

# Mapping knowledge-to-action processes in the implementation of trauma-sensitive sport programming in a national youth organization

**KEY FACT** Trauma-sensitive sport programs use competition as a healing mechanism. Exposing children to the dynamics of gameplay and real stakes within a safe environment, can help them practice how to regulate when faced with stressors.

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## 1 BACKGROUND

Program staff's use of trauma-sensitive sport practices (TSSP) can offer socially disadvantaged children the opportunity to:

- practice self-regulation,
- perceive safety and control,
- build supportive relationships,
- experience psychological escape through sport.

Such opportunities can contribute to children's resilience-building and well-being.<sup>1</sup>



## 2 OBJECTIVE

This dissertation explored the translation of TSSP in BGC Canada, a national youth-serving community organization, through a trauma-sensitive program known as the Bounce Back League (BBL).



## 3 CONTEXT

The BBL was hosted weekly, afterschool, by BGC staff for children ages 9-12, in local Clubs. Program rollout involved:

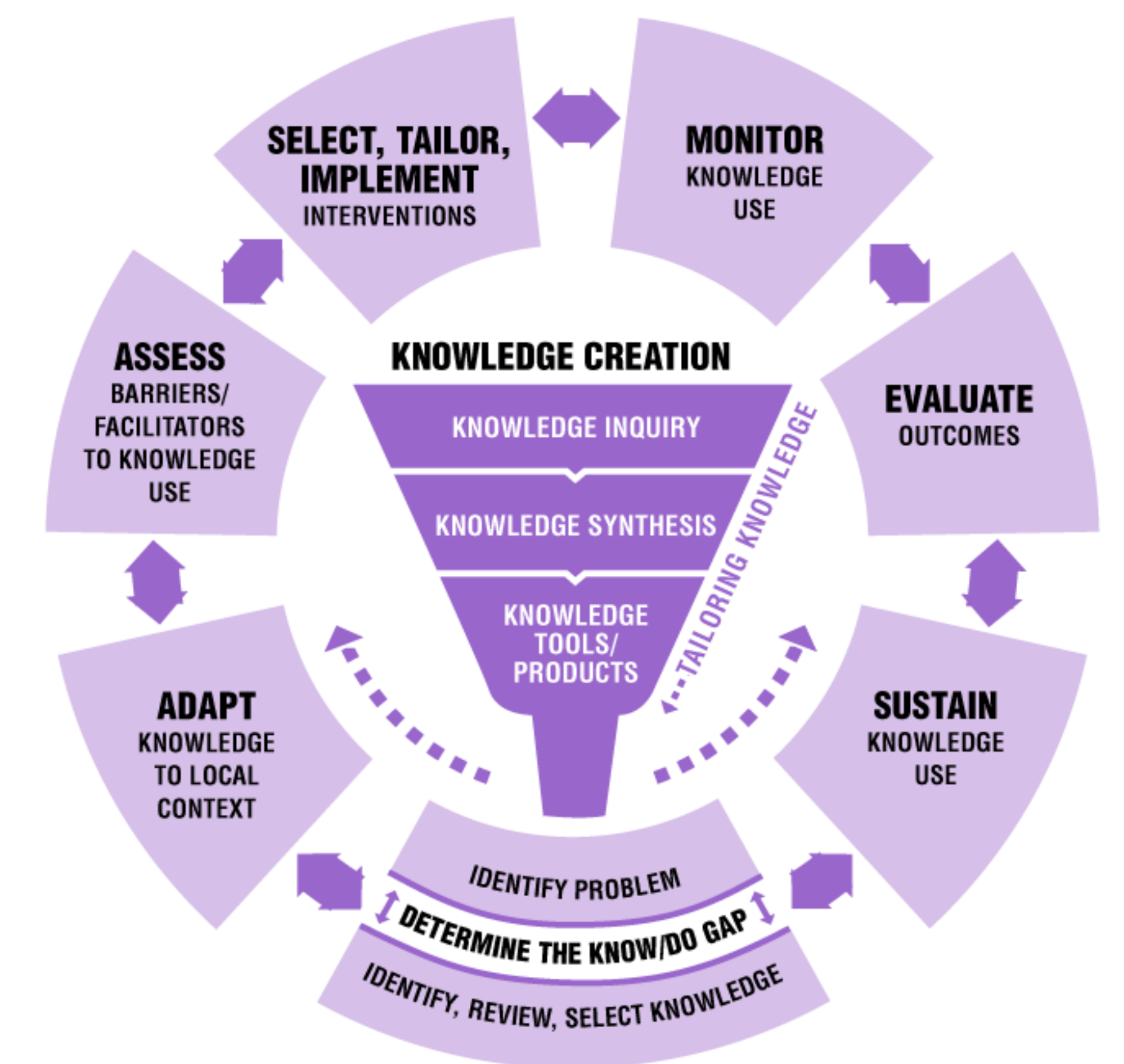


BBL was piloted in 3 Clubs with 12 staff trained by TSSP expert trainers (2017-19). Pilot insights informed the expansion stage. In expansion (2019-20), pilot staff took on in-house trainer roles to mentor 20 new staff, who then delivered BBL in 10 more Clubs.

## 4 METHODS

A knowledge translation lens (KT) lens was used to guide the evaluation of program implementation, using the knowledge-to-action cycle.<sup>2</sup>

Data were gathered through a mixed methods approach, using semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and self-report questionnaires with staff and members; staff-completed session logbooks and participant report cards; observations of training, program delivery, and debriefing sessions; and online communications.



## 5 RESULTS

A BBL season lasts from 6-10 weeks. In the pilot years, six seasons of BBL were implemented in 3 Clubs, reaching 218 children (67% boys, 32% girls, 2% unknown). In expansion, 2 seasons of programs were implemented in 13 Clubs, prior to pandemic closures. Here, BBL reached 288 children (70% boys, 29% girls, 2% non-Binary).

Assess barriers/facilitators & Adapt knowledge to local context

### FACILITATORS

- Pilot training seen as useful and applicable to practice.
- TSSP aligned and/or enhanced staff's existing youth work.

### BARRIERS

- Limited member recruitment and retention.
- Managing youth's behaviours in groups in times of dysregulation.
- Staff turnover, leading to loss of capacity.

### ADAPTATIONS

- Developed new strategies for recruitment, retention, and engagement for youth and staff, to foster greater interest and commitment.
- Updated program materials, training content, and ongoing supports to meet staff's needs for the expansion stage.

Select, tailor, implement intervention

### TRAINING WORKSHOP OUTCOMES

- All 20 staff reported satisfaction in content relevance and usefulness, trainer engagement, and increased confidence to deliver BBL.
- 10% improvement in content knowledge, 38% improvement in perceptions of knowledge, 7% shift toward favourable TSSP attitudes.

- Ongoing mentoring calls were challenging given their unstructured nature, leading to inconsistent staff participation. Greater structure and reinforced expectations for mentoring calls were necessary (for both mentors and mentees).

Monitor knowledge use

### PROGRAM QUALITY OBSERVATIONS

- Clubs delivered basic TSSP components: facilitating psychological safety, caring relationships. Staff had strong existing capacities to facilitate these pieces.

- Trained staff delivered higher quality programs than untrained staff. Trained staff were better able to adhere to BBL structure, create highly engaging activities, and integrate resilience-related skill development through discussion and reflection.

Evaluate outcomes

### CHILDREN'S SUCCESSES

- Children more willing to participate, learned self-regulation strategies, and built positive relationships.

[Child] went from someone who had an argument every program in our clubhouse to learning to let things go... now [they] removes [themselves] from the room when [they] gets frustrated and calms down elsewhere.

### CHILDREN'S CHALLENGES

- Some children struggled with personal conflicts, self-esteem, or social struggles and frustrations.

[Child] struggled with participating in drills and activities which he [they] not choose or did not want to do. [Their] attitude and emotions became overwhelming for [them] and [they] had a difficult time focusing on some days.

## 6 DISCUSSION

- The process and results of this study revealed that:
- (a) A KT lens can be useful in guiding the evaluation of implementation processes of youth sport interventions.<sup>3</sup>
  - (b) Rolling out interventions using a developmental approach that incorporates ongoing evaluation, can be essential in adapting programming to meet stakeholders' needs.<sup>4</sup>
  - (d) Training workshops can offer an initial high dose of content knowledge; yet, lack of structure and consistency in post-workshop mentoring can lead to discontinued learning.
  - (e) All staff had existing capacity for supporting safety and caring relationships; staff education made the difference in higher quality program practices.
  - (f) TSSP-use led to resilience-related outcomes for children.

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## AFFILIATIONS

