

# Riders rein! Everyone saddling up for pony club

*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

The Pony Club Association of Victoria Inc. (PCAV) started in 1954 with seven clubs. These days, over 200 pony clubs around Victoria are represented by PCAV, with clubs divided into one of 10 regional zones. PCAV boasts a consistently strong annual membership base of 8,000. Riding members of the PCAV are up to 25 years of age and of all riding abilities. Pony club provides children and young adults with the opportunity to engage with those who share their love of horses and also to develop skills and understand the responsibility of caring for a live animal, which may enhance their personal development.

## The project

PCAV supports the inclusion of riders with a disability into mainstream sport by increasing awareness and developing opportunities for them. The program focuses on ability and level of skill not the rider's disability. This project promoted and provided inclusive coaching to all instructors in the state. During 2009–11, the inclusive coaching training is being rolled out to 1,500 instructors in nine regions, to broaden the participation base of people with a disability. This will increase participation, with all coaches equipped to offer inclusive coaching and more riders with a disability being able to attend local pony clubs.



Sally Francis, PCAV Coach, explains a few of the finer points to three aspiring young horsewomen.

## Barriers prove to be a valuable lesson in getting program on track

### The story

The PCAV learnt a lot on the job in the past 12 months. Former Executive Officer, James Fitzpatrick, had the task of implementing the *Inclusive Coaching and Riding Program* across hundreds of Victorian pony clubs. Initially, the organisation had a plan that it thought was infallible.

"We were powering along, really excited about this new program. We assumed we would get a really great response, we couldn't see any reasons why the clubs wouldn't want to embrace it," he says. The initial stages of development went without a hitch.

Clare Lewin, PCAV State Coaching Director, wrote the Pony Club Australia (PCA) *National Coaching Accreditation Scheme Manuals* containing the Inclusive Coaching Modules. Clare received input and consultation from the PCA coaching panel, Riding for the Disabled Association Australia (RDAA) and Ridability Victoria. The PCAV coordinated the inaugural PCA national workshop which launched the competency-based training scheme. Sport Education Victoria facilitated assessor training as part of the workshop. Assessors, trainers and mentors were recruited from clubs and PCAV was ready to roll the program out club by club across Victoria over two years.

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 first pilot club we targeted in East Gippsland was great. We received really positive feedback and four coaches were assessed as being competent to implement the program. Our plan was then to go to four other clubs to provide a larger sample size for this as our pilot introduction.”

“The clubs’ reactions made us see that an up-and-running proven program is more enticing to clubs than one that is new and untested. We needed to assure clubs that we wouldn’t assess them until they are ready. It was important to let them know that we’d look after them and give as much help as possible,” James Fitzpatrick says.

Based on feedback received from the clubs, the PCAV made significant changes to the implementation of the program. The PCAV gives the clubs a number of choices to make program implementation easier. Clubs can sign on with another club to run the program jointly, or can opt out altogether. The PCAV has also modified its initial expectations based on the experiences of those training coaches.

“We wanted 100 per cent compliance from all the coaches. We are now aiming for 80 per cent with the view that this proportion can educate the other 20 per cent.” The PCAV’s message to other sports is that listening to feedback and monitoring a new program’s implementation can be used to refine and improve pilot programs.

In the first 12 months, PCAV has assessed 349 coaches in 57 clubs. The program continues to receive positive feedback and is making an enormous difference to the clubs, the coaches and the lives of riders with a disability, who love being part of a pony club. There are currently 183 newly trained coaches in clubs and this number continues to grow.

Furthermore, the implementation of this project with its innovative coaching principles and inclusive training has also seen an increase in riders with a disability. At the completion of the first year, a survey of well over 200 participants demonstrated tremendous support for and collaboration with the program.

In particular, the partnership between PCAV and Ridability Victoria has given many riders with a disability a new mobility and freedom to thrive in a mainstream sport. Significant outcomes of this partnership were the field visits to riders and exemption panel endorsements of riders. The most successful result of all was seeing the new riders with disabilities and inclusive coaches embracing the program. This sport is honouring its commitment to being inclusive and welcoming at a local club level.

For more information on the Pony Club Association of Victoria go to: [www.ponyclubvic.org.au](http://www.ponyclubvic.org.au); email: [office@ponyclubvic.org.au](mailto:office@ponyclubvic.org.au) Telephone: (03) 8685 8925

## 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.