

The perfect match serves up tennis for all

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

Tennis Victoria is known for promoting the positive health, cultural, physical, mental and social benefits of tennis. It aims to make tennis a part of every Victorian's life, advancing tennis as Victoria's preferred sport. To achieve this it creates and implements innovative programs and services; develops players so they reach their potential; and fosters progressive and team-oriented administration.

The project

The aim of Tennis Victoria's PICSAR project is to increase the opportunities for people to be engaged in the sport and to ensure they feel part of a welcoming, sustainable and quality tennis environment. This will be achieved by increasing regional community awareness of Tennis Victoria, tennis associations and clubs. The project will focus on building the capacity of tennis clubs in rural and isolated communities, and providing opportunities for new and emerging community groups to participate in the sport.



Young participants enjoy a game of tennis. *Image courtesy of Tennis Victoria.*

Community program provides more than tennis lessons

The story

Tennis Victoria has been running many successful community-based programs for a number of years. However, during the development of its Strategic Plan in 2006, it noticed a gap in programs targeting newly-arrived communities. Due to the growing number of these in Victoria, Tennis Victoria decided to work with these groups to introduce tennis to people who traditionally have had limited exposure to the sport.

"Working with newly-arrived communities initially presented a big challenge for us. We had so much to learn about this group's barriers to participation. We had traditionally spent a lot of time, focus and funding on mainstream programs where barriers were minimal. It was very

difficult for us to know where to start," says Tim Hatzi, Tennis Victoria's Club and Programs Coordinator.

Tim identified a number of multicultural organisations he believed could help provide a better grasp of the issues Tennis Victoria was facing. The Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) provided valuable information on multicultural communities, their needs and ideas for further partnerships. The main barriers identified were language, financial costs, transport, the lack of understanding of structured sport (including tennis), and how to access it. These were all issues Tennis Victoria usually did not need to consider when developing participation programs.

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

Aware that AFL Victoria was a leader in delivering programs with multicultural communities, Tim also looked at their model and received insightful ideas applicable to Tennis Victoria's project.

Extensive consultations were held with migrant resource centres (particularly in the north-west and south-east metropolitan regions) and with Afghani, Sudanese, Somali and Iranian community leaders. As a result Tennis Victoria decided to trial a program in two large local government areas: Brimbank and Dandenong, and to focus on the Sudanese communities within these municipalities.

Tennis Victoria realised very quickly that previous strategies used to engage communities would not be appropriate here. Holding an event such as an Open Day and expecting the community "to just show up" would be unrealistic.

"Imagine coming to a new country and your immediate needs are housing, employment, education and learning a new language. How could we expect people to be interested in a sport they knew little or nothing about when they had more urgent issues to face," Tim says.

To effectively deliver the project Tennis Victoria realised it would need to build a mutually trusting relationship with the community. They began identifying organisations that already had a direct link to the Sudanese community, hoping to partner with them. Through chance, Tim read about an organisation, Sudanese Australian Integrated Learning Program (SAIL) in his local paper. SAIL provides voluntary English tuition on Saturdays to primary school-aged Sudanese children in the areas Tennis Victoria was targeting.

Tennis Victoria approached SAIL and asked if they would be open to the idea of including tennis in their classes as an alternative fun activity where the children could extend their English lessons. By coincidence, SAIL had already introduced activities such as cooking into their classes for exactly this reason, and thought tennis would be a perfect fit.

So far, Tennis Victoria, in partnership with coaches from Dandenong Tennis Club and Our Lady's Tennis Club, Sunshine, has conducted eight four-week tennis programs with over 160 Sudanese children.

The program has been running very smoothly, Tim says, largely due to the benefits of working in partnership with the right organisation.

"The beauty of a partnership is that you are not alone. You share the responsibilities, combine resources and work on solutions together," he says.

Tennis Victoria has since expanded its multicultural program into the Footscray and Werribee areas. The program has resulted in new club memberships. However, as the costs of these memberships are subsidised, Tennis Victoria is eager to look at ways of creating sustainability for the clubs and the participants.

"We have created awareness of and interest in the sport with the multicultural program. Through coaching and participation in local clubs, we are trying to increase sustainable participation for everyone. This may take many years but we hope that by playing the sport, these new communities will one day see it as an integral part of their lifestyle," Tim says.

Tennis Victoria's multicultural program is a fine example of the elements of a successful partnership. It demonstrates the value of doing your research, identifying the right partners, developing mutual trust and setting goals that are beneficial to everyone. It's when *participation* for all serves an ace.

For more information on Tennis Victoria go to: www.tennisvic.com.au
Telephone: (03) 8420 8420

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.