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‘Keep using your voice’; Mother-daughter referee duo advocates for girls in hockey

Huntsville’s Kerri Vallentin and her daughter Ainslie are making an impact in girls’ hockey. The pair is advocating for equality and growth in the sport.



Mom Kerri Vallentin and daughter Ainslie Vallentin refereeing at the Lake of Bays Community Centre Arena in Baysville on Dec 21. Ainslie wears a green arm band — [an initiative](#) to identify young referees/officials and combat any form of abuse toward them.

Megan Hederson photo

A mother and daughter find common ground on the ice, both as players and referees in the world of hockey.

Equality and growth for girls hockey

Kerri Vallentin said when their family moved to Huntsville in 2010, there weren’t many options or programs for girls’ hockey.

“My girls were little at the time. They wanted to play. Their friends wanted to play. There was stuff for the boys, but not the same opportunities for girls,” she said.

Back then, most of the struggle was finding ice time to reserve. The hockey association was working with townships and municipalities in the area, searching for arena space for the girls to practice and compete.

“Equality in sports really helps us at a local level to create ice parity among user groups,” said Vallentin, who is also the board president of the [Huntsville Girls Hockey Association](#).

Now, she said the Lake of Bays arena in Baysville is their “home ice” and the township has been “amazing” in providing space and time for the teams. Huntsville has also carved out some time for them as more girls take an interest in hockey and the organization continues to expand.

“In the last 13-14 years we’ve grown to 13 girls teams plus a women’s team — which is wonderful,” Vallentin said.

Refereeing runs in the family

“I saw my mother and my older sister reffing on the ice ... I was like, that’s a cool job, and I know hockey, so I’ll give it a try. It’s nice to see that the girls can play their games — otherwise, without refs, they can’t,” Vallentin’s daughter, Ainslie said.

Now that Ainslie is 17, she’s taken on the responsibility to teach another young woman about refereeing. Her advice to others just starting out, or those looking to progress in the sport, is to keep at it.

She encourages girls who face challenges or unequal treatment to continue standing up for themselves and supporting each other — because everyone deserves the chance to play.

“Keep using your voice to advocate for yourself and other girls ... It’s definitely a great sport for team-building and from a personal level. The No. 1 thing is to have fun,” she said.

Ainslie started hockey when she was eight, and instantly loved it. She’s now in her second year of refereeing. Vallentin said it’s “uplifting” to share her passion for hockey with her daughter.

“I like that she’s developing the confidence to go out there and manage a game. It’s a tough environment ... and it can be an unforgiving space. So when we see young officials out there, the take-home message is these kids work really hard to get to where they are ... Kudos to every young person who has donned the stripes,” Vallentin said.

HGHA and its upcoming hockey tournament

The association offers hockey programs for girls starting at age 4, focusing on skating and hockey skills in a fun, supportive environment.

Teams from U9 to U18 compete in the North Simcoe/Muskoka Girls House League, a travel league with teams from Huntsville, Barrie, Orillia, Collingwood, and Midland. The season features 18 games, weekly practices, and two tournaments (one home, one away).

“I think we run the largest event in the community,” Vallentin said, referring to the [annual hockey tournament](#), now in its 46th year.

The tourney will feature 70 teams along with their coaches, parents, and friends, who will stay in hotels across Gravenhurst, Bracebridge, Huntsville, and beyond for the event on Jan. 10-12. The games are scheduled in the Baysville arena, Huntsville’s Summit Centre, and Burk’s Falls arena.

Girls and women are always welcome to join in any capacity: playing, refereeing, scorekeeping, etc. They can reach out to hgha@hotmail.ca for more information.