

BUILDING BRIDGES PROGRAM

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Building Bridges is a community engagement program developed by ICSN that brings together youth and law enforcement through sport, dialogue, and mentorship. Inspired by the Police Athletic League (PAL) model in the United States, the program creates safe, inclusive environments where young people from Black and other underrepresented communities can engage directly with law enforcement officers, ask questions, share lived experiences, and build authentic relationships grounded in respect and trust. The long-term goal is to establish Building Bridges as a national community engagement model that strengthens relationships between youth and community institutions across Canada.

PROGRAM IMPACT AT A GLANCE

205

Total Youth
Participants

5

Program
Regions

National

Expansion
Vision

25+

Black Police
Officers

2025

Inaugural
Pilot Year



THREE PROGRAM GOALS

Relationship Building

Create meaningful opportunities for youth and law enforcement to interact in positive, non-enforcement settings through sport and shared experience.

Youth Empowerment

Provide youth with a platform to ask questions, share perspectives, understand their rights, and build confidence in navigating real-life community interactions.

Community Trust

Strengthen relationships between racialized communities and local law enforcement through sustained dialogue, mentorship, and shared learning.

PROGRAM STREAMS

Building Bridges (Core Program)

- Launched in 2025 in Durham Region
- Connects Black youth (ages 13–14) with Black police officers
- Uses sport, mentorship, and facilitated dialogue to build trust
- Includes Q&A sessions, leadership development, and first aid/CPR training
- Delivered in partnership with Durham Regional Police Service (DRPS)

G.E.M.S. (Girls Empowerment Series)

- International pilot launched in 2025–2026
- Delivered in Windsor–Essex, ON and Detroit, MI
- Focused on BIPOC girls (ages 12–16)
- Combines sport, mentorship, leadership, and wellness education
- Features facilitated "Real Talk" discussions
- Delivered with Detroit Police Athletic League and Border City Athletic Club

COMMUNITY IMPACT

Early feedback from youth, families, and program partners highlighted the transformative impact of Building Bridges. Participants reported feeling more comfortable speaking with law enforcement, gaining a better understanding of police roles, and building trust through positive personal interactions. G.E.M.S. feedback highlighted increased confidence, stronger peer connections, and meaningful mentorship experiences reinforcing representation, belonging, and leadership development.

COMMUNITY VOICES

"The program helped youth feel more comfortable speaking with law enforcement and gain a better understanding of police roles and procedures."

"Parents emphasized the importance of programs that help youth navigate real-life interactions with police in a supportive environment."

CURRENT PARTNERS

Durham Regional Police Service (DRPS) | Detroit Police Athletic League | Border City Athletic Club | Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) | Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) | Ontario Provincial Police (OPP)

FUTURE EXPANSION

Building Bridges is designed to scale nationally. Future expansion will extend the program to additional Canadian cities through partnerships with law enforcement agencies (RCMP, OPP, Cdn Armed Forces, Ottawa, Durham, LaSalle), community organizations, and sport partners, with expanded youth participation, mentorship pathways, and integration with additional sport programming.

CONNECTING IT TO THE FUTURE OF SPORT COMMISSION

- Inclusion & Belonging: Creates welcoming spaces where Black and BIPOC youth feel heard, valued, and supported.
- Youth Empowerment: Builds confidence, leadership skills, and understanding through mentorship and dialogue.
- Community Trust: Strengthens relationships between youth, law enforcement, and community institutions.
- Cross-Sector Collaboration: Brings together sport organizations, police services, and community partners to create positive change.
- Sport for Social Impact: Uses sport as a platform to foster connection, respect, and personal growth.