

The library that encourages fun 'n games

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 among people with disabilities and those from low socio-economic, Indigenous and new-arrival communities.

The organisation

CHSA Sports Central is a not-for-profit organisation established to work with, and for, sport and active recreation groups within the Central Highlands region of Victoria. The organisation aims to build sustainable and inclusive environments for competitive and non-competitive sport and recreational pursuits within the community. Sports Central is a part of the state-wide network of Regional Sports Assemblies together forming the Regional Sports Network Victoria (RSNV). This peak body works to develop projects and advocate for regional sport and recreation across the state.

The project

With this project, Sports Central aims to increase individuals' opportunities to participate in sport and active recreation activities. A settings-based, community development approach is employed to help address health inequalities and increase participation. This project model includes a continual process of engagement, consultation, evaluation, review and refinement in partnership with the community to achieve sustainability. Inclusive and accessible opportunities are being further developed by promoting collaborative partnerships between key sport and community stakeholders.



Local school children inspecting equipment at the Sports Equipment Library launch. *Image courtesy of The Courier, Ballarat, reproduced with permission.*

Equipping families for free play

The story

Families in the Ballarat area can now have fun together and keep fit, thanks to a well-stocked, Sports Equipment Library. This free library aims to give everyone the opportunity to try items before they buy them, or to borrow instead of buying their own. The huge variety of equipment means that locals can borrow items such as tennis and squash racquets, cricket and croquet sets and even surf and body boards.

This project is the result of an innovative partnership between several agencies. Ballarat Community Health initially met with Sports Central and the Central Highlands Regional Library with the idea of establishing a community sports equipment library. The health centre had concerns about low levels of physical activity among the community and the health implications that could result. Their key aim was to increase access to physical activity options for those who normally couldn't afford 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

A strong commitment to the task and a mutual respect for each agency's expertise led to the development of a Sports Equipment Library. The idea was simple: by becoming a member of the local library, residents could also access sports equipment. This library would operate in a similar way to a normal library system with a library card. Equipment borrowing would be free but overdue fees would apply after the four-week borrowing period.

A library card system would also prove valuable in tracking who borrowed what equipment. Equipment was purchased with assistance from grant funds, local sports outlets and the health centre.

Initially, the Sports Equipment Library operated out of two Community Health Centres at Sebastopol and Wendouree. The project managers found that borrowing at these sites was limited as people did not associate the health centre as a place to borrow sports items. Realising they could benefit from more community advice, the project managers invited other local organisations to become part of a steering committee.

The new partners – Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council, Sebastopol Secondary College and Healthy Active Delacombe – have been instrumental in helping expand opportunities to better engage the target populations. The library now operates from seven sites: two at Ballarat Community Health; three Central Highlands Regional Library sites, one at Delacombe Neighbourhood Renewal and one at Sebastopol Secondary College. Additional items were purchased to ensure that each site has a good range of equipment.

Breanna Doody, former Program Coordinator from Sports Central, says this 'untraditional' partnership has been a great success for the agencies involved and the wider community.

"Due to this partnership we have given many people, who would otherwise not be able to afford it, the opportunity to

access sports equipment and to become more active at no cost to them. We are encouraging the community to have fun together while being physically active. We are also helping to reduce the barriers to local sporting opportunities for those who are financially disadvantaged."

Even though the library is popular, the project managers would like to see more people using it. The most popular items are mainly equipment for ball games such as basketballs, netballs and footballs. By providing a wide range of equipment, the library was hoping to encourage people to experiment with different games but it has found that most people tend to borrow familiar items.

To help overcome this, Breanna says the next stage for the project is a strategic marketing plan to help create an identity for the Sports Equipment Library. A logo has been developed and marketing activities will begin to target groups who are yet to access the equipment. A local Indigenous sporting identity will help with the promotions. Partnerships are also being developed with local multicultural and disability agencies to provide use of the equipment on special events days. Respected members of these communities will be asked to endorse the library.

As Breanna states, "This project has shown that great things can spring out of what appear to be unlikely collaborations. It has allowed us to recognise the necessary elements of a great partnership. Our experience shows that it is important to be flexible and be willing to compromise, to be committed and most importantly, to listen to and trust the partners you are working with."

For more information on
CHSA Sports Central go to: [http://
centralhighlands.sportslink.org.au](http://centralhighlands.sportslink.org.au)
Telephone: (03) 5331 6966

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.