



## *Joseph Yankanna*

Joe Yankanna is an advocate for youth, inspiring them to be confident, self-assured and to overcome challenges to achieve excellence in their lives. He leads with passion and determination, removing barriers and creating opportunities for our youth. When you meet Joe, it becomes readily apparent that he uniquely possesses the qualities it takes to make a difference in the lives of our youth.

Joe grew up in East Vancouver and attended John Oliver High School at a turbulent time with the prevalence of race discrimination, gang affiliation and violence. He saw firsthand the plight of his friends and peers. His passion for sports provided an outlet for him, where he played highschool basketball and football and excelled as a leader and player. By grade 12, he was a provincial football champion and all-star and was selected to the inaugural Team BC football team. He went on to pursue his football career, playing 3 seasons with the Surrey Rams and the University of Manitoba Bisons.

Out of these experiences, a passion was ignited for Joe to dedicate his life to our youth. He began as a mentor, coach, and volunteer at the local community centres, often with vulnerable and at-risk youth. Joe went on to work with the Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Vancouver, where he honed his skills and excelled, becoming the Program Coordinator at the North Vancouver Boys and Girls Club for 13 years.

Joe was driven to do more to expand his outreach, particularly to vulnerable and at-risk youth. In association with his lifelong friend Will Loftus (“Will”), Game Ready Fitness was established, and Joe ventured out on his own, starting at the bottom of the proverbial ladder. He initially began coaching and mentoring youth out of local community centres. This quickly grew to Joe opening his own Game Ready Fitness youth centre in North Vancouver while Will opened an identical centre in Cloverdale. The centre is fully equipped with a gym, classroom, and games room and the doors are open to all youth. The centre is a place of refuge for at-risk and vulnerable youth, who need somewhere safe to go where they are welcome and cared for.

Ultimately, Joe partnered with a charitable organization - the Washington Kids Foundation (Kyle Washington) - where the facility has grown in its size and scope. Joe developed physical literacy (learning in conjunction with exercise), self-confidence and leadership programs which are offered to all children and youth in North Vancouver, but also to communities in the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island. Joe has built a partnership with the North Vancouver School District which sees over 1500 children and youth attend the centre each year.

Joe’s commitment to our youth and what he has accomplished is a testimony to his character. He continues to live in his cherished East Vancouver community with his loving wife, Jennifer and his two children, Quinton (14) and Olivia (16).