

Sailing into uncharted waters helps keep clubs afloat

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

Yachting Victoria is the state peak body for sailing and boating. There are 90 affiliated sailing and boating clubs within Victoria comprising 2000 members. The key strategic direction for Yachting Victoria is to develop greater junior and youth participation through greater community engagement.

The project

Yachting Victoria's program promotes sailing as an enjoyable, accessible, safe sport and a lifetime recreation for everyone. This project builds club capacity and develops appropriate programs to attract non-traditional participants, specifically people with a disability and young people from areas of socio-economic disadvantage. People with a disability are being engaged through the expansion of the *Sailability* Program, while young people are participating through the *Tackers* Program. Partnerships have been developed with *Sailability*, The Boatshed, Albert Park, Regional Sports Assemblies, local government and AAA (Access for All Abilities) Providers.



Out in the boats. Image courtesy of Rod Austin, The Boatshed Manager, Yachting Victoria.

'Kids and boats equals fun'

The story

In Victoria, the sport of sailing is boldly charting new territories. Since sailing is often perceived as expensive and exclusive, Yachting Victoria's new *Tackers* program sets out to challenge this.

Tackers is designed to increase participation in sailing for primary school-aged children and youth. It aims to foster a life-long love of sailing and continued participation among young people who would normally not be exposed to the

sport, especially those encountering social and economic barriers.

"Most yacht clubs are comprised of men aged over 40. The number of junior members has stagnated and sailing finds it really hard to capture and retain primary school-aged children. All clubs recognise that juniors are essential to their future", explains Daisy Brooke, Yachting Victoria's Sport Development Manager.

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

Yachting Victoria realised they needed to develop a program that was affordable, attractive and appealing to children and youth.

So *Tackers* uses low-cost, highly durable small boats and a structured program focused on learning basic movement and coordination skills. A low-cost 'kit' provides an 'identity' for the program, comprising brightly coloured t-shirts (with different colours for the three different skill levels), water bottles and caps. Participants do not need their own equipment as this is provided by the yacht club.

Tackers is delivered by professional, qualified young instructors, who promote non-competitive participation – making it an unique program in the sailing community.

Yachting Victoria first trialled *Tackers* with 30 Grade 6 students from Laverton P-12 College. The school had embraced sailing as its signature sport and was keen for the children to take part. Many children were from non-English-speaking backgrounds and had never travelled far from their local area.

Implementing the program with this group of students was an enlightening and invaluable experience for the instructors. They found that while the students were keen to give sailing a go, there were key issues that needed to be addressed urgently.

"Traditionally, sailing participants come from families who are actively involved in the sport and aren't anxious about water safety. But many of the Laverton children couldn't swim and found it very difficult to understand the concept of floating – they didn't trust that the boat would keep them afloat," says Daisy Brooke.

Therefore, changes were made to the program. *Tackers* is delivered at The Boatshed, Albert Park, which provides ideal opportunities for working with children. It is shallow, centrally located and sheltered, ensuring that children

wouldn't drift off to sea. At the start of training, the children are familiarised with water by doing activities in a swimming pool while wearing life jackets.

Another big issue was that for many of the children this program was their only physical activity. High numbers of overweight and obese children were observed. Yachting Victoria found through discussions with teachers that the most significant factor determining children's ongoing involvement in the sport was parental support.

Thus, Yachting Victoria is looking to offer physical activity programs for parents; for example, walking programs for parents while the children sail. Much time is also put into fostering relationships with parents and schools and linking them to sailing clubs. Family Days events are held where parents and siblings can enjoy a barbeque and experience the sport as a family.

Clubs are being encouraged to alter membership policies, provide more inclusive and welcoming environments and send out newsletters encouraging parental participation.

"We are now very keen to take our knowledge to other yacht clubs. We want to say 'here are some of the issues you'll face and the benefits you'll receive from being a more open, inclusive community club'," adds Daisy.

Tackers is the first consistently delivered and branded junior sailing program in Australia recognised and accredited by Yachting Australia. Yachting Victoria has produced a series of documents and resources to guide clubs on how to deliver this program. *Tackers* is a hands-on practical approach to help address social inclusion in yachting clubs.

For more information on
Yachting Victoria go to:
www.vic.yachting.org.au
Telephone: (03) 9597 0066

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.