

Tips for clubs and community programs seeking to increase migrant and refugee community participation in sport

Participation in sports has the potential to improve health, wellbeing, social inclusion and meaningful engagement in Australian society for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. And yet, young people from these communities have lower participation rates in organised sport than young people whose parents were born in Australia.

The following tips come from the [University of Melbourne's Count Me In \(CMI\) program](#), which was very successful in getting young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to participate in sport. A key feature of the project was to employ bilingual Community Support Coordinators (CSCs) to recruit families, promote the benefits of sports participation, connect young people and families to clubs and support their registration and participation.



Tips on what to look for in a Community Support Coordinator

The connection created between the families and the club by the Community Support Coordinator was key to the success of this trial and it should be noted that the CSCs were paid for their work.

For example, local clubs in the Moreland and Hume LGAs were approached by the CSCs to invite them to be involved as partnering clubs in the Count Me In program. Clubs provided information and trial sessions, as well as registration fee, training and match day details that the CSC would be able to share with interested families. The CSC established themselves as the key communication link between club personnel and families, to introduce the family to the club and to make sure the club provided a welcoming environment throughout the season.

Here's a checklist of the qualities to look for in a good CSC:

- has a strong connection to the migrant and refugee community/ies
- is bilingual and bicultural
- has well-developed interpersonal skills to be effective in encouraging and facilitating families to join clubs
- has access to knowledge to enable them to promote the value of sports participation
- is available at weekends and on the evenings to welcome participants to registration days and initial training sessions
- can encourage effective and ongoing communication with families to address barriers and help maintain participation at the club.



Tips for clubs on welcoming participants from different communities

Taking the time to have an upfront – and ongoing – conversation with participants and their families about any cultural or personal barriers and suggestions for inclusion will help families maintain participation at the club.

People from migrant and refugee communities will feel more welcome if club personnel:

- make an effort to greet new families
- provide an explanation of how the club works
- teach families about the commitment required to participate at a local sports club, and do not assume they are aware of requirements
- have an open and welcoming 'can do' attitude
- have an appreciation of diverse cultures and learn how to accommodate different norms
- discuss and accommodate specific religious and cultural issues (e.g. offer halal or vegetarian food options, female only programs)
- explain the uniform and/or equipment requirements and flexible with these (e.g. accommodate full length uniforms or head scarfs)
- take a flexible approach to collecting fees (e.g. payment plans or approve reduction for hardship cases)
- talk about the various volunteer positions and help families become involved.



Tips on creating a culturally safe environment at your club

Don't be afraid to have an open discussion about issues that affect participation by migrant and refugee families and how these can be accommodated.

For example, Badminton Victoria (BV) worked with Count Me In to develop an indoor badminton program exclusively for females, providing a culturally-safe space for those uncomfortable in a mixed-gender and/or outdoor non-private environment.

For some migrant and refugee families, club personnel can encourage participation if they:

- consider providing female-only environments on specific days (i.e. female coach, all female team, indoor space)
- accommodate Muslim families by providing Halal or vegetarian food and discussing sensitivities around alcohol at club functions
- discuss the possibilities for participation during the month of Ramadan
- celebrate or recognise important celebrations of other cultures.



Tips on educating participants new to sport in Australia

Education for migrant and refugee families about the commitment required to participate at a local sports club is critical. Don't assume people understand the sports system in Australia.

Tips to hold an initial and ongoing discussion educating new participants – talk about:

- the importance of consistent and punctual attendance at weekly training and matches
- the need to communicate with the team manager or coach as soon as possible if unable to attend training or matches
- bringing a water bottle, appropriate sports shoes and any special equipment
- the requirement to purchase a uniform (consider providing second-hand options if possible)
- the idea that sports clubs are usually run by parents volunteering their time (it is important to discuss and support options for volunteering, as this helps families feel a part of the club and allows them to meet other parents).

For further information

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VicHealth acknowledges the support
of the Victorian Government.

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August 2020

<https://doi.org/10.37309/2020.PA881>

