

Communication the key to a more inclusive leisure environment

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

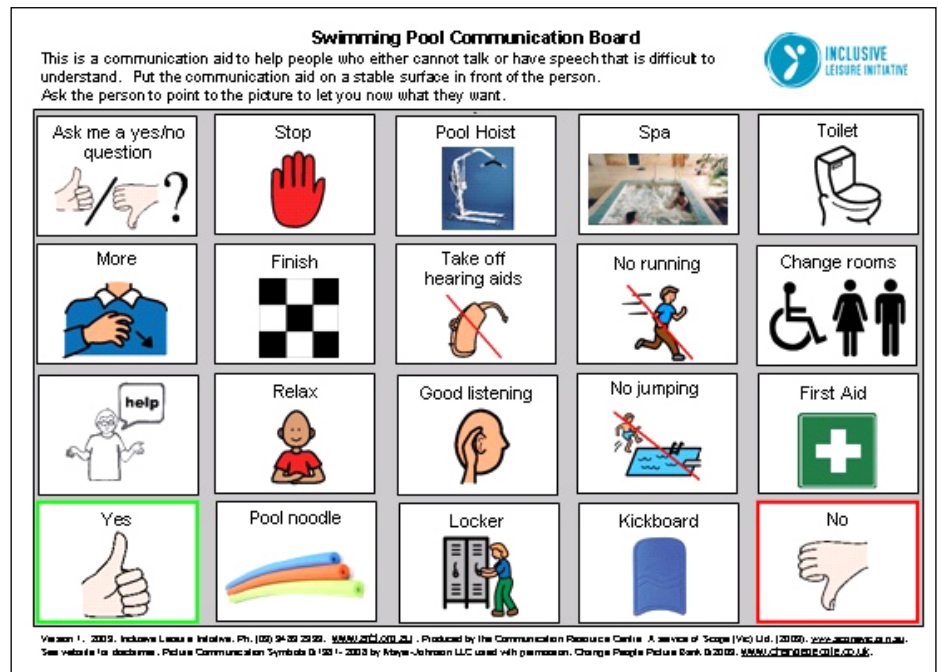
Inclusive Leisure Victoria (ILV) – formerly VICNORD – is a disability organisation that works within the sport, recreation and disability sectors in Victoria. ILV advocates for the inclusion of people with disabilities, so they can participate in sport and recreation opportunities of their choice.

As part of the Inclusive Leisure Initiative (ILI), ILV has partnered with Aquatics & Recreation Victoria (ARV), the peak agency for the leisure industry. Together, the two organisations are working towards establishing inclusive standards for leisure centres.

The project

The ILI is a four-year pilot project that aims to increase opportunities for people with a disability to become physically active by creating inclusive leisure centre environments. This is achieved through: building industry capacity; increasing understanding of barriers; developing resources; establishing inclusive standards; and advocating for the needs of people with a disability.

The pilot program currently being rolled out at 13 leisure centres focuses on eight key action areas: accessible equipment; disability sector resources; staff training; leisure education; policies and procedures; physical access; marketing and communications.



The swimming pool communication card is one of a series of cards being piloted by 13 leisure centres across Victoria as part of the Inclusive Leisure Initiative, a project which aims to make leisure centres more accessible for people with a disability. *Image courtesy of Hanna Phillips. Reproduced with permission from the Inclusive Leisure Initiative.*

Opening the doors to more inclusive leisure activities

The story

An innovative partnership between Inclusive Leisure Victoria (ILV) and the Communication Resource Centre (CRC) – Scope has resulted in the development of a valuable communication resource for the leisure industry in Victoria. The resource aims to support people with a disability to better participate in leisure centre activities.

The communication resource – a series of communication cards – is the latest product developed by the *Inclusive Leisure Initiative*.

ILV asked CRC – Scope to develop a communication resource specific to the leisure industry, which would meet the needs of people with a disability and the industry. A year-long consultation process ensued with the leisure industry, disability organisations, and people with a disability.

During the consultation, a number of research methods were used by CRC – Scope, ILV and ARV with project stakeholders. This included focus groups, where people with disabilities were asked to share their experiences of leisure centres.

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

Hanna Phillips, the *Inclusive Leisure Initiative* Project Coordinator, says a common theme raised during the consultations was the strong need for welcoming customer service staff in leisure centres.

“People with a disability really want to feel welcome at a leisure centre. The way they are treated at the front desk has an enormous impact on them. A place like a gym can be a very intimidating place for someone with a disability and they need to feel that support is available to them, and that they are welcome,” Hanna Phillips says.

ARV, through the help of a reference group representing lifeguards and teachers of swimming and water safety, was asked to submit a list of the most commonly used words and phrases in the aquatics area.

From here, CRC – Scope took the most appropriate words and phrases and developed a series of communication cards and support material. The support included fact sheets explaining how to use and maintain the resources.

Mindful that Ringwood and Northcote Aquatic Centres had been using communication cards within their facilities for over 20 years, ILV also consulted with staff from these two centres.

“Discussions with these two centres provided us with valuable feedback on the practicality of the resource for the industry. We were able to include the centres’ suggestions into the final product,” says Hanna Phillips. Scope also undertook user testing and incorporated suggested changes.

ILV developed new partnerships with speech pathologists already connected to Scope. Leisure centres were linked with speech pathologists in each pilot area across Victoria. The speech pathologists play a crucial role in provide ongoing support for leisure centre staff, and act as the local contact for any communication

needs (training, marketing tips, assistance with modifying communication cards specific to each centre, and so on).

ILV hopes that this approach will help ensure the sustainability of the project beyond the life of the pilot.

The communication cards are now being piloted statewide in 13 leisure centres. The cards are displayed at reception desks, in the gym, next to or in the swimming pool and in the café. Specific cards have been developed for lifeguards and teachers of swimming and water safety, to communicate phrases including; ‘Close your eyes’, ‘Float’, ‘Get out of the water’, or ‘Emergency’.

ILV believes the production of the resource highlights the importance of consultation and research to identify and meet the needs of the target group.

“Although this process has taken much longer than we first envisaged, by ensuring systematic processes are followed, we have been able to develop and deliver a quality resource for the leisure industry. This is taking us one step closer to developing an inclusive standard for the leisure industry,” adds Hanna Phillips.

For more information on Inclusive Leisure Victoria go to:
<http://www.afcl.org.au/ilv>
For more information on the *Inclusive Leisure Initiative* go to:
www.aquaticsandrecreation.org.au/inclusiveleisureinitiative
Telephone: (03) 9489 2999

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.