

Inclusive boxing program produces life-changing results

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

Boxing Victoria Inc. promotes and encourages the sport of amateur boxing. It does this by promoting amateur boxing competitions and ensuring compliance with the rules and regulations governing the sport. Its community programs aim to promote boxing as an inclusive, safe and welcoming sport and recreation option for all people.

The project

The Boxing Victoria PICSAR project engages culturally and linguistically diverse communities, new arrivals and low socio-economic communities in boxing programs. It involves partnering with the Police Citizens and Youth Clubs, Centre for Multicultural Youth, the Salvation Army, RecLink and the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS). The project recruits and establishes new members and gyms for these population groups. Boxing Victoria is hoping that after assisting with the initial set-up, the gym programs can become self-sufficient. The program began with 63 people attending, and now has around 200 members across Victoria.



Participants learning the movement skills of amateur boxing. *Image courtesy of La Rosa Boxing.*

Changing lives through coaching, inclusion and community acceptance

The story

Nick La Rosa, board member and Coach Coordinator for Boxing Victoria, is passionate about boxing and keen to demonstrate the sport's contribution to community physical and mental wellbeing.

"There are many myths associated with boxing. Boxing is a safe and inclusive sport that provides opportunities for physical activity and social connection for many people who would normally fall through the cracks of society," he says.

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

Boxing has traditionally attracted a wide range of people and population groups. Nick believes a boxing gym provides a sense of place and belonging to an extraordinarily diverse range of people.

“People who may be seen as ‘outsiders’ in society can walk into a gym and see other people like them who are at a similar point in their lives. There is a sense of order in a gym that many people with chaotic lives may not get anywhere else. A boxing gym provides structure, discipline and acceptance. And for some, having a boxing coach may be the first time in their lives they have had someone looking after them,” says Nick La Rosa.

Boxing Victoria believes it is a different organisation compared to what it was before it embarked on its PICSAR program.

“The resources and focus from PICSAR have enabled us to learn more about our community and develop partnerships with key bodies that allow us to reach out to vulnerable people in a way that we would never have been able to before”, adds Nick La Rosa.

A program run in conjunction with the Salvation Army, ReCLink and a Collingwood gym targets homeless people, encouraging them to skip, punch bags and train in a welcoming environment with accredited coaches. The program has quickly attained valuable street credibility, with approximately 30 people participating on a weekly basis.

“People don’t realise that only one out of 100 people who walk into a boxing gym actually go on to compete. The other 99 people are positively affected in some way through getting fitter and through the sense of camaraderie and discipline that the gym environment fosters,” Nick said.

The Police Citizens and Youth Club in Dandenong has also proven to be a valuable and complementary partner assisting with the implementation of an extensive statewide program for multicultural youth.

“Our association with the police has been fantastic. They have provided us with a great link to the community and their networks have enabled us to get this program up in over 20 gyms across Victoria. We would not have had that reach without them,” Nick La Rosa says.

Previously, Boxing Victoria survived on few resources. Through sheer necessity it focused all of these resources on running tournaments and on developing athletes who were successful in competitions. Today, the organisation has a very different definition of success.

“Working in partnership has proven to us that providing structured, supported physical activity opportunities for people who normally wouldn’t get to access them can positively and profoundly affect the participants’ lives. Increasing the number of people who participate in sport is one thing, but changing someone’s life through this participation is immeasurable”, adds Nick La Rosa.

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.