

PRO

PARKS AND RECREATION ONTARIO

Annual Report

2023

Embracing a transformative  
vision for parks & recreation  
across Ontario

TRAILBLAZERS

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## Land acknowledgement

PRO's members, the Board of Directors, staff, and partners are based in communities across the land we now know as Ontario. These lands cover 46 treaties – agreements governing how we are to live and relate to each other and the land. We recognize that our work is intimately tied to land and offer thankful recognition to the Indigenous peoples who have been stewards of this land since time immemorial. We acknowledge the historical and contemporary oppression of Indigenous peoples and lands, and the covert role that parks and recreation has played in colonization.

In the spirit of rectifying relationships, PRO strives to be an advocate for land and all Indigenous peoples. In doing this work, we anticipate a long journey of missteps, unlearning, and relearning. However, we remain hopefully optimistic in PRO's capacity to initiate critical dialogue about the roles and responsibilities of the parks and recreation sector in realizing a present and future Ontario that prioritizes that health and wellbeing of land, as well as Indigenous peoples and communities.

## IDEA statement

PRO acknowledges that systemic racism, ableism, 2SLGBTQQIA+ phobias, sexism, and other forms of identity-based discrimination are prevalent across our province. While we believe that parks and recreation spaces should be welcoming, inclusive, and accessible to all, we recognize that this has never been the case.

PRO is committed to advancing inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility across our sector. Our efforts include a learning journey, wherein staff and the Board of Directors engage in critical dialogue about the ways in which parks and recreation may perpetuate various forms of prejudice and discrimination. Additionally, we are implementing intentional recruitment efforts to diversify our staff and Board of Directors, which in turn will help PRO better represent the experiences of all parks and recreation professionals across Ontario. Finally, we approach all our work with an intersectional lens, centring inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility in all our professional development services and advocacy efforts.



# Dear trailblazers

## Message from our CEO

I am thrilled to present PRO's Annual Report, marking my inaugural year as CEO. From the outset of my tenure, I emphasized the importance of ensuring that every member perceives the tangible value in the activities undertaken by PRO.

Challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic catapulted a digital transformation at PRO. Recognizing the importance of adapting to virtual landscapes, many of PRO's education and professional development opportunities are now available online. These endeavours are driven by our commitment to better support our members, ensuring that they receive great value from their investment in and involvement with PRO.

At PRO, we take pride in our commitment to excellence in recreation training, exemplified by the credible HIGH FIVE® program. This past year, PRO engaged external support to conduct a comprehensive business review of HIGH FIVE®. We remain dedicated in our pursuit of excellence, ensuring that the HIGH FIVE® program continues to set the standard for recreation training.

Our partnership with the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (CPRA) remains steadfast. Collaborating closely on government relations matters, PRO was honoured to participate in CPRA's inaugural "Day on the Hill" in Ottawa. This opportunity allowed PRO to engage with Parliamentarians to advocate for a deeper understanding and appreciation of the recreation, sport and physical activity sector. At the provincial level, we have met with numerous ministries,

making strides to ensure that PRO is seen as a credible partner to government and a trustworthy brand to the public.

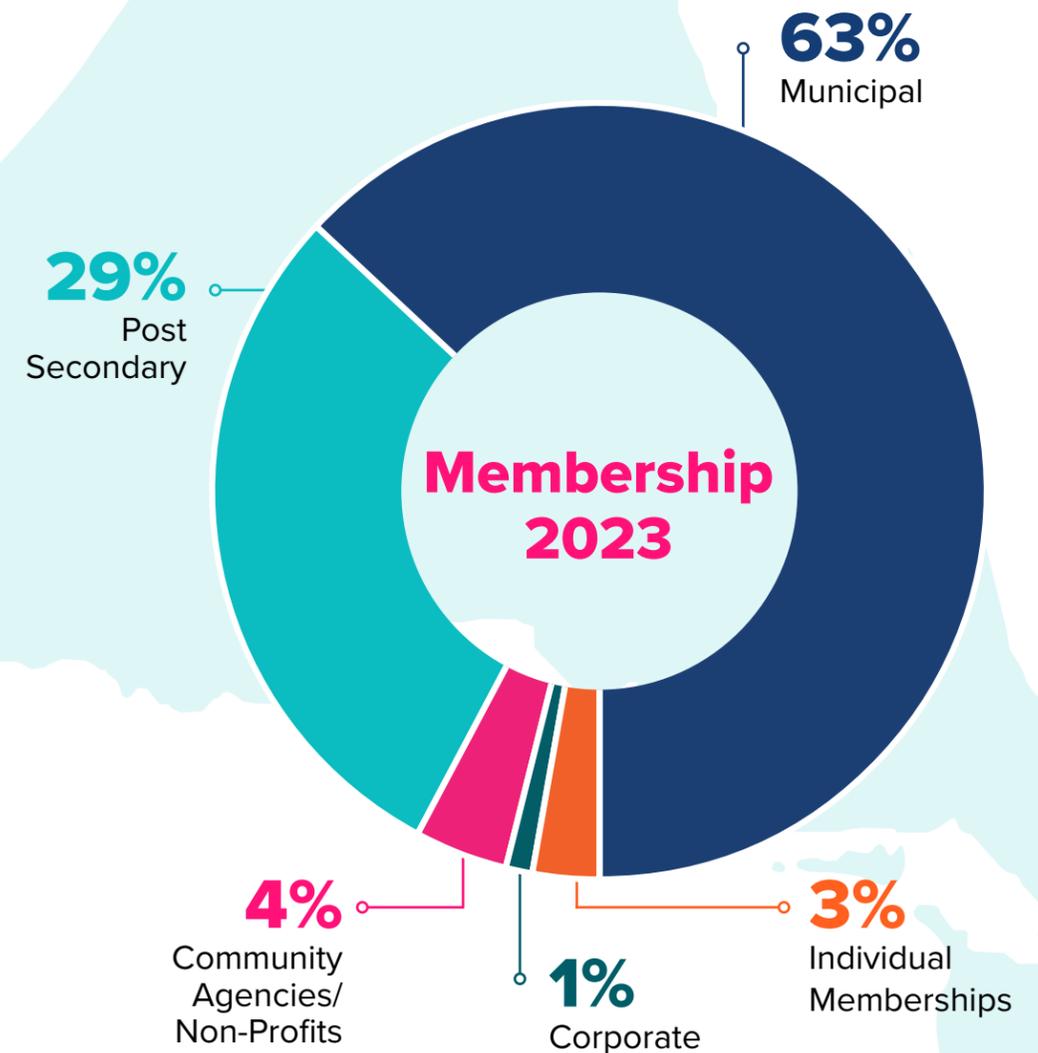
With an unwavering commitment to advancing legislation and public policy across all levels of government, PRO has intensified its advocacy efforts. Through enhanced engagement and dialogue with various government bodies, we are ensuring that the interests of our sector are effectively represented both at decision-making tables and through our vital role in commenting on proposed legislative and policy changes.

It has become increasingly clear that while our sector remains essential, it is entering a period of change that presents both challenges and opportunities. In response, PRO has been diligently fostering dialogue and collaboration with our members to navigate these changes effectively and determine how best we can support them. In 2023, we hosted our first in-person conference since the onset of the pandemic. Additionally, we organized a series of in-person events, including workshops and training sessions, across the province.

My first year with PRO has been a transformative season of learning. Parks and recreation practitioners are instrumental in creating more meaningful, connected, and healthy lives for all Ontarians. The work each of you do inspires me daily to continue increasing the quality and quantity of services that PRO provides to our membership.

Kim Gavine  
Chief Executive Officer

# Trailblazers we served



Over **7,000** members strong

# Trails we explored



“ It feels great to be back in-person and meeting with our members to learn about what they are working on and how we can support them! We visited all corners of Ontario in 2023, and look forward to continued connection, learning and growth together. ”

–Kim Gavine, Chief Executive Officer



**Brampton**  
FEBRUARY  
Hosted a HIGH FIVE® Trainer clinic and certified 12 new trainers!



**Milton**  
JULY  
Welcomed 9 new trainers to the HIGH FIVE® family!



**Hamilton**  
MARCH  
Our first in-person conference post-COVID; it felt great to be together!



**Windsor**  
AUGUST  
Visited the WFCU centre, chatted after-school program funding needs, joint-use agreements, and even tried the world-famous 'Windsor-style Pizza'!



**Sudbury**  
OCTOBER  
Saw some amazing parks in Sudbury and learned about City plans to revitalize outdoor courts and playgrounds across the community.



**Burlington**  
SEPTEMBER  
Toured newly re-opened Mountainside Pool and saw major renovations, it was easy to see why the facility is beloved by the Burlington community.



**Tecumseh**  
AUGUST  
Visited Optimist Park, Lakewood Park and finally Lacasse Park to see a recent infrastructure build - a brand-new grandstand to support the upcoming 2024 Baseball Canada Senior Men's National Championships.



**Dallas, Texas**  
OCTOBER  
HIGH FIVE® showcased its innovative approach and connected with recreation providers at the National Parks and Recreation Association Conference.



**Thunder Bay**  
NOVEMBER  
Had a blast in Thunder Bay training new trainers in the Principles of Healthy Child Development!



**Smiths Falls**  
NOVEMBER  
Celebrated the 10-year anniversary of the Rural Recreation Association at their annual summit.



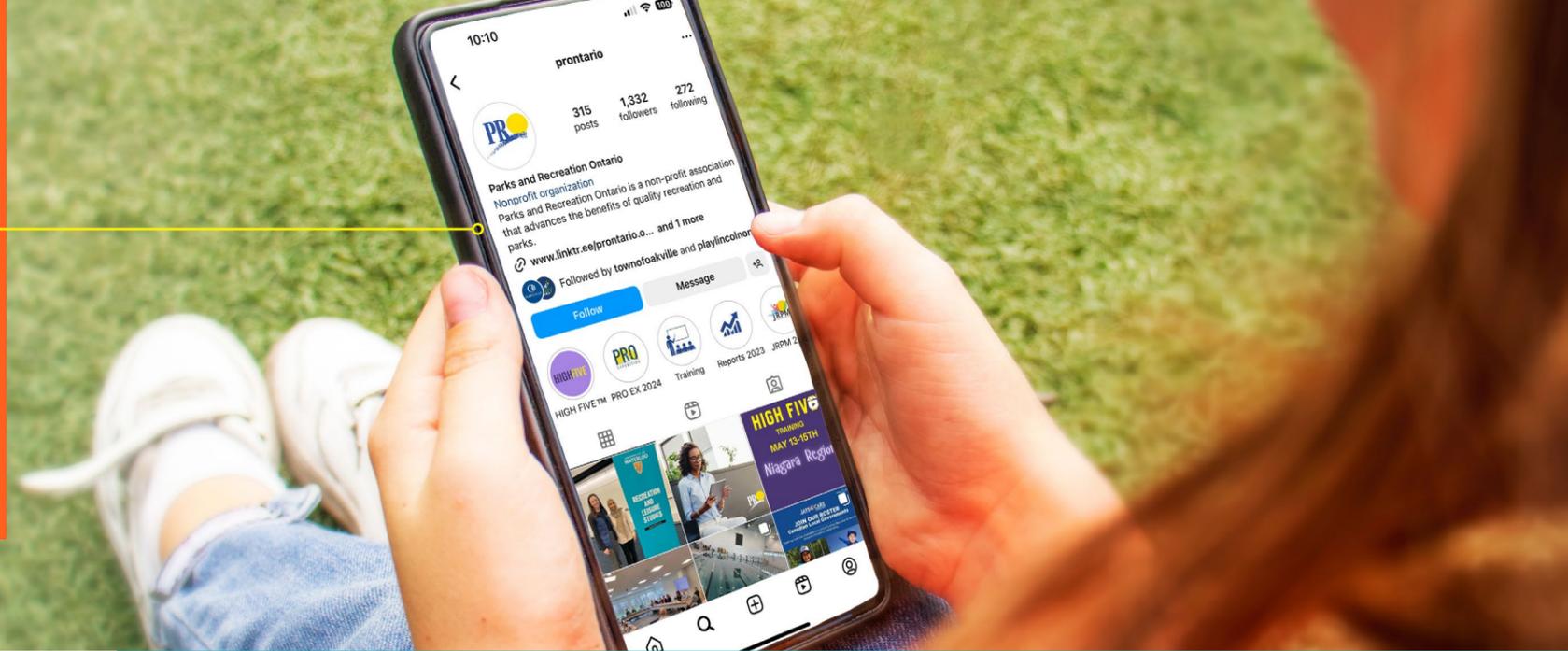
**Loyalist**  
NOVEMBER  
Visited the W.J. Henderson Recreation Centre to learn about the \$49.5M renewal of the facility.



**Toronto**  
NOVEMBER  
Discussed all things aquatics at the Canadian Swim School Alliance Conference and presented about HIGH FIVE® at the Ontario Parasport & Physical Activity Summit.



# Connections we made



## By the numbers

2023

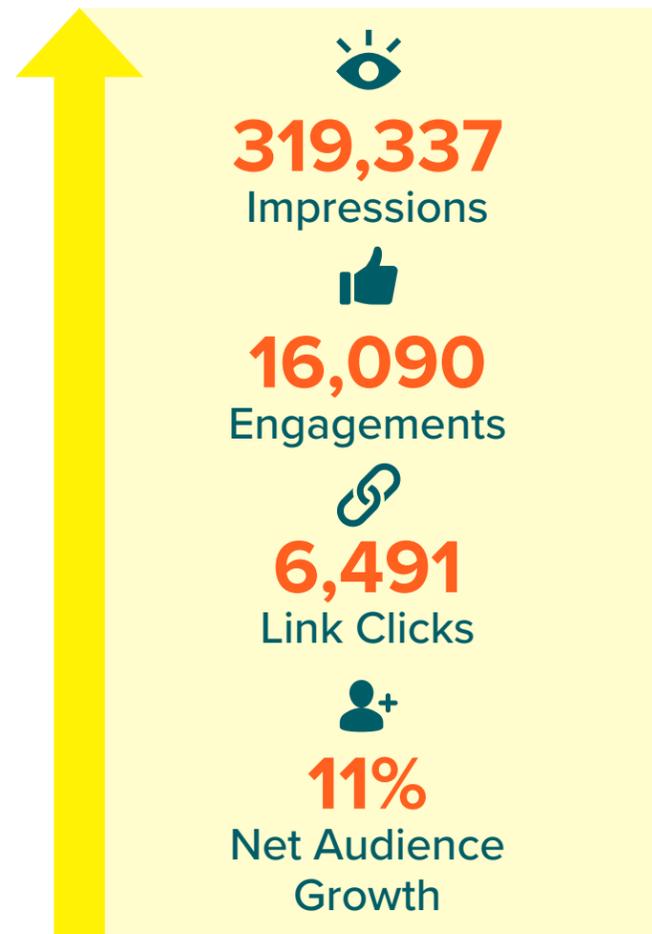
### Social Media Followers

	5,835
	1,784
	1,196
	4,830

**Total Followers**  
13,645



### Combined Social Media Growth Across Platforms



# connections



**Video Views**  
**13,457**  
(across all platforms)



**Job Mart**  
**96**  
editions  
**445**  
sector job opportunities



**Newsbrief**  
**19**  
editions  
**46,928**  
opens

# Learning we facilitated



## March 2023

### PRO Forum & Aquatics Conference

We hosted our first in-person conference post-COVID over four days.

## August 2023

### Enhancing Accessibility in Summer Camps: Tips from the Field

We partnered with the Abilities Centre to facilitate a discussion about how summer camps can be made a truly inclusive and empowering experience for all involved. During the webinar, participants learned about supporting participants with disabilities, implementing universal design, and overcoming challenges. A panel of experts shared practical strategies to help create transformative summer camp experiences in communities.

## May 2023

### Learning Lab Launch

We launched a new **learning management system** thanks to \$149,800 received through the Resilient Communities Fund from the Ontario Trillium Foundation. This funding enabled us to update technology and offer virtual professional development opportunities. All our members now have access to 5 on-demand professional development modules.

## September 2023

### Enhancing Park Accessibility: Insights & Solutions

Engineering Health Lab in collaboration with The KITE Research Institute presented groundbreaking interdisciplinary research that explored how Canada's parks can be transformed into truly accessible spaces. The workshop featured pivotal findings, innovative research methods, and practical solutions drawn from extensive consultations and real-world experiences.

## April & October 2023

### Parks and Recreation Management Certificate

We collaborated with the Schulich Executive Education Centre at York University to offer the Parks and Recreation Management Certificate (PRMC). Delivered virtually, the PRMC program offers participants an immersive learning experience, blending theoretical frameworks with practical insights gleaned from real-world case studies.

## October 2023

### Northern Ontario Regional Workshop

We visited Greater Sudbury and invited members to participate in networking opportunities, learning presentations and breakout sessions.

**“Incredibly well delivered and had very meaningful exercises. Left me intrigued and wanted to learn more to improve my business unit and municipality as a whole. Highly recommend for anyone in supervisor or management level in parks or recreation!”**  
 –PRMC 2023 Participant

## November 2023

### Gender Equity in Recreational Sport Workshop

We collaborated with CPRA to host a multi-day workshop for sport and recreation practitioners and decision-makers dedicated to creating environments that are safe and welcoming for women, girls, and gender-diverse people. The three-module workshop used case studies, practical resources, and opportunities for idea exchanges to explore possibilities related to gender-sensitive facility design and policies.

Over **800** members educated

# Programs we delivered



In partnership with the **Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (CPRA)**, we were proud to disburse over **\$2M** in direct financial support to the sector.



## Green Jobs Initiative

Direct financial support via wage subsidies, to local governments (municipalities, Indigenous communities, etc.) and other sector organizations, that focus on green career-related activities.

**41**  
# of green jobs

**\$188,983**  
awarded



## Reaching Each and Every One: A Community Sport Intervention

Financial support to prompt the initiation of community level interventions in programs, events, and/or policy changes that removed barriers and increase sport access, participation and retention rates for equity-deserving groups, particularly Black, Indigenous, racially diverse, 2SLGBTQQIA+, low-income and newcomer populations, as well as people living with disabilities.

**68**  
# of projects

**\$1,501,035**  
awarded



## Youth Employment Experience

Provided direct financial support to local governments, enabling them to offer placements that focus on youth gaining a broad range of skills, knowledge and experience in the community parks and recreation sector. Each youth was paired with a mentor at their place of employment to provide an immersive experience.

**28**  
# of Youth

**\$333,355**  
awarded

## Additional Sector Funding

An increase of **\$1.1 million** to support **Ontario's After School Program** for the 2023/24 school year, which acknowledges the importance of quality recreation to healthy childhood development.

A **\$1.76 million** commitment to fund the **Swim to Survive and Swim to Survive Plus** programs for the 2023/24 school year to support basic swimming skills.

Over **\$10 million** to support **improved community buildings and spaces** that provide opportunities for recreation through the Capital Grant program.

Over **\$500,000** for the **creation of accessible and inclusive environments**, such as enhancements to parks, trails, and community centres, through the Inclusive Community Grant program.

# Trailblazers we applauded



## Access & Equity Award

### RECIPIENT

City of Toronto and Kiki Ballroom Alliance

### PROGRAM

Kiki Ballroom Program

### ABOUT THE RECIPIENT

The Kiki Ballroom program was a collaboration between the City of Toronto and the **Toronto Kiki Ballroom Alliance**. This initiative provided queer and transgender youth with opportunities to learn about ballroom culture and connect with Black and LatinX 2SLGBTQQIA+ communities. The program involved learn-to-vogue workshops and a participant talent showcase at the City's first Kiki Ball, which was held during Pride Toronto in collaboration with **Global Black Pride**.



## Access & Equity Award

### RECIPIENT

City of Thunder Bay

### PROGRAM

Youth Inclusion Program

### ABOUT THE RECIPIENT

The **Youth Inclusion Program** in the City of Thunder Bay adopts an innovative 'by-youth-for-youth' approach to crime-prevention and risk factors associated with victimization. Outreach strategies were used to learn about the needs of local youth and engage them in programming. Program workers supported youth in navigating housing, employment, primary care, and mental health and social services. The program also involved free outings, helping youth to build relationships with their community.



## Operational Excellence Award

### RECIPIENT

City of Toronto and NIKE Canada

### PROGRAM

Play Mobile

### ABOUT THE RECIPIENT

The **Play Mobile** initiative consists of three vibrantly decorated vans that travel across Toronto, providing barrier-free recreation programming. This project prioritizes delivering recreation programming to 31 equity-deserving communities, identified by the City of Toronto as **Neighbourhood Improvement Areas**. At no charge, the vans deliver a wide range of sport and recreation equipment for archery, badminton, wheelchair basketball, lacrosse, boccia, and more.



## Parks & Facility Design Award

### RECIPIENT

City of Welland

### FACILITY

Empire Sportsplex

### ABOUT THE RECIPIENT

The **Empire Sportsplex** is a state-of-the-art facility that offers pickleball, basketball, beach volleyball, tennis, and more. The facility was designed with inclusivity and accessibility in mind, featuring a cushioned court surface, height adjustable basketball and volleyball nets, shaded benches, high contrast colours, and an innovative self-guided play area. Empire Sportsplex is centrally located, accessible by foot, bike, or bus, bringing quality recreation experiences to all citizens of the City of Welland.



## Parks & Facility Design Award

### RECIPIENT

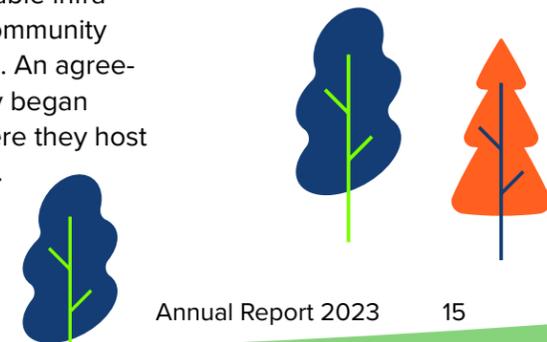
City of Burlington

### FACILITY

Orchard Community Hub

### ABOUT THE RECIPIENT

In need of an indoor community space to gather, the residents of the Orchard Community worked together with the City of Burlington to find a suitable location to run community activities and programs. The community lacked suitable infrastructure, and after years of planning, a local school in the Orchard Community offered some unused space in their building for the community centre. An agreement was formed between the school board and the City, and the City began renovations. The Orchard Community now has a Community Hub where they host youth movie nights, line dancing, craft groups, and holiday gatherings.





## Aquatics Facility Design Award

### RECIPIENT

Town of Oakville

### FACILITY

Oakville Trafalgar Community Centre

### ABOUT THE RECIPIENT

The Oakville Trafalgar Community Centre is a state-of-the-art aquatic facility with accessibility and sustainability at the forefront of its design. The facility boasts rooftop solar panels and is home to Canada's first public net-zero pool, which utilizes geothermal heating and 80% less water than regular public pools. The facility is also equipped with Oakville's first gender-inclusive change room, and a heated therapeutic pool, featuring a ramp, lift, and hydrotherapy jets.



## Aquatics Access & Equity Award

### RECIPIENT

City of Brampton

### PROGRAM

Lifeguard Certification Program

### ABOUT THE RECIPIENT

Amid staffing shortages, the City of Brampton seized an opportunity to enhance professional development and equity. The City offered free aquatic certifications to those who met eligibility standards. This program helped to address Brampton's staffing shortages, while also removing financial barriers associated with certification costs.



## Emerging Leader Award

### RECIPIENT

Colleen Beswick, Town of Oakville

### ABOUT THE RECIPIENT

Colleen Beswick began her parks and recreation career in 2017 as a coordinator for the Town of Oakville. Since then, Colleen has become integral to Oakville's Parks, Recreation & Culture Department, playing a pivotal role in the transfer of services to the new Trafalgar Community Centre. In 2019, Colleen was promoted to Program Supervisor. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Colleen reinvented children and youth programming and camps, and developed a partnership with Community Living Oakville to address staffing shortages. In six short but eventful years, Colleen has made a profound impact in the Town of Oakville.



## Bob Secord Leadership Award

### RECIPIENT

Samantha Gregorio

### ABOUT THE RECIPIENT

On top of excelling in the Honours Bachelor of Recreation and Leisure Studies program at Brock University, Samantha is already a seasoned parks and recreation professional. With eight years of experience, Samantha has worked in roles such as a lifeguard, coach, camp director, and event coordinator. Additionally, Samantha holds several certifications from the Lifesaving Society, Skate Canada, and HIGH FIVE®.



## Hugh Clydesdale Bursary

### RECIPIENT

Mandisa Lau

### ABOUT THE RECIPIENT

Mandisa is a well-rounded, highly capable leader, who is already making an impact on the parks and recreation sector. Mandisa has worked in a variety of roles supporting recreation programming for children and youth. Winning this bursary helped Mandisa fund her Master of Arts degree in Recreation, Sport, and Community at Brock University.



# Standards we upheld

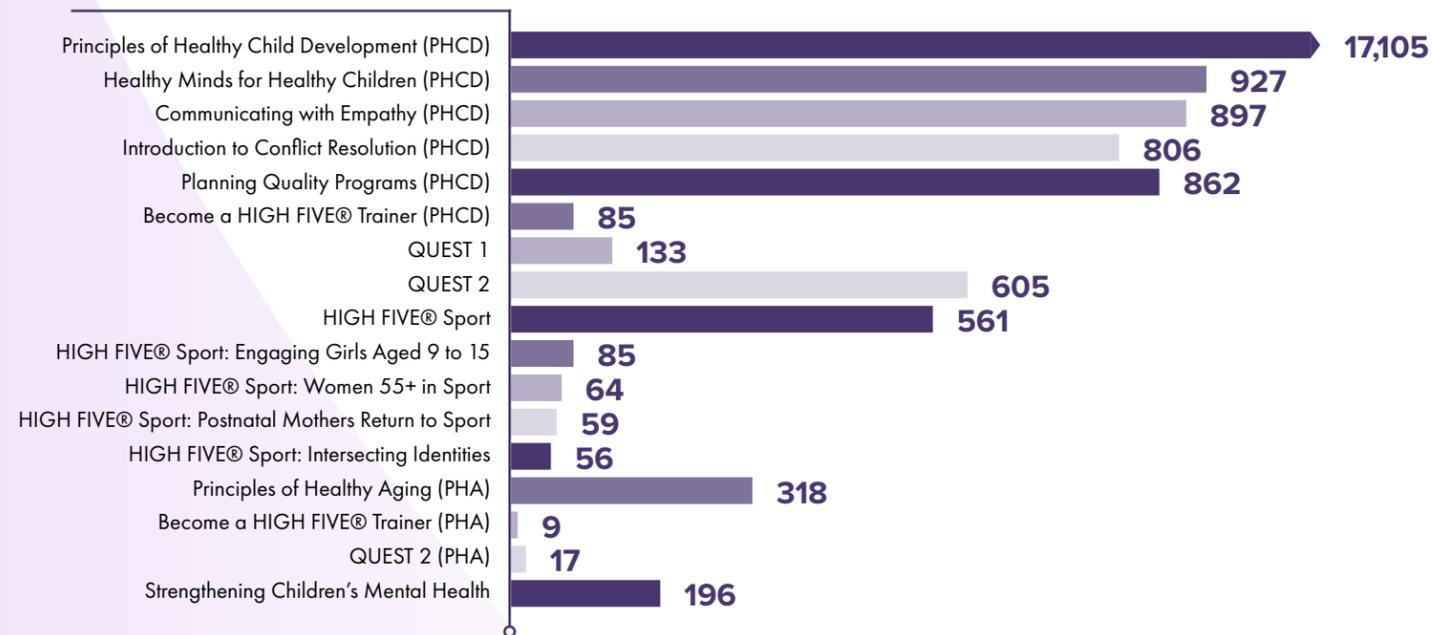


## Accessible Sport Partnership

In 2023, HIGH FIVE® collaborated with the Ontario Parasport Collective and the Centre for Accessible Sport and Play to develop an additional follow-up module to the Principles of Healthy Child Development. During this training module, leaders learn how to provide effective one-on-one support to a child with disabilities participating in sport and recreation programs, understand the role of a one-to-one volunteer, and learn ways to design and deliver inclusive recreation and sport programming. This training was piloted in fall 2023, with wide release planned in 2024.

2023	Accredited Organizations	Registered Organizations	# of Programs	# of Children
Ontario	39	171	42,206	614,378
National Totals	40	369	52,181	809,585

## Programs and Learners



15,494  
Trainer Led

22,785  
Total Learners

7,291  
On Demand (Virtual)



★  
"It was amazing and interactive. Enjoyed every minute of this course. Hope to embark on other courses to increase my knowledge and skills."

★  
"I absolutely loved this course, it is quick, engaging and overall, very fun!"



# Voices we uplifted



Throughout 2023, our members shared their experiences, opinions, and concerns about issues impacting their daily work. In return, we published several reports, statements, and responses to proposed legislative and policy changes with the intention of uplifting the critical insights and voices of our members.

## Establishing priorities for Ontario's summer camps

We distributed surveys and conducted interviews with members across Ontario, gathering data related to staff recruitment and retention in Ontario summer camps. This survey captured valuable comparative data on staffing and service provision pre- and post-pandemic.

### SURVEY FINDINGS

**WE'RE HIRING**

**78%**  
of respondents faced hiring challenges in the last three years

Due to hiring challenges, waitlists have grown. From 2019 to 2022, waitlists have increased by **171%**

### OUR PRIORITIES

Informed by research findings, we developed priorities that guided subsequent advocacy work, including:

- Increased funding and youth employment subsidy programs for summer camp providers.
- Dedicated funding to create or expand summer camp services and programming for children and youth with specialized needs.



## Bringing awareness to aquatic staffing challenges

Challenges associated with recruitment and retention of qualified aquatics staff were exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic. In response, we distributed a survey to our members, gathering data on this issue. Survey findings captured information on wages, alternative forms of compensation, job titles and descriptions, and recommendations to improve staff recruitment and retention.

### SURVEY FINDINGS

**Barriers to staff retention**

**38%**  
Certification length

**27%**  
Low wages

**15%**  
Physical demand

**20%**  
Other

### OUR PRIORITIES

Informed by research findings, we developed priorities that guided subsequent advocacy work, including:

- Increased investment in aquatics infrastructure
- Strategic approaches to engage equity-deserving populations in aquatics programming and career development opportunities
- High quality learn-to-swim programs that inspires long-term participation in aquatics
- Implementation of an aquatics leadership program that counts towards high school credits
- Lowering the minimum age for lifeguards and instructors





## Advocacy in Action

We attended the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) conference in London, ON, as a part of our long-term government relations strategy. This was a great opportunity to network with members, connect with political staff from various ministries and support key sessions that had an emphasis on the sector, including a presentation by former Board Chair, Shari Litcherman, on the importance of parks and recreation. We have met with AMO staff several times since the conference to advocate for sector needs and ensure alignment.

## Technical Advisory Table

We were invited to join the Technical Advisory Table on Ontario's Housing Supply Action Plan by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) to provide perspective and advice on Municipal Development-Related Charges. We continue to liaise with this important Ministry and represent the interests of our members while discussing the financial and quality of life implications created by the *More Homes Built Faster Act (2022)*.

## Day on the Hill

Alongside CPRA and our provincial/territorial partners, we participated in the inaugural "Day on the Hill" in Ottawa. This important day of lobbying aimed to promote a better understanding and appreciation of Canada's recreation, sport and physical activity sector to Parliamentarians, while seeking their support for CPRA's federal budget requests.

## Increased Funding for Afterschool Programs

In October 2023, the Province of Ontario announced a funding increase of \$1.1 million to support Ontario's After School Program. After ongoing efforts to engage with the

Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport, we were appreciative of this critical investment that marked a significant step forward to enhance healthy childhood development. We are proud to be a member of the Ontario Afterschool Program Coalition, advocating for further critical investment to support providing children with quality recreation opportunities.



**\$1.1M**

funding increase announced by the Province to support Ontario's After School Program

## Creating Safe Work Environments

In September 2023, we submitted 2 responses to the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills in support of newly proposed heat stress and air quality regulations.

After engaging with our members, we determined that the implementation of the new regulations must also be accompanied by financial support, resources and support materials, including a phased approach. Additionally, we encouraged all levels of government to consider the integral role of green spaces in mitigating extreme heat and poor air quality.



Climate change will continue to increase and exacerbate workplace illnesses related to heat and poor air quality

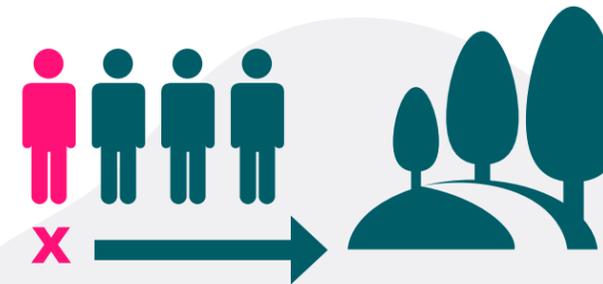


The creation and maintenance of parks and green spaces can help prevent and mitigate climate-related illnesses

## Access to Recreation

In September 2023, we submitted a response in support of a regulatory amendment that would allow a northern Local Services Board to collect fees for the purpose of providing recreational services within its geographical boundary.

We supported this amendment because it increases access to wellness-enhancing recreation opportunities for Ontarians living in rural and northern areas. 90% of Ontarians believe participation in recreation programs or consistent usage of recreation amenities contributes to health and well-being.



**More than 1/4**  
of Ontario's rural and remote residents have no park or playground within walking distance.



# Treasurer's report

In my final year as Treasurer of Parks and Recreation Ontario, it is my pleasure to share with you our 2023 financial journey. The figures and facts in our annual report go beyond the numbers; they tell the story of our success and challenges and the impactful work we've undertaken to enhance the sector of parks and recreation across Ontario.

This past year was a blend of anticipated plans and excitement as we returned to our in-person platforms and engaged with our many stakeholders and members to start rebuilding our presence in the sector. Our financial health remains robust, thanks to diligent management and the leadership of our Board, guided by our strategic initiatives, which kept us on track.

In 2023, with the assistance of an Ontario Trillium Foundation Resilient grant, we completed an important phase of our digital transformation in our HIGH FIVE® and Education and Training portfolios, laying the foundation for access to our digital learnings. We led our first post-pandemic, in-person conference in the spring, continued to provide our PRMC courses, and in the fall, we travelled to Sudbury where we hosted a successful day of learnings and connections. Our Job Mart continues to provide an important service to our members, and our banner HIGH FIVE® program is well received with strong training rates, and a positive return for our investments.

In 2023, operating revenue exceeded expenses, resulting in a net surplus of \$185K. This balance reflecting careful management of costs, was re-invested in our operations and our reserves, resulting in a year-end net asset balance of \$1.2M. Our strong liquid asset position at the end of the year will allow PRO to leverage our strengths and mobilize our work as we continue our efforts, aligned with our mission, to enhance the quality and accessibility of parks and recreational services across Ontario.

This year will welcome new board members and see the commencement of work on our new strategic plan. Investments will continue in the creation of strong digital platforms for the organization, and the development of new quality educational offerings for professionals in the sector. I am confident that the organization is well positioned to be a relevant leader both today and for many years to come.

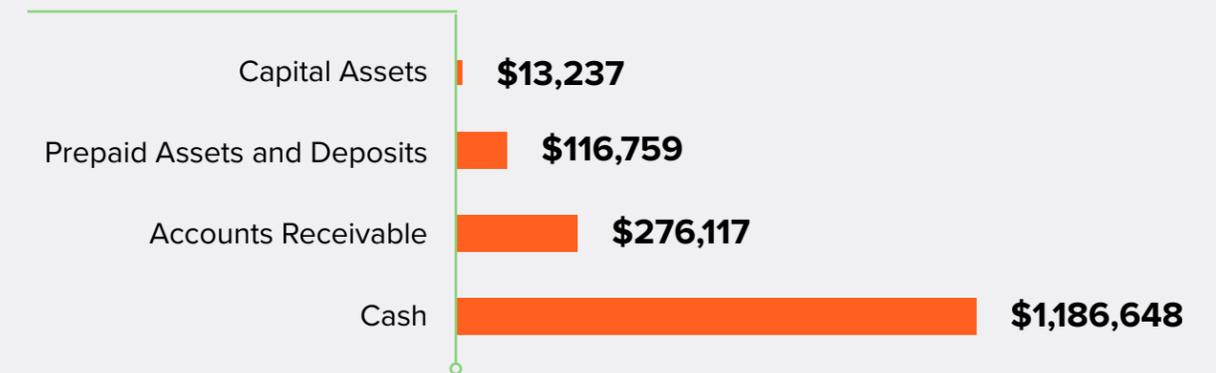
Romas Keliacius, Treasurer



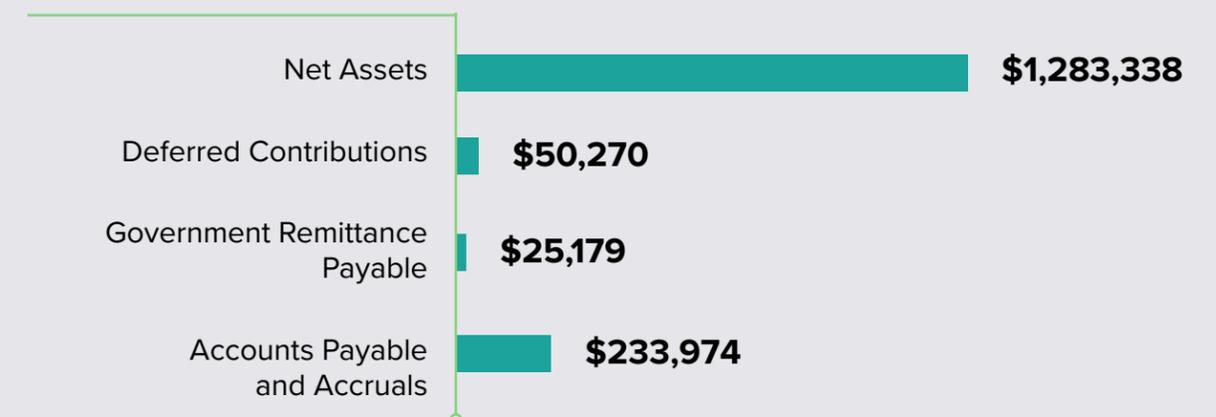
# Financial Information for 2023

## Summary Statement of Financial Position at December 31, 2023

### Assets \$1,592,761



### Liabilities & Net Assets \$1,592,761

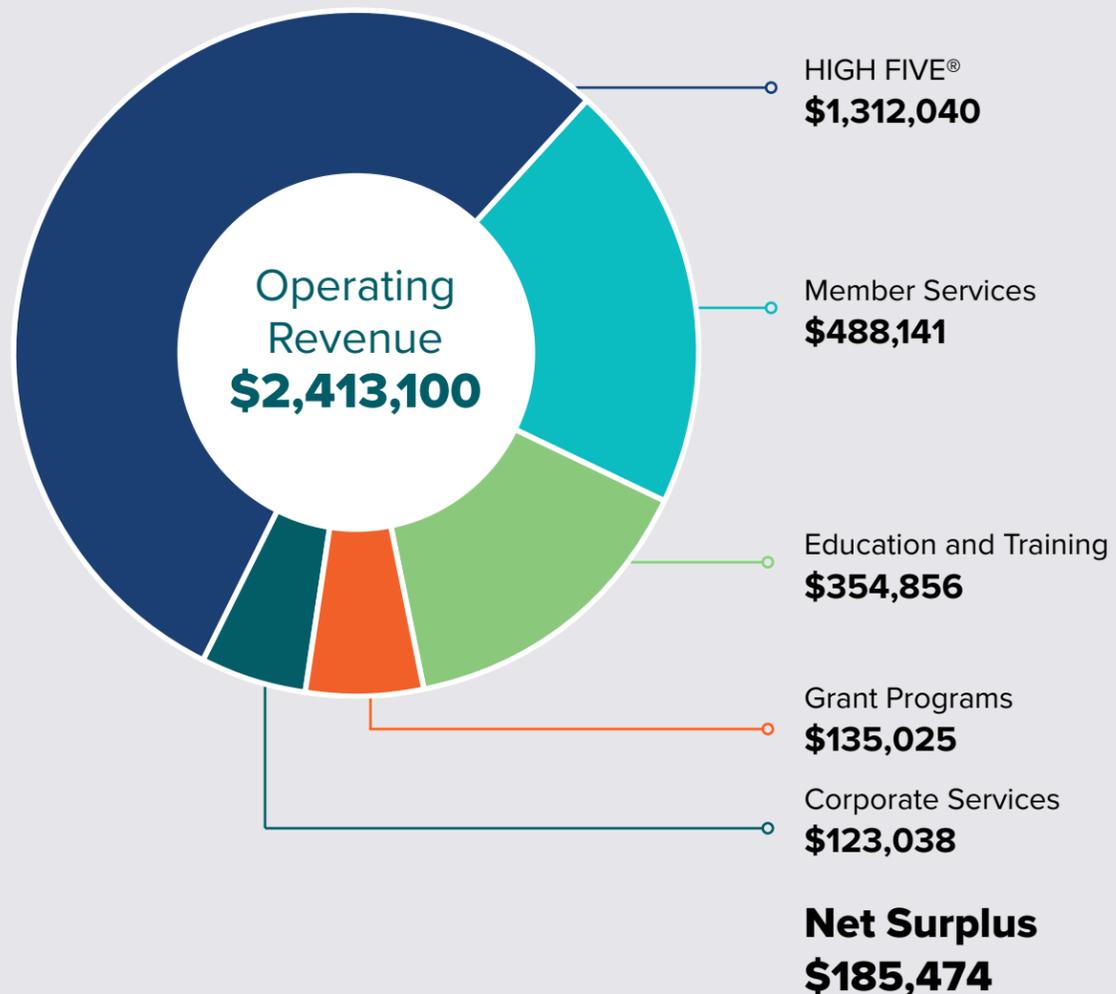


# Financial Information for 2023



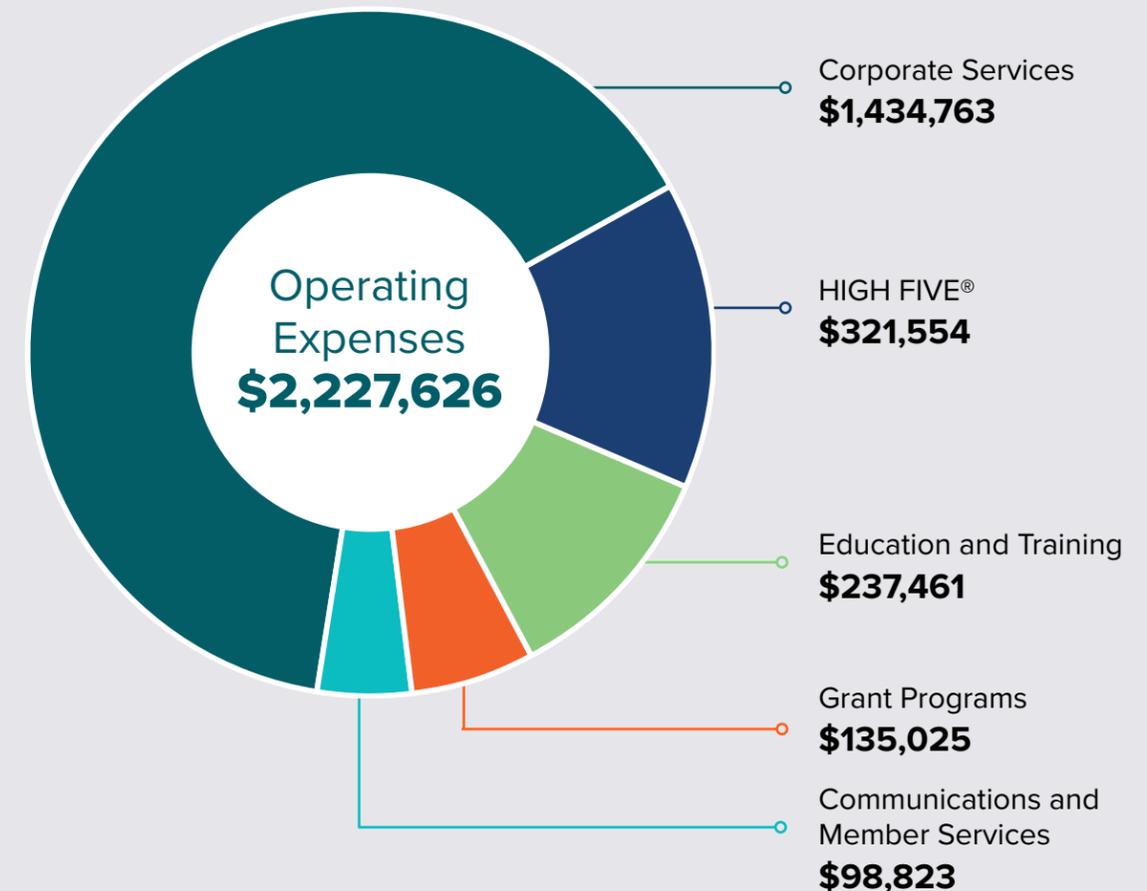
## Summary Statement of Operations for the year ended December 31, 2023

### Revenue



Parks and Recreation Ontario is committed to operational efficiency, transparency and accountability.

### Expenses



Full audited financial statements are available. Please contact [pro@prontario.org](mailto:pro@prontario.org)

# Who we are



Kim Gavine  
Chief Executive Officer



Maggie Henderson  
Director of Education,  
Training, & Quality  
Assurance



Judith Hackam  
Director, Finance  
& Operations



Danusia Kosior  
Business Development  
Specialist



Sarah Ane  
Director of Policy  
& Partnerships



Kate Balkwill  
Events Specialist



Jodi Longland  
HIGH FIVE® Community  
Development Specialist



Krystyna Lazar  
Members Services  
Support Specialist



Kendra Fortin  
Research and Advocacy  
Support Specialist



Angela Lee  
Accountant



Grace Wilson  
Systems Specialist



Kristie DiNardo  
Product Development  
Specialist



## 2023 Board of Directors

**Jeff Payne**

Town of Newmarket

**Romas Keliacius**

City of Hamilton

**Kyle Barber**

YMCA of Oakville

**Juanita Bueschleb**

Lifesaving Society Ontario

**Aaron Karmazyn**

Town of East Gwillimbury

**Kari Lambe**

Loyalist Township

**Darryl McWilliam**

Town of Oakville

**Dexter Slater**

Recreation Professional

**Katie Misener**

University of Waterloo

**Ray Mensour**

City of Windsor

**Jeff Pafford**

City of Greater Sudbury



# Until our paths cross again

## Message from our Chair

This past year was a season of significant transformation for Parks and Recreation Ontario. While COVID-19 is further in our rearview, its cascading impacts have undoubtedly changed the parks and recreation sector forever. Throughout 2023, I connected with our Members, listening to the challenges and opportunities they face in their daily work. Our membership includes professionals at all career stages – from post-secondary students to Directors and CEO’s. What ties us together is our shared value for enhancing the health and well-being of all Ontarians through parks and recreation.

Our sector’s changing landscape requires that PRO remain a dynamic and responsive organization. In April 2023, PRO’s Board of Directors identified Kim Gavine as the leader best suited to steer PRO through its next evolution. Kim brings more than 30 years of experience in the conservation sector, having worked for both governmental and non-governmental organizations. Since Kim stepped into the role of CEO, PRO has undergone significant development including digital transformations and increased advocacy efforts.

Looking to 2024, the Board is eager to undergo our own transformation. First, I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to Shari Lichterman, who served as Chair at the outset of 2023, and to all the Board of Directors. Their tireless dedication and invaluable contributions across all areas of PRO’s work have been instrumental in our continued success. This year, several Board Directors are concluding their terms. While we extend our deepest appreciation and gratitude for their

service, we also seize this opportunity to recruit new Board members that are representative of our diverse membership.

Over the next 12 months, I look forward to collaborating with our newly appointed Board members to develop PRO’s strategic plan, mapping the coming years of organizational direction and expansion. This plan will include extensive digital transformation, a robust inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility plan, and meaningful approaches to Indigenous engagement.

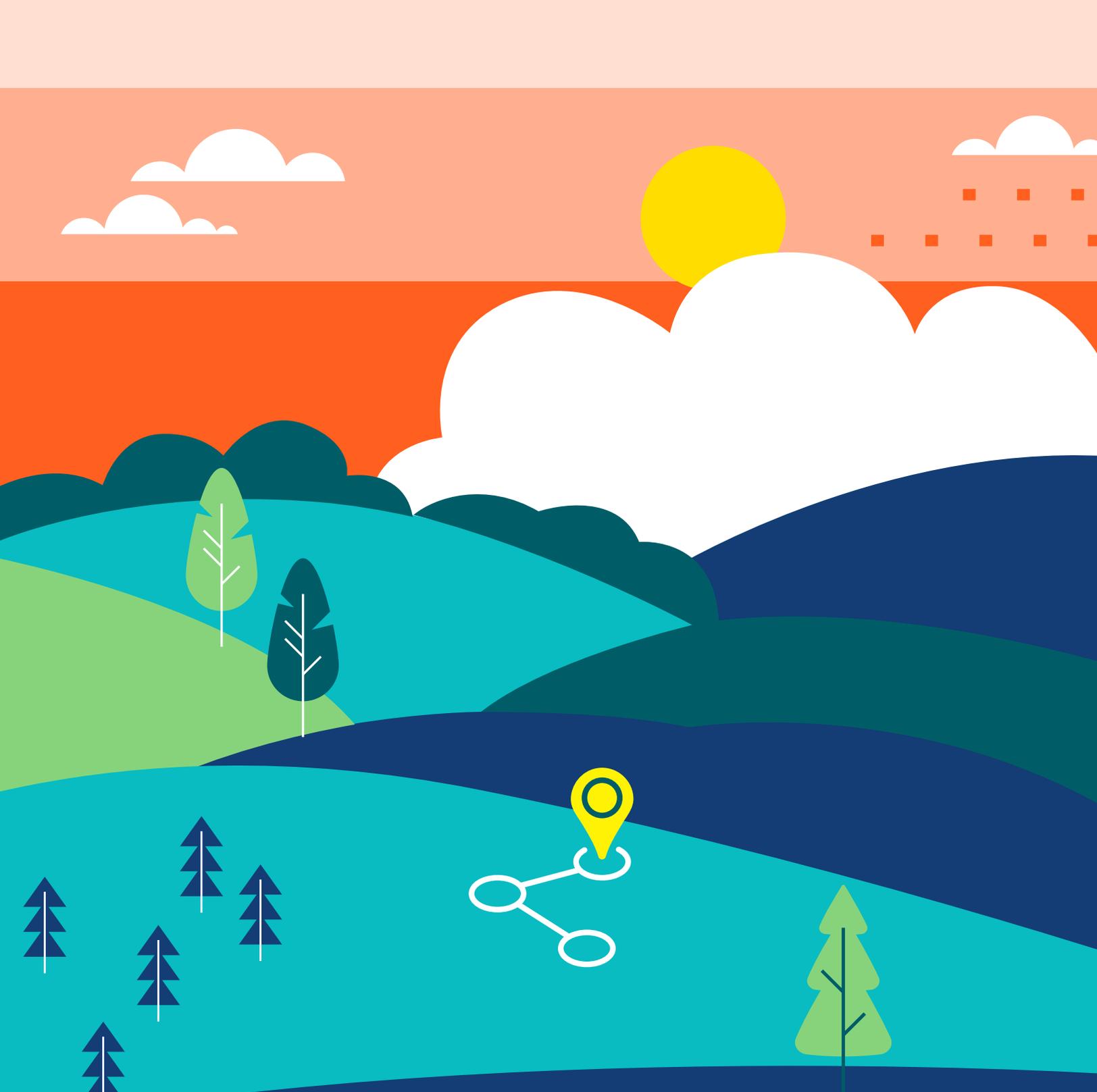
We acknowledge that our sector is facing serious stressors. Aging infrastructure, staffing shortages, and increased service demands challenge our Members daily. However, the Board remains confident that PRO is well prepared to advocate for and represent the interests of all parks and recreation professionals across Ontario.

Collectively, we must embrace a transformative vision for the sector, reimagining the role that parks and recreation might play in all facets of civic life, whether it be economic growth, climate change mitigation, or social welfare.

On behalf of the Board, thank you for continued commitment to improving access and equity to parks and recreation in Ontario. Your work enhances the daily lives of Ontarians, creating healthier and more connected communities.

Yours in wellness,  
Jeff Payne





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