

Girls just want to have fun – *All Nations Women's Cup*

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

Football Federation Victoria (FFV) administers the sport of football (soccer) in the state and aims to provide the best possible football experiences and opportunities for participants and partners. FFV's vision is for football to provide genuine access, value and quality experiences which inspire Victorians. The federation strives to increase participation through various levels from grassroots to elite, including administration and education for match officials and coaches.

The project

The All Communities project is aimed at newly-arrived, refugee and culturally and linguistically diverse young people throughout Victoria. It provides regular participation opportunities through schools and communities at a low cost. FFV provides education on the culture of sport in Australia, the team environment, and the health benefits of sports participation. Leadership opportunities are provided through coach and referee education, team management and first aid training. Multicultural awareness and inclusion training is also provided for partner clubs giving them the tools to engage local community groups and integrate them into the club.



All Nations Women's Cup winners for 2009 – Little Brazil. *Image courtesy of the Ethnic Youth Council at Spectrum MRC, reproduced with permission.*

Cultural partnerships kick-start footy program

The story

In 2007, FFV identified the need for a physical activity program for young women from multicultural backgrounds that would also address their cultural and religious beliefs.

From this, a pilot football program was created by FFV specifically targeting young women from Sudanese, Somali and Eritrean backgrounds living in Carlton.

Culturally, sport was not seen as a particularly important activity for these young women. To address this, FFV developed crucial relationships with the young women's families which enabled them to explain the important role sport can play in people's lives. Lack of money, the need for uniforms and transport issues were identified as significant barriers to participation. FFV was committed to creating a program that was accessible and sustainable.

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

The success of this pilot program and the learnings drawn from it has enabled FFV to implement several other programs across Victoria in partnership.

To help facilitate these state-wide programs for young women, volunteer working groups were established. Immediate set-up tasks included developing weekly rosters, recruiting coaches, providing transport (if required), building relationships with families, linking with local clubs and providing general support to the participants.

Each working group is made up of representatives from several different organisations including local councils, multicultural resource centres (led by Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre), Victoria Police, youth workers, community leaders, Centre for Multicultural Youth, VicSport and VICSEG (Victorian Co-operative on Children's Services for Ethnic Groups).

Without these partnerships in place, and countless valuable volunteer hours, these programs would not survive. FFV found that the most important partnership however, is between the families, participants and the organisers. The trust developed is the glue that keeps the programs running.

Participants train on a weekly basis with qualified coaches. The objective of each program is not only to introduce and develop the skills of the young women but also to provide a comfortable environment where they can feel safe.

The popularity of these programs saw the state-wide working groups come together to look at providing a 'real' competition for the young women to play in. This resulted in the development of the *All Nations Women's Cup*, a round robin competition held four times a year during the school holidays. Each competition runs over a day with uniforms, equipment, referees and lunch all provided. A presentation and giveaways feature at the end of the day's competition.

Currently, 15 participants from these programs are now involved in club football, with two participants selected in the Victorians Champions League – FFV's elite competition. Participants in these programs were also exposed to other opportunities to become involved in football. Courses were offered in coaching and refereeing, with an estimated 14 players completing the referee's course and eight completing the grassroots coaching course. The participants also had the chance to attend and participate in W-League Melbourne Victory half time small-sided football.

Each of these programs is unique, but they all provide young women from a range of multicultural communities with the opportunity to play sport in a social capacity and expose them to opportunities in coaching, refereeing and volunteering.

Many components contribute to creating a program that is accessible, sustainable and culturally appropriate. The All Communities Project with its dedicated mix of the right partners, a pool of loyal volunteers, strong community relationships and a committed lead agency shows how to get it right.

For more information on
Football Federation Victoria go to:
www.footballfedvic.com.au
or telephone: (03) 9474 1833

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.