

# Night time Yard Ball covers all life's bases

*Increasing participation in physical activity through community sport and active recreation*

This project is part of a VicHealth funding program known as PICSAR, which aims to increase participation levels in community sport and active recreation amongst people with disabilities and those from low socio-economic, Indigenous and new arrival communities.

## The organisation

Baseball Victoria is the peak body for the administration of the sport of baseball in Victoria. It conducts, encourages, promotes, advances, standardises, controls and administers all forms of the sport of baseball throughout Victoria.

## The project

This project uses Yard Ball, a flexible game involving minimal cost and people power to successfully introduce baseball into a community. It allows participants to overcome barriers to participation such as limited skill levels and is intended to provide recreation activities in a less structured way within all social settings throughout Victoria. The project employs a development officer who works with organisations such as Sports Focus, the Regional Sports Assembly located in Bendigo, and Victoria Police to showcase and expand the program both regionally and within the metropolitan area.



Local sporting identity Pam Dawkins. Photograph courtesy of *The Advertiser* (Bendigo), 16 February 2010.

## Local youth find new purpose through team work

### The story

Baseball is struggling 'big time' in the Bendigo region. Club numbers are down with some clubs on the verge of folding due to low participation rates.

A committed partnership and plenty of hard work between the Bendigo Baseball Association and Baseball Victoria, has

resulted in the development of a number of new initiatives aimed at increasing local interest in the sport.

One of these initiatives is *Night time Yard Ball* – an activity aimed at engaging young people 'at risk' in the Bendigo area.

More information about Participation in Community Sport and Active Recreation (PICSAR) is available on the VicHealth website at: [www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/picsar](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/picsar)

The idea was to run a modified game of baseball (Yard Ball) inside stadiums between the hours of 9pm and 12am one night a week for eight weeks. Baseball Victoria met with Victoria Police and together decided to target the program to a specific group of young people in the area. The decision was made to engage young people who were first time offenders or those who were constantly bumping up against the law.

Baseball Victoria wanted to offer this group of young people an activity they could come to, relax and just be themselves. While there, they would also participate in physical activity, connect with their local community and hopefully feel good about succeeding at something.

As some of these young people lived on the streets, Baseball Victoria also wanted the program to provide them with somewhere to go to have fun and provide a chance to be kids again. It was also hoped that the program would allow the participants the opportunity to develop leadership qualities through gaining coaching skills.

Local sporting and community identity Pam Dawkins, worked tirelessly to get the program up and running in the Bendigo area and was a major conduit between the young people and the agencies involved.

The program was a real hit. Not only did some of the Yard Ball participants move into the mainstream baseball league in Bendigo, but the Yard Ball program itself seemed to grow and grow from week to week.

Positive spin-offs from the nights were noticed. There were many benefits experienced by the young people and by the wider community. For example, many participants returned to the Yard Ball program and help out by running the games, coaching teams and providing leadership to the young people who have just joined the program.

Also, Baseball Victoria indicates that after running the program for a year, re-offending rates among the young people dropped dramatically.

Baseball Victoria believes that *Night time Yard Ball* demonstrates that sport is an effective way of engaging this special group of young people. Participation gives them something to look forward to, a sense of purpose and a new direction in life. The program shows that there are many untapped resources that can, when discovered and connected, help sustain sport, sporting clubs and local communities.

For more information on  
Baseball Victoria go to:  
[www.baseballvictoria.com.au](http://www.baseballvictoria.com.au)  
or telephone: (03) 9645 8000

## PICSAR

Sport and active recreation organisations are well placed to assist VicHealth in addressing the health inequalities that result in poorer health outcomes for many groups in the community.

They have a tradition of providing opportunities for individuals and groups to:

- participate in physical activity,
- connect with other members of the community,
- feel part of their local community, and
- develop knowledge and skills that can be used in a range of contexts.

The Participation in Community Sport and Active Recreation (PICSAR) Program comprises three funding programs:

- State and Regional Grants
- Active Participation Grants
- Active Club Grants

The first two programs are long-term investments that work with State Sporting Associations, Regional Sports Assemblies, statewide peak agencies and regional organisations to increase participation in physical activity in specific target populations.

A learning snapshot from the independent evaluation being conducted by Monash University/ ARTD Consultants shows that:

1. partnerships are perceived as beneficial to program delivery
2. it is important that staff (paid or voluntary) have the required skills to implement activities
3. sports at all levels should consider adapting policies and activities to provide greater flexibility to promote inclusion.