like to say different from any other sport because everyone motivates each other, and like yes, we compete but we give each other advice. It's just like when you practice, it's basically survival methods when you're out on the land. So like if you're stuck, you'd want help, right? So it's just the same for Inuit games, Arctic sports.

Christine: So you make friends because during the competition, you're all helping each other.

Ree: Yeah.

Christine: That's how you make friends. Do you remember if you saw the same people you had seen two years ago?

Ree: All 23 years I've been seeing everyone.

”

Athletes' fondest memories of the AWG were related to the “meaningful” athletic competition, the cultural exchanges, and the friendly ambiance, all of which connect with the mission of the AWG (the three rings of the logo). One participant stated that another special memory of the AWG was that participants were made to feel like part of something bigger than themselves, which paints a picture of the AWG as an invisible entity that englobes anyone who participates in any way – a nod to the notion of community. In most cases, athletes went to the AWG more than once (many of the interview participants went three times). They had different memories of each experience, with most explaining that they were less likely to interact with others during their first experience and more likely to with each subsequent experience. This suggests that as participants age, get more comfortable with the overall flow of the AWG, and become more confident in their abilities, they participate more fully in the social interchange aspect of the AWG.

What did you like the most about your experiences?

Importantly, when asked what they liked the most about their experiences, more than half of the interview participants talked about the social interactions, including pin trading. For example, Young Leaders Ree and Melly and Contingent Leader Theresa suggest that meeting people and making friends were aspects they liked most:

“

Christine: Do you remember what you loved the most? At first...

Ree (Young Leader): Making friends actually and pin trading. Trading the pins?

Christine: Mm-hmm.

Ree: Not even the sport, like something else.

Christine: Many people that I've talked to so far have talked about the pin trading and making friends and not the actual competition.

Ree: Mm-hmm.

”

“

Christine: If you think back on your whole experience as an athlete, what do you think you liked the most?

Melly (Young Leader): Out of everything? Gosh, that's... The most. Probably just meeting people from other places. I always thought that was so cool. And like staying connected with some of them. Like I said, I think I still have some of them on Facebook. I don't talk to them anymore, but I know there were people that I met that we stayed in contact with for a while after the Games. Actually, now that I think about it, there was someone I met. I think I met him though the last year I went, in 2014, and then in 2018, I actually drove my truck down Alcan to Minnesota because that's where I went to college. And we were driving through Grand Prairie and I remember this guy I met was from Grand Prairie. So I like messaged him. I was like hey, I'm going to be driving through Grand Prairie with my friend. You want to grab a coffee? And so we actually met up and we got a coffee at Tim Horton's, like saw each other again after four years, which was really cool. And we still have each other on Facebook, and it's crazy now because I think he's married and has a kid and I'm married and have a kid and it's like whoa! I met you like in high school.

Christine: Yeah, yeah.

Melly: It's really cool the people you meet, for sure.

”

Theresa (Contingent Leader): I liked meeting all of the new and different people. I liked watching all the different sports, so we would go and cheer for our Team Yukon hockey team when they were playing, you know, Team Alaska and such. And so just being part of one larger team. I've often mentioned that to athletes here is that you're used to travelling with your one volleyball team and, yes, having Team Yukon in your back. In this Games, you are Team Yukon. You are part of a larger group and some of them have never experienced that before and they haven't cheered, been able to cheer for one another that way, or be cheered for in that way. So, yeah, that's what I've enjoyed the most, for sure. So less about the sport, of course, and more about the social side and the meeting of people.

Some participants also suggested that they enjoyed cultural aspects of the AWG in addition to the social interaction aspects.

Tina (Contingent Leader): I think it's such an honour to be able to go to the Arctic Winter Games. It's very culture forward. You get to learn a lot more than just about your sport. You know, you get a chance to go watch all these other games that you've never, or sports that you've never seen before, like the high kick and just a lot. I could list them all day. And, you know, even when you're competing, everyone you're competing with you become friends with them. So it's a very welcoming atmosphere that you're in.

Christine: You don't feel you're adversaries, is that what you're saying?

Tina: Yeah, that's right. Like you get to be very close with the people that you're up against. That's what I would say.

Sport was also something that was mentioned, although only by three interview participants. For example, when asked what they liked best, Morey (Manager) explained:

Morey (Manager): Well, I'm a competitor, so I like the competition, like the basketball part of it.

Keagan (Manager) spoke about what they liked by comparing the AWG to the Canada Games:

“
And thinking back to my like athlete days as well, I enjoyed Arctic Winter Games much more because you were able to be competitive whereas at a Canada Games level, you’re getting blown out of the water. It’s not fun, you know, that sort of stuff, whereas like the Arctic Winter Games it meant so much because you were in a competitive environment. You weren’t just going to the Games, knowing that, you know, you’re going to lose by 70 or whatever. Like you’re going into the Games and being like we want to win this Game. So yeah. That’s about it. (Keagan, Manager)
”

Keagan’s comment brings their enjoyment of the AWG back to this notion of “meaningful competition” that was described above.

Other aspects mentioned include travel, ceremonies, that the AWG make participants feel special (a different participant than the one noted above in the section about what participants remember the most) and the fact that the overall experience was so much more than just a sporting experience.

What did you like the least about your experiences?

As with many major games, the aspect most cited as a dislike was the food. Also, accommodations and travelling between venues came up for a few of the interview participants. Overall, though, most interview participants (explicitly) did not have much to say when asked what they disliked about their experiences.

Motivation for Returning as a Leader

When asked about their motivation to come back as adults and work for the AWG as managers, contingent leaders, and young leaders, 13 interview participants gave more than one response. Eight leaders explicitly stated that they wanted to give back to the AWG having gained so much from their experiences there.

“
Because I want everybody to have the same experience that I had because it is such an amazing experience. So, I guess it would be giving back. I want to give that experience to every single athlete who is willing to take it. I share because I want everybody to see how amazing especially the Arctic sports games are. I want them to see the passion that these kids and these other coaches have for each other and for other kids that they’re competing against and with. I just want them to have as much fun because it is my passion. I love it so much that I want everybody else to have just as much fun. And I hope, my goal is that my passion rubs off on them, so they are having just as much fun, and they have such an amazing time that they want to keep coming back. (Colette, Contingent Leader)
”

Colette (Contingent Leader) expresses her desire to give back but also her hope that their actions will encourage others to do the same in the future.

When asked if he feels we all have a responsibility to give back in some way or another, Graham (Contingent Leader) stated:

“

Graham (Contingent Leader): I think so, yeah. I think that if you know or you have a coach, I think if you have a coach that is super invested in the program and in making you a better athlete and a better person, you can't help but want to sort of continue that legacy on. So I know I mentioned Emily Nishikawa before, so she's coaching at the Arctic Winter Games. Now, the cross-country ski program is one of the best in the country here. But last year there was an opportunity to go to Atlin, so a bunch of them got together. And on the same bus, you had Olympians. Like our coaches have been Olympians way back, H el ene and Lucy Steele. So you've got sitting in a bus with 40 people kids probably 10 to 12 years old, right up to people that have gone to the Olympics, and they're sitting in a bus and they're sharing their experiences.

Like I don't know of a better opportunity as an athlete. Like here I'm sitting with my idol and we're skiing on the same trail or hanging out and we're cooking food and like to me, that is just the best. And that's how that program seems to remain so strong because you have those athletes that have gone through, have been successful, come back into the program. And it just breeds success and inclusion and the community is so much better for it.

”

Four interview participants were motivated simply so they could return to the AWG in some capacity, because they had such an incredible experience as participants. For example,

“

I think mostly just because I had so much fun every year. And I know I keep saying this and I really haven't been super specific in how much fun it was. Like I'm trying to be, but it was just fun. I really enjoyed it every time and I mean, if I could, I would love to go back and like be an athlete again, but that's just not how it works. So being a coach is the second-best thing. Plus my mom did it, so I'm kind of like following what she did. So, yeah. (Melly, Young Leader)

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Christine: How did you become a coach for the Games?

Shania (Young Leader): Um, well, it was always in the back of my mind as I aged out that I wanted to coach. Like in 2016, I remembered at NAHC when I aged out, and Arctic Winter Games I knew I wanted to coach at them again

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Christine: And you were already thinking then that you were doing this because you wanted to go back to the Arctic Winter Games or the Canada Games?

Constance (Contingent Leader): It was like in the back of my head. And not necessarily it was my... When I first signed up for the course, it was kind of like something, because my coaches in Yellowknife are amazing. Like I had a great time growing up, but it's all volunteer based. So then when I got to the Okanagan and had a paid coach, I saw a huge difference. Like I improved a ton, I got so much more kind of out of it. So in my mind, that kind of was like oh, my God, like I want to share some of these things I've learned with Yellowknife. So I had always had an idea of like I can go back and I can kind of help these guys get to where I wish I was when I was their age.

”

Others were motivated to take on roles because they have a passion for the AWG and/or sport in general.

Still others had children involved and were motivated to volunteer so they could give their children the opportunity to go, to encourage their children or simply to be with them at the AWG.

Five interview participants (originally or currently) took part in the AWG because it was part of their paid work, however, all these respondents identified other motivators, as well.

Two interview participants were motivated because they wanted to give kids, who don't normally have the opportunity, a chance to participate while another cited human development as one of their motivations for partaking. For example,

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Mairin (Manager): Well, I liked the human component. I love the organization of it as well, but you know, making sure everybody has got everything they need, and all the boxes are checked and everything. But I love the human component. And, yeah, I love the human component of sport and how it makes people achieve great things, it makes people come together and who don't know each other regularly, sometimes don't even speak the same language, and they come together with this one familiar thing, and that's the sport they chose to do, or their body chose them to do. (Laughs).

Christine: So, it wasn't necessarily the, not to take away the competitive aspect, but it wasn't necessarily the sport development or the sports skill per se that attracted you as much as the whole package of the event?

Mairin (Manager): I think it would be the human development, yeah, and the sport skill, the sport as the vehicle is one component of that. But it's developing as a human being.

”

These interview participants' motivations can be brought back to the notion of social justice discussed earlier, much like Colette's mention of her role as advocate for Aboriginal people and sports. Sport workers and volunteers, such as Mairin, attempt to develop (underprivileged) youth by harnessing the transformational benefits of sport.

Ultimately, it appears as though the leaders' motivations have strong links with how they think about or see the AWG.

While no one explicitly identified community engagement as their motivation to work or volunteer for the AWG, given that most responses referenced a desire to make a difference in the day-to-day life of people around them suggests that their work does, indeed, consist of community engagement. Furthermore, the varied responses explaining why they wanted to (in most cases, return, after previously participating, to) work for the AWG indicate that the reasons for giving back are diverse. This is a predictable finding, given people have different relationships to the AWG. Given this predictability, why bother exploring AWG managers, contingent leaders, and young leaders' motivations, anyways? Scholars exploring the motivations of volunteers in large scale events, community sports organizations and events and even SDP projects suggest an important purpose of their research is to help sport managers effectively manage the volunteer experience (i.e., ensuring volunteers are effective in their roles and satisfied with their experience) and, ultimately, understand how to develop better recruitment, training and retention strategies – in other words, in this case, how to keep the AWG going, a crucial task as referenced by many of the interview participants. Additionally, while these studies are useful for stakeholders from the sports sector, as Welty Peachey, et al. (2014) noted, “future research should attempt to move beyond the commonly articulated values motive and probe deeper for underlying motives” (p. 1064). This deeper understanding could help sport managers engage and retain workers and volunteers, but it would ultimately help researchers and practitioners develop a more nuanced understanding of worker and volunteer experiences.

Importantly, the SDP literature arguably goes the furthest in attempting to elucidate the motivations and lived experiences of workers and volunteers (e.g., Darnell, 2011; Welty Peachey, et al. 2014), and suggests that young people are motivated by altruism, and love of youth, community and sport. This partially addresses Welty Peachey et al's call, but more needs to be done, thus why we infused this question into the larger research project. Our findings suggest that managers, contingent leaders and young leaders contribute their time and energy with the goal of “paying it back” to the organization or community (known as direct upstream reciprocity) or “paying it forward” to current members or participants (known as indirect upstream reciprocity)¹⁴. However, feelings of social responsibility to act played into the interview participant's motivations to give back, as well. Schwartz (1993) states that social responsibility is “to act out of commitment to do what one thinks is right, what will promote public welfare, quite apart from whether it promotes one's own. It is to act out of a sense of responsibility as a citizen” (p.337). Wray-Lake and Syvertsen (2011) also connect social responsibility to citizenship and add that it motivates certain behaviours rooted in justice and care for others. Giving back, the result, is therefore not simply motivated by either the characteristic of reciprocity or the act of reciprocation. It is also connected to the characteristic of responsibility and thus requires a nuanced analysis. To address this nuance, we scoured the literature and selected two concepts that we felt accurately captured our interview participants' explanations of giving back. These include the concept of what we call “reciprocation” based on French sociologist and anthropologist, Marcel Mauss' (1990) description of “the Gift” and the concept of what we call “responsibility” based on German-born American Jewish philosopher Hans Jonas' (1984) claim that as human beings, we all feel an imperative of responsibility to one another.

We felt it was important to determine whether the interview participants were giving back because of a sense of reciprocation or responsibility, to know, at a deep level, what was driving interview participants to give their time and energy to the AWG.

Reciprocation or Responsibility?

¹⁴ Direct upstream reciprocity is where individuals pay back the benefactor who provided them with a benefit and indirect upstream reciprocity is where individuals pay the unearned benefit forward to another individual or group.

When explicitly asked, after explaining these two concepts to them, only two interview participants indicated that they were doing their work solely to reciprocate. For example,

“ I think it’s more I received, so I just want to give back. It’s not that I feel that sense of duty or responsibility at all. It’s just more, you know, kids aren’t active anymore as much like they used to, and it’s just, it’s a fun way to get kids more involved and active. And it’s not just, you know, participating in sport. It’s like volunteering or being part of something larger. Yeah, so I just want to, you know, give them that opportunity to do something that I did. (Morey, Manager)

”

Four interview participants suggested they were doing their work because of a sense of responsibility. For example,

“ So just all because I know what sport can bring to human beings and how it can open doors for them, how it can make them feel really good about themselves, how it can physically make them healthier people. (Theresa, Contingent Leader)

”

Seven interview participants identified with both concepts:

“ Ree (Young Leader): I’d say both. Like just like you said, as a youth I loved it, and I want the youth right now to enjoy like what I experience. It might not be the same but at least they get to experience something. And like I’m sad to say but Nunavut does have a high suicide rate. So, like they look forward to another year each year.

Christine: Mm-hmm. To give them something to look forward to.

Ree: Yeah.

Christine: Okay. And is that where your sense of responsibility comes from?

Ree: Probably. Not 100 per cent, but like that’s why we moved.

Christine: Okay.

Ree: High suicide rate. I don’t want to tear up, but my son was eight or nine and he said: Mommy, what does suicide mean? So, I said... So just to give a chance to the youth to experience something and to look forward to something.

”

“

The first one (reciprocity) is definitely, the yes, that's me, that one. But with the like kind of the like if I don't do it, nobody else will, I didn't have that thought until I was in it. Like until it was like I got back, and the coach was like thank you. You're here. I'm going to be gone this... Like he had all these trips planned like prior to me saying for sure I'll be back. But it was just like what would they have done if I didn't come back? And now I'm like ah! I just want to do it all for them. But I did never think of that or have those thoughts before coming back to Yellowknife, if that makes sense. (Ceara, Young Leader)

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“

Yeah, the reciprocal way definitely, like I felt like I had a lot of positive experiences from coaches, volunteers. Knowing that other people need to fill those roles and not that I felt like I needed to, but I felt like I wanted to or it just... I think it just felt like automatic. I don't even know if I really had time to think, like do I really want to do this? It's just like I jumped into it. I'm going to do it. Maybe I want to do it again after the Games. Maybe I realized I don't. I think it's a good learning experience. And then for the sense of responsibility, yeah, and maybe that's why I didn't think about it and give myself time to digest like do I want to do this, or is it because I feel like who else is going to do it? Or I feel like I see myself as a really good candidate. I felt like I fit well for that role. (Shania, Young Leader)

”

This is an interesting finding given that so many of the interview participants initially seemed to understand giving back only as reciprocation. The act of asking the interview participants this question incited reflexivity on their part, which many suggested was something they benefitted from.

When talking about these concepts, not all interview participants spoke about where this giving back came from, however, some did. Several of them stated that it came from their sport culture (e.g., hockey, speed skating, cross country skiing, badminton, Arctic sports, etc.) For example,

“

I speed skated for 14 years of my life and we have the same coach that, like Coach John, he was my coach when I was four, up until I finished skating, and he's still there. And so, it's a part of giving back to the community and the club and the group and, you know, it's kind of something everyone in speed skating does eventually, it seems. All of our coaches are ones that have skated in the past or they have had kids that skated in the past, and they come back, and they help and they volunteer with meets and whatever basically. It's kind of just a part of our speed skating community is we give back. And so, I was really excited about it, and my sister, my younger sister, she's still speed skating. So that's a plus. You can never go wrong with that, right? (Tina, Young Leader)

”

This finding is not new. Sport culture seems to foster a desire to give back, and, in fact, many sport organizations (or community organizations with sport programs, such as the BGC Ottawa) foster this desire intentionally.

Focus question: Is this something the AWG are trying to achieve? If so, it would be worth looking at how this is done now and what could help further foster the desire to give back.

Importantly, looking at volunteer and employee experiences of community connection and aspects of this connection, such as “giving back”, includes asking questions about the governance of individuals by organizations, such as the AWGIC and Host Societies, and whether these organizations offer a space for employees and volunteers to reflect on their place within the AWG community. For example, does giving back, when framed as either reciprocity or responsibility, mean abiding by the AWG’s mission, values, culture or request to give back? In other words, are people doing “social good” in order to be a “good citizen” or an “ideal citizen-subject” (see Environics Report; Ilcan and Basok, 2004; Ruschkowski et al., 2019) because they are asked to? Or, on the other hand, does the AWG encourage their volunteers and employees to personally reflect and carefully consider their place in the community (within reason – life stories and structural forms shape reflexivity), making giving back more akin to *choosing to be in the process* of giving back? Does *choosing to be in the process* of the act of giving back help people feel even more connected to the AWG? To delve deeper in to the young and established leaders’ community engagement, we had to determine how they came to work for or volunteer for the AWG. For example, did they seek out roles on their own or were they recruited by AWG contingent leaders, coaches, etc.? If recruited, were they recruited because they were former participants who were deemed qualified or had those who recruited them been looking for another quality?

Were you recruited?

When asked if they were recruited, less than half of the interview participants were recruited to their positions. Those that were recruited were asked by either friends, family members (e.g., Tina) or acquaintances they had made at previous AWG as participants or in other roles (e.g., Kerstie) or sport governing bodies or organizations (e.g., Terran). Those that were not recruited applied for their positions because they wanted to return to the AWG in some capacity.

An important question for the AWG moving forward is whether recruitment should be prioritized, especially for people who may not otherwise apply.

How were you trained?

When asked “what kind of training did you receive with respect to the mission and values of the AWG or your contingent”, most Contingent Leaders and Young Leaders mentioned the technical or logistical or conduct training they had received (either from AWG Managers or sport specific organizations) rather than anything related to the mission and values.

How did you train?

When managers were asked “what kind of training do you focus on”, most Managers and Contingent Leaders stated that while they had to train their coaches and volunteers on logistical aspects, they did not have to train them with respect to the mission and values of the AWG. For example, Colette (Contingent Leader) explains:

“

Christine: Is there something you tell them about the values of the Games over there, or you don't have to, they already know them because they're coaching for Arctic or Dene?

Colette (Contingent Leader): Yeah, I don't have to tell them. They already have that down. They got it here and they've got it here, in their hearts.

”

This aligns with what Contingent Leaders and Young Leaders stated about how they were trained. Interestingly, with respect to the 2020 AWG that got cancelled, ML (Manager) suggested an enormous amount of time, energy and money was spent on ensuring highest level workers and volunteers understood the move towards an increased focus on Truth and Reconciliation and inclusion:

“

Yeah, we did blanket exercise quite a few times. We did smudging. We smudged the office when we first moved in. We did another repeat smudge later. We had smudges when the Games were cancelled. We had a part of the Reconciliation Action Plan. We had button blankets being sewn. We had three. They were brought into the office and everyone had a chance, an opportunity to stitch and sit around and stitch. It was quite beautiful. We served a traditional... you know, had bannock and tea at some events instead of pizza or whatever. We played hand games. Yeah, we went to harvest camps like for some of the people that were on part of the Reconciliation Action Plan sent them out to harvest camps. Our mascot had an indigenous name and went on community tours, gave the opportunity to people to go up to Old Crow, which is like completely top of the Yukon, only fly-in community. So, people like southerners made sure they got on the plane to go up. Yeah, those are just some examples. We also had our inclusion policy that we had some individuals of the community from the LGBTQ2S+ community working with us as members of staff and explaining to us how life was, their lived experience was. We did a lot of classes on that as well and did our best to understand other people's lived experience. (Mairin, Manager)

”

That the Contingent Leaders and Young Leaders did not state that they had been trained with respect to these kinds of issues suggests that the upper-level workers (e.g., boards of directors) may be more likely to be trained than the operational workers. Mairin confirmed this in her interview.

Focus questions: Could this be changed for future events? What would this look like? How might this address the Calls to Action?

All former AWG participants interviewed enjoyed their experiences at the AWG, had different motivations for contributing as adults (young or older), with “giving back” being the most cited. Some participants discussed that they were reciprocating, some felt responsible and most felt they were doing both to ensure that the AWG continue. Most workers and volunteers did not receive training with respect to the mission and values of the AWG, which suggests they are already aware of what the AWG stand for. However, with a more direct focus on Truth and Reconciliation (in Canada), it is possible that more training will be required in the future.

Interview participants conceptions of community were outlined in question #1 above, as were their experiences and motivations for giving back (question #2). Recruitment and Training practices were also

discussed. Next, we ask what meanings do managers, contingent leaders and young leaders ascribe to their sporting responsibilities as practices of engagement towards youth and the “community”, beyond a love of sport? In other words, do their actions uphold the mission and values of the AWG? What kind of person are they trying to be through their work?

RESEARCH QUESTION # 3 – UPHOLDING THE MISSION AND VALUES OF THE AWG

Participants indicated that they were not explicitly trained (or did not explicitly train – in managers' cases) with respect to the mission and values of the games. They were asked what they deemed the mission and values of the Games to be. They were also asked whether the AWGs have a social responsibility towards the people and communities they serve, who the AWGs are really for, what their goals are as leaders participating in the AWG and what kind of person, with respect to the AWG, they ultimately want to be.

What are the mission and values of the AWG?

Eleven interview participants suggested that the mission and values of the AWG were related to sport, with the majority suggesting the development of young athletes as the focus. The same number of interview participants (11) also suggested that the mission and values of the AWG were related to culture, in particular their ability to increase cultural awareness. In fact, most claimed that the AWG were about both sport and culture. For example,

“

Well, I think that really, the mission for the most part and what I think, in a lot of other sports, is that they are providing an opportunity for the youth of the North, the Circumpolar North, to come together in a sporting event, you know, in a healthy competition and experience not only that, but the cultural aspect of it because there's always a big cultural aspect of all these Games. And it's an opportunity for them to not only participate in the athletic part of it but in the cultural. And the game, what I consider invaluable knowledge from other parts of the Circumpolar North and to meet new friends. Different people. And I think that's probably why, and I think it does that and I think that's why you find a lot of people coming back to the Arctic Winter Games because of it. Whether it's as a coach or like myself, as an International Committee member or whatever it may be, right? A volunteer. I think, to me, that's probably the biggest reason why people come back to it. (Chester, Manager)

”

“

Christine: What would you say are the values of the Arctic Winter Games? You kind of spoke a little bit about it, about this tension between elite sport versus, you know, participatory sport, but are there other values you associate with the Arctic Winter Games?

Terran (Young Leader): I think, you know, learning about different cultures, meeting different people from around the world that you might not otherwise get the opportunity to. I do think that the Arctic Winter Games play a valuable part in kind of like an athlete development pathway and, you know, it helps them train for bigger events and things like that. And I do think there's value to, like you know, Team Northwest Territories isn't winning a lot of medals at like national competitions, right? It's nice to have a multi-sport games that it's kind of a little bit of a more even playing field, right? You're playing against provinces or countries that have similar population sizes and stuff. So.

”

“

But the Arctic Winter Games is something different. And when you look back at the history of the Games, I believe that that was the whole goal was to give northern athletes a place to compete; but there is also a pretty big cultural component and respect for each other and community pride, and it was a social and a cultural thing to get people together, you know? So it just so happened that there was some sports happening at the same time. But that really was the whole goal of the Arctic Winter Games is to make people feel – at least, this is my interpretation of it – but to make people feel part of something bigger than themselves... so in terms of values, I know that they'll say respect and fair play and all those things, and they're very true. But realistically for me, it's to give the kids a place to belong, if that makes sense. (Jesse, Contingent Leader)

”

That so many interview participants spoke about the cultural aspects of the AWG is a significant finding, however, very few of these people specifically mentioned Indigeneity as the “cultural” aspects they were referring to. This issue requires further exploration. It could be that culture as concept is ambiguous and may refer to a variety of ideas from one person to the next, from regional to ethnic to traditional to national cultures. The AWG do bring together Teams from four different countries and from a variety of distinct northern regions. Another hypothesis related to the fact that only three interview participants explicitly identified as Indigenous which leads us to wonder whether (non-Indigenous) interview participants may not want to make a distinction between Indigenous peoples and themselves when they are engaged in community development and trying to be part of the same community through the AWG and in their daily lives. Alternatively, it may be that, like *Jeux de l'Acadie* interview participants for whom the *Francophonie* or *Acadian community* was so implicitly linked to the Games it did not seem necessary to name it, it may be that Indigenous cultures are so central at the AWG and in their day-to-day lives as northern residents that interview participants did not see the relevance of making it explicit in our discussions. Another explanation might be that ‘cultures’ in the context of the AWG implicitly refers to Indigeneity for many people, rather the different national, regional or ethnic cultures that come together at the Games. For instance, youth participants we interviewed in our parallel study on the social and environmental sustainability of the 2023 AWG referred exclusively to Indigenous cultures when discussing the promotion of northern cultures at the Games.

Five interview participants also spoke of fair play, which, as discussed earlier, has been deeply entrenched in the AWG since its beginnings, and evidenced by their emphasis on the importance of the Hodgson Trophy, Fair Play pins and links to True Sport. For example:

“
We’ve got sport. There’s culture. There’s also fair play. It’s really encouraging, you know, being sportsmanlike outside of your own team to people who may not look, act or even play the same way that you would and kind of getting to appreciate the differences. And I think it’s really a life skill when it comes down to this opportunity. It’s so much more than sport. (Constance, Manager)
”

Seven people felt that the values of the AWG referred to community development and connection between people. For example,

“
Christine: So it’s not just about sport development then.
Morey (Manager): No, no, it’s a lot more than that. It’s community development. It’s learning about different cultures, the opportunity for different exchanges. People learn about the different languages across the North. Yeah, so there’s a lot of different opportunities.
”

Three interview participants suggested that the AWG are a catalyst for life. For example:

“
Christine: Okay. What would you say are the values of the Arctic Winter Games?
Ree (Young Leader): I’d say just the experience and travel. Like a lot of the kids don’t have a chance to travel at all and see the world for themselves, and this might be their only opportunity to do so. I just like that, like it starts something and maybe it’ll motivate them to travel more or just get out of their comfort zone and not be scared to go somewhere else to work or just to live. Mm-hmm.
”

“
And I think it’s really a life skill when it comes down to this opportunity. It’s so much more than sport. Like I said, it gives them an opportunity to experience. You know, maybe it wasn’t about sport for me. Maybe I want to move. Maybe I want to further my education so that I can travel more. Maybe I want to be a coach for this event. Maybe I want to work for Games. I think it really reaffirms career paths, life paths. It’s a big concept, but I can appreciate that now, even looking back at it. (Constance, Manager)
”

Do the AWG have a social responsibility?

In addition to the mission and values, interview participants were asked whether the AWG have a social responsibility towards Indigenous people, community development, philanthropy, social, political, media, sport, health, education, and other areas as well as how this responsibility is shown in AWG community engagement. Of note – sport researchers have only recently begun to address the concept of social responsibility in sport organizations, with most applying corporate social responsibility frameworks to understand community sport organizations (see Robertson et al., 2019). These studies have found that community sport organizations, like those involved with the AWG, are perceived to have a wide range of social responsibilities. However, Robertson et al. (2019) claim there is also a danger to employing a framework used by the corporate sector, whose goals are profit oriented to non-profit organizations. We avoided using any frameworks or definitions of social responsibility in the interviews and simply asked interview participants whether they believed the AWG have some kind of social responsibility towards others. It was widely agreed that the AWG have a social responsibility, with 17 interview participants speaking about this. Twelve people suggested two or more aspects of social responsibility that AWG have. Seven participants confirmed that the AWG are about more than sport and culture. For example, Mairin (Manager) claims that the AWG should have “far-reaching tentacles” out to communities of the North:

“

Christine: Okay. I'll still stick to the larger purpose of the Arctic Winter Games. Would you say from your perspective and your knowledge of them now – so we've talked about why they exist or whatever – would you say that the Games have a larger...? No, let me rephrase that. Would you say that the Games have a responsibility towards the communities they serve? And by that, I mean, not just the host community but I mean the northern communities?

Mairin (Manager): Yes, for sure. That responsibility comes from engaging people as volunteers, engaging people as having them come to the show, even if it's, you know, a \$5 ticket or a free ticket, for heaven's sakes, to try out for the team. Yes, it is a bigger thing and it means a lot to people from, as other people have said, remote communities. And I'm talking about communities of 200 people. It means a lot for them to have somebody in the Arctic Winter Games or volunteer at the Arctic Winter Games or be a cultural delegate at the Arctic Winter Games and mission staff, whatever. It means a lot. And that'll go, like they'll go down in history because of this person, you know? So, yes, there is an Arctic Winter Games in the metropolis of Whitehorse does have a far-reaching and should have far-reaching tentacles out to the communities of the Yukon but also the communities of other parts of the North. I don't know if that always happens, of course, but there's a responsibility.

”

Six people suggested that, in some way, the AWG have the responsibility to provide opportunities for people. This includes giving anyone, children in general or off-the-road athletes (athletes from small communities) in particular, the opportunity to experience the AWG. It also includes giving participants the opportunity to take their experiences back to their communities and giving opportunities to the North in general because there is less opportunity there. For example:

“

Christine: Would you say that the Arctic Winter Games have a responsibility towards the communities they serve? And by communities they serve, I mean not just the host community but also the communities that send athletes?

Colette (Contingent Leader): Absolutely. Absolutely. Every contingent is responsible for making, for giving anybody who can the opportunity to attend and go to these Games. One of Alaska’s goals is to get as many rural athletes off-of-the-road system to be part of the Arctic Winter Games.

”

Others claimed that the social responsibility aspects of the AWG include: celebrating culture, giving people the opportunity to learn about culture, developing young athletes, preserving Arctic sports and building relationships between people of the North.

Focus questions:

- **In what ways do / can the AWGs engage in the aspects of social responsibility suggested by interview participants?**
- **What are your suggestions to enhance this engagement in the future? (desired situation)**

Who are the AWG for?

Who are they for? Almost all interview participants suggested that they believed the AWG were for the athletes. Those that didn’t claim that the AWG were for the athletes believe that they are for “everyone” or the “whole community”. Many people who identified the athletes or “everyone” as who the AWG are for gave multiple answers, including responses such as cultural participants, adults, host communities, Indigenous athletes, spectators, elders, politicians / funders.

One participant suggested that the AWGIC should better define whether the AWG are for the highest performing athletes or for those who want to participate, regardless of competency. This was an interesting finding, and one that we suggest AWGIC continue to address.

What are your goals?

When asked, what are your goals, 14 participants expressed that they had multiple goals for their involvement. Nine participants said that one of their goals was to get the message across to the participants and volunteers that winning is not the most important thing. For example,

“
It’s really important to me that the kids have fun racing regardless of results. I’m very... I’m really passionate about the fact that results don’t mean anything. (Ceara, Young Leader)
”

Eight participants stated that one of their goals for their AWG was to help give participants an experience that will last a lifetime. For example,

“
My goal is for the participants to have an experience like me that they carry through with almost for the rest of their life, that affords them the opportunities later in life that are directly related. That might be a lofty goal, but I believe my opportunities of life as an adult are directly related to my participation in the Arctic Winter Games and sport in general because I always bring it back to sport. That’s where my heart lives. But my goal is for these participants, for it to be a lifelong core memory that they build when they come here. I think as well, I want the community to be engaged and for them to have a lasting impact, for us to have these Games to have a lasting impact on them because I hope these aren’t the last Games that we host, and I think every positive event that we can have and every impact that we have on our volunteers means they come back because we can’t do it without volunteers.
(Constance, Manager)
”

Six suggested they wanted the participants to have fun. For example,

“
Yeah, so I guess a sense of responsibility, accountability, sacrifice. But then also I just want them to have moments of joy, moments of this is amazing, moments of like whether it’s at the opening ceremony, whether it’s within some of their own performances or I guess just being proud of what they’ve been able to contribute
(Theresa, Contingent Leader).
”

“
What I really expect of like him is like just have fun. Experience it. And then he’ll just want to come back next time and work harder because a 12-year-old, he’s hyper, right? (Laughs). Like I know he’s going to be all over the place, talking to everyone because he’s very chatty. I just know he’s going to want to come back, so. (Ree, Young Leader)
”

While both Theresa and Ree spoke about their emphasis on the participants having fun, their comments also addressed the concept of youth development. The concept of youth development popped up (unsolicited) in many responses throughout the interviews, including when interview participants were asked to describe the AWG. In that case, seven participants spoke about how the AWG provide athletes

with the opportunity to travel (often far distances). Comments referred to the fact that AWG is often the first (and sometimes only) large scale sporting experience athletes of the North get, particularly for those who might not have the opportunity to travel to other athletic competitions. One interview participant even called it a “grown-up experience”, which is suggestive of youth development. Positive Youth Development (PYD) is a framework that has been used in many disciplines (including sport) to explain the psychosocial development of young people, with sport researchers using it to explain how sport can be a learning environment for acquiring physical (e.g., skills for healthy active living), personal (e.g., positive self-perceptions), and social (e.g., civic engagement) life skills (Camire, et al. 2022). Proponents of the framework continue to emphasize that sport can help with individual skill building, engagement, and empowerment. Both Theresa and Ree’s comments suggest they believe this to be part of the growth young people experience from the AWG.

While the AWG thus seems to be a milieu in which PYD is taking place, it is also a place in which Social Justice Youth Development (SJYD) may (or may not yet be) taking place. Importantly, SJYD, which builds youth’s self-awareness of how class, gender, race, ethnicity, and other dimensions of power affect their lives and contribute to the root causes of both local and global challenges (see Camire et al, 2022; Iwasaki et al., 2014) is becoming valued in a youth sport setting. Given that some interview participants, like Theresa, commented about hoping to instill responsibility, accountability and sacrifice through her work with AWG participants, the time seems right for the AWG to continue to push forward with a focus on SJYD. However, this requires a perpetual rethinking of their sport structures, and would require those involved with the governance of the AWG to refashion aspects of the annual event. As Camire et al. (2022) state “instead of trying to fit social justice agendas into market-driven youth sport structures, perhaps a rethinking of organized youth sport may be warranted for alternative modes of human movement to at least be acknowledged as offering worthwhile opportunities to promote social justice” (p. 1072).

There was a diversity of other goals suggested, including: creating a positive memory for community, knowledge volunteers had positive impact on youth, encourage youth, be a role model, preserve the integrity of the AWG (i.e., the size of the event, the values), provide a safe environment, want athletes to feel prepared, comfortable confident, some aspects of reconciliation, share the passion, keep AWG going, teach and embody hard work, attitude, showing up, teach and embody positive attitude, fair play, make family proud and a desire for youth to give back.

What kind of person do you want to be?

When asked what kind of person you want to be, eight interview participants stated that they wanted to be either role models or mentors.

“ Well, hmm, I don’t think it changes just because it’s the Arctic Winter Games. Like I’m just trying to be a mentor for these kids and help them achieve their goals. It doesn’t matter if it’s some tournament in Edmonton or Arctic Winter Games or whatever. My philosophy doesn’t change. (Terran, Young Leader)

”

“

Um, I want to be a positive coach that is remembered. Like I said, I hope to inspire or motivate young Indigenous females to coach. I think that's not too many that I'm aware of, up North anyways. Yeah, I want, what kind of person do I want to be? I want to be organized, involved, engaged, feel like I'm someone who people can come to. Yeah. (Shania, Young Leader)

”

Overall, most young and established leaders suggest that they want to be role models, thus community leaders. They are returning to the AWG to either reciprocate or, out of a sense of responsibility, give back to others moving through the system.

It is relevant that interview participants had already reflected on the type of person they want to be through their involvement with the Games and all of them could speak to what could have been a difficult question. Their thoughtful answers revealed that contributing to the AWG is meaningful to their sense of self, and not merely a habitual practise. It is a very deliberate engagement which relates to how they view the AWG as congruent with their goals and values but also as a site that allows community engagement.

Focus questions:

- **How can the AWG continue to foster meaningful community engagement in ways that are congruent with their mission and values?**
- **How can the AWG enable greater involvement in ways that ensure individual goals fit within the AWG mission and values?**

DISCUSSION – BUILDING ON THE CURRENT PRACTICES OF THE AWG

Based on the interview data, evidence shows that AWG managers, contingent leaders and young leaders passionately work towards achieving the AWG mission, which is to present an *athletic competition, a cultural exhibition and a venue to promote social inter-change* (as symbolized by the three interlocking rings) for young Northern athletes, cultural participants, Northern communities and, arguably the panarctic community. The comparison of interviews with managers, contingent leaders and young leaders reveals consistency with respect to what the AWG represents. Some interview participants see the AWG as a community; however, most do not see it as the community to which they are contributing or “giving back” to. Instead, most participants saw the community to which they were “giving back” to as the local community in which they live, young athletes in general or the young athletes they work with specifically, and their sport community (including coaches, volunteers, parents). Their strongest sense of belonging was to the community in which they live, to their province / territory / state, to their Arctic Winter Games contingent or to their sport club, their sport, or sport in general, rather than the AWG.

Focus questions:

- **Does the AWG want to be seen as a community unto itself, or is it more about using the AWG to construct a panarctic community (and identity)?**
 - It is important to consider that conflicting and constantly changing identities are (re)produced through the AWG – e.g., panarctic, national (reproducing Olympic, other major games, which contradicts the idea of being one world, one North), Indigenous (see Thomsen, et al. 2018).
- **Does the AWG want to be the “community” to which leaders come and contribute to?**
- **Does the AWG want to be seen as a “community that challenges other sporting communities, because it takes a “friendlier” approach to sport and physical activity?**

Regardless of how the AWG wants to be seen, and what community leaders give back and feel most connected to, what is most important is the fact that people involved with the AWG build social connections. Whether the community ends up being their sport community, the contingent or their local community rather than the overall community of the AWG, it may not matter. What matters is that the AWG offer a space where people develop strong connections and feel part of a community, any community, which is crucial given the disconnectedness felt by many in present times.

Managers, contingent leaders, and young leaders who were former participants had mostly positive experiences of the AWG, with very few negative experiences to report. They had a multitude of motivations for getting involved, with most of those returning to get involved to give back. This “giving back” was not explicitly seen as community engagement, and it most often happened due to feelings of both reciprocation and responsibility. Very few interview participants indicated that they had been recruited, which suggests that they were drawn to give back to the AWG on their own. Furthermore, few participants were trained about the mission and values of the AWG, which suggests they entered their positions knowing what the AWG stand for. This is quite relevant and speaks to the success of the AWG in having a positive impact on young people such that they are self-motivated to return and for promoting their values among participants. With a more direct focus on Truth and Reconciliation (at least in Canada), it is possible that more recruitment and training will be required in the future.

Focus questions:

- **Is the AWG trying to foster in its current participants a desire to give back? If so, how this is done now and what could help further foster the desire to give back.**
- **Should recruitment be prioritized, especially for people who may not otherwise apply?**

- **What about training? Should all those involved be trained with respect to social justice values? What would this look like? How might this address the Calls to Action?**

The interview participants know what the AWG stands for and their views of the mission and values are congruous with the AWGIC and Host Societies. It was widely agreed that the AWG have a social responsibility, with respect to giving anyone, children in general or off-the-road in particular, the opportunity to experience the AWG, giving participants the opportunity to take their experiences back to their communities and giving opportunities to the North in general because there is less opportunity there. Interview participants stated that their goals were, first and foremost, to help AWG participants understand that winning and competition are not as important as having fun and soaking up an experience from which memories may last a lifetime. Goals also included encouraging youth, being a role model, preserving the integrity of the AWG, providing a safe environment, sharing the passion, keeping AWG going, teaching and embodying hard work, a positive attitude and fair play, making family proud and convincing youth to give back. Interview participants thus seem to be upholding the AWG mission and values – cultural awareness and understanding, fairplay, access and equity, integrity, respect for self and others, partnerships, personal development and community development. Furthermore, they do so purposefully. The AWG become a site where they can engagement in meaningful community development.

Focus questions:

- **In what ways do / can the AWGs engage in the aspects of social responsibility suggested by interview participants?**
- **What are your suggestions to enhance this engagement in the future? (desired situation)**
- **One participant suggested that the AWGIC should better define whether the AWG are for the highest performing athletes or for those who want to participate, regardless of competency. This was an interesting finding, and one that we suggest AWGIC continue to address.**
- **How can the AWG continue to foster meaningful community engagement in ways that are congruent with their mission and values?**
- **How can the AWG enable greater involvement in ways that ensure individual goals fit within the AWG mission and values?**

While we laud the AWG for its apparent success in achieving its mission and promoting its values, we wonder whether other avenues are open to the organization to improve its work. The following list details questions we believe the AWGIC, Host Societies and Contingents can explore (if they are not already doing so) to find new ways of working with, recruiting and training their AWG leaders and using the AWG to challenge the sports industry towards “moral progress” (Ferez et al, 2018; Fuchs, 2022).

Questions:

1. Interview participants suggest that the AWG reproduce a lot of Olympic and other mega event aspects but challenge many other aspects. Does the AWG want to be seen as a “community” that challenges other sporting communities, because it takes a “friendlier” approach to sport and physical activity and is more inclusive on many levels (e.g., inclusion of Arctic Sports and Dene Games)?
 - a. Look to True Sport, Jumpstart, and other organizations and research projects that are challenging hypercompetitive aspects of sport
 - b. If so, do they want to enact an “alternative model” – researchers suggest that “instead of trying to fit social justice agendas into market-driven youth sport structures, perhaps a rethinking of organized youth sport may be warranted for alternative modes of human

movement to at least be acknowledged as offering worthwhile opportunities to promote social justice” (Camire et al, 2022, p. 1062; Atkinson, 2010)

2. While the AWG arguably started as a project with a colonial history and consciousness, it now has the opportunity to focus on inclusivity and building collective community through a commitment to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action. Not many interview participants discussed Indigenous aspects of the AWG but individuals clearly experience it (see Thomsen et al. 2018) and it's very prevalent in both the national news (e.g., CBC coverage) and the Games news (The Ulu News). Is this a priority? And for whom? Host Societies can certainly make space to continue raising awareness and encouraging meaningful exchange on Indigenous issues through the sociocultural programme and by involving local communities and peoples in the planning process. However, how are Contingents engaging with these issues? In what ways, for instance, can Contingents further engage on the path to Truth and Reconciliation through diverse recruitment on the sport teams? Are there best practices in some sports or on some Contingents that can be shared and adapted throughout the various Contingents to ensure that the AWG become a real opportunity for athletes in remote communities?

Given that the managers and leaders see the AWG as a much friendlier event than others, Northerners as a unique group of people, and make reference to inclusion as a key tenet of the AWG, which sets it apart from many other sports and cultural events, community, in the case of the AWG, challenges some aspects of the status quo and the larger high performance sport system. Thus, the AWG is a community that is trying to offer something different than the “faster, higher, stronger” attitude and is built around the concept of inclusion, which runs counter to mainstream sport, and often mainstream society. The overall flavour of the interviews is that the AWG is a community that was constructed to give those who are excluded from or made to feel as though they don't belong at national and international sports and cultural events a place to feel good about themselves. This is, however, not without its challenges – for example there is arguably still not enough focus on getting indigenous youth from remote communities involved in the AWG and a tension remains between picking the best athletes (high performance model) or giving anyone the chance to participate (sport for all model). The AWG ultimately contribute to the development of what some see as a community that strives to be different than others by giving Northern people a sense that they belong, that acknowledgement that knowledge and practice of sport (including Arctic Sport and Dene Games) and culture are valued at all levels and can be executed by everyone, and that friendship is what matters at the end of the day. The AWG thus provides hope that people can engage in (sport, cultural and community) development activities that are inclusive and create a sense of belonging, even in this era where more and more people are feeling as though they will never fit in (i.e., in hypercompetitive sporting environments) and are disconnected from their communities.

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