

Gearing up clubs to be more inclusive

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

GippSport is a Regional Sports Assembly that covers the six municipalities in the Gippsland region and has offices in Newborough, Bairnsdale, Sale and Wonthaggi.

GippSport's aim is to connect local people of all abilities with sport and recreation opportunities in their community, and to increase community understanding of the barriers and enablers for participation in sport and active recreation.

The project

GippSport aims to increase participation in community sport and active recreation in a region characterised by widespread pockets of disadvantage and inequality. The project aims to realise the social, physical and health benefits of increased participation. A range of integrated strategies will include: developing and strengthening partnerships with key stakeholders and organisations; increasing the capacity of sports clubs to be more welcoming and inclusive; promoting integrated approaches to reducing social disadvantage; providing knowledge, skills, resources and support; empowering community sport and recreation organisations to increase active participation; and raising awareness of the barriers to and enablers of active participation.



Jeremiah Daniels (Gippsland Soccer League) pursued by one of the Sudanese Stars. *Image courtesy of Bob Ashdown, (Falcons 2000).*

Throwing doors open to connect communities

The story

A *Welcoming and Inclusive Clubs* program developed by GippSport hopes to assist sporting clubs to open their doors to become more accepting, friendly and inviting. The program aims to get clubs thinking more about the people who make up their community, how to address community needs and, in turn, build viable and successful clubs and communities.

Patrick Kilday, GippSport Program Coordinator, says many clubs think they are inclusive and open, but upon reflection, can fall short in some areas.

“Our *Welcoming and Inclusive Clubs* kit contains an extensive self-assessment tool for clubs to see whether they really know their local community and if they are a welcoming club. We are hoping to open their eyes to the changing demographics of their local communities and help them

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

look at ways of addressing barriers to participation and to be generally more inviting," Patrick Kilday says.

Welcoming and inclusive clubs, GippSport states, are places without discrimination of age, income, race, religion, sexual orientation, gender, ability or education. They encourage involvement from all people and actively seek to remove physical, social and economic barriers to participation.

GippSports' program supports and encourages clubs to adopt inclusive policies and activities across the entire organisation. Its implementation is based around five steps; club attendance at a workshop, completion of a club checklist, a GippSport visit to a club committee meeting, the signing of a Club Commitment document and extensive promotion of the club as being welcoming and inclusive.

Patrick believes that it is important for clubs to get to know their community when preparing to become an inclusive club.

"Clubs are traditionally not great welcomers of change. Communities are now made up of people of diverse cultures and backgrounds, including newly arrived refugees and migrants. For their own survival, clubs need to be aware that communities are changing and club committees need to address this. There are enormous benefits to being a more open and community-driven club," adds Patrick Kilday.

The kit lists the many potential benefits for clubs that adopt more inclusive practices. These include an increase of memberships from participants and their families, an increase of potential volunteers to help with everyday tasks and a new enthusiasm from existing members. There is also the potential to develop new partnerships in the community, a greater diversity of members' skills and the harnessing of experiences, cross-cultural education and understanding.

GippSport's program helps clubs identify and address the key barriers which may prevent individuals from accessing sport and recreation opportunities. The program reinforces the significant role a club plays as a conduit to social connection and to fostering feelings of belonging and respect. It also highlights the role of a club as a valuable community meeting place.

"We want clubs to look at their community as a whole when addressing barriers to participation. For example, your mate might be struggling to pay the membership fees and may be too embarrassed to tell you. You can overcome this by offering different payment methods so everyone can afford it. We want clubs to think about how they can include everyone who wants to participate," says Patrick Kilday.

GippSport aims to roll out its pilot program to approximately 10 to 15 clubs over six local government areas during 2010. To help with the implementation, GippSport has identified a number of 'flagship' clubs – clubs that have a positive track record in addressing community needs and working in partnership to deliver programs.

"There are some soccer clubs and tennis clubs in Gippsland who are already working with new-arrival communities and people with a disability. Our local volleyball association has been actively and very successfully recruiting Sudanese players. We will be partnering with these clubs, who have already built community respect and trust and can be great role models for widely promoting our program of inclusion," says Patrick Kilday.

For more information on GippSport go to:
<http://www.gippsport.com.au>
Telephone: (03) 5135 8335

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.