

centre for multicultural youth issues



Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMYI)

**Multicultural Sport:
Sustaining a Level Playing Field**

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Setting the Agenda on Multicultural Youth Issues

1. The Playing Field

Australia is a country that is culturally, socially and economically enriched by its policy of multiculturalism. Over 44 per cent of Victorians were born overseas or have at least one parent born overseas, with nearly 20 per cent from countries where English is not the main language spoken.¹ Many Australians acknowledge the diverse backgrounds that shape Australia, however recent events such as September 11, the so called ‘Tampa Boat Crisis’ and the ‘Children Overboard’ claims have left a large amount of people apprehensive and wary of Australia’s intake of immigrants and refugees. Although media and the government of the day play a role in shaping society’s views, xenophobic feelings can also be attributed to a lack of understanding of the issues, needs and experiences of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) people.

One of the aims of this paper is to examine the issues associated with CLD young people’s involvement in sport and recreation. This is an area that is often overlooked by service providers as resettlement needs usually take a higher priority, particularly in the initial period of resettlement. ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) statistics reveal that young people from CLD backgrounds are dramatically under-represented in structured sport. This includes sport conducted by State Sporting Associations (bodies that represent individual sports throughout the state) and their affiliated clubs and competitions. 2001 ABS statistics show that of all people involved in organised sport or physical activity, persons who were born in Australia had a higher participation rate (26.8 per cent) than those born overseas in the main English speaking countries (22.0 per cent). And both of these rates were higher than the player participation rate for those born in non-english speaking countries (10.3 per cent).²

¹ Multicultural Affairs Unit, Victoria, *Counting on Diversity – Diversity in Melbourne: A sample from the 1996 census*. May 1999, Department of Premier and Cabinet.

² Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Involvement in Organised Sport and Physical Activity*. Cat. No. 6285.0, 2001, Canberra.

2. The Project

Research in this area is still in the early stages. The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) and Sport and Recreation Victoria (SRV) have recognised the need for research, documentation and the development of appropriate programs and in 1996 funded a research project by the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMYI). A subsequent report was produced entitled, “Sport – Creating a Level Playing Field”. As a result of recommendations from this report, CMYI was funded to undertake the current Multicultural Sport and Recreation project. The aim of the project is to address issues related to the participation of CLD young people in structured sport by developing and documenting programs as well as increasing links between sporting providers and ethnic communities.

CMYI has used the following methods to break down existing barriers and promote greater understandings between ethnic communities and sporting providers:

- Developing and documenting good-practice programs
- Holding forums
- Training
- Support
- Advocacy

3. Involvement in Sport

CMYI consultations have confirmed that in the past and still today, many sporting clubs have not sought a membership base outside of their current mainstream population groups. Groups often neglected in program development and membership drives include the disability, CLD, indigenous, low-income earners, women and the elderly. A typical drive for new members from these clubs may focus primarily on targeting children and young people at a local school, with the aim of inspiring an early interest in their sport.

More progressive SSAs and clubs have been active in including these alternative groups and individuals in their club programs. Others have just begun to realise the value of diversification, especially where the membership base is low. Recently, there has been a

shift in focus of grants and funding opportunities to promote under-represented groups and partnership based submissions. More progressive associations and clubs are taking advantage of this shift in focus. Surf Life Saving Victoria is an example of a SSA that has taken a pro-active approach in sourcing funding to employ a Participation Officer whose role is essentially to increase the cultural diversity of Surf Life Saving clubs' membership throughout Victoria.

The benefits associated with diversification are numerous. Higher rates of participation lead to increased club membership and a greater range of sports being played. This in turn correlates with improved financial gains for the club. Clubs also benefit from a broader understanding of other cultures as well as an increase in the number of skilled players, volunteers and administrators. The Victoria Cricket Association for example, has developed an "All Embracing Plan." One of the outcomes of the plan has been the involvement of people with disabilities in all areas of the sport, from competition to maintenance of club websites.

For participants, increased participation leads directly to improved physical and mental health. Social integration as well as a reduction in involvement in possible 'high risk' behaviour are also key outcomes. A study by the Australian Institute of Criminology reported that "It appears that sport and physical activity can reduce crime by providing accessible, appropriate activities in a supportive social context."³

4. Neglected Populations

Given the number of associated benefits cited above, why have groups such as the culturally and linguistically diverse been overlooked by sporting organisations for so long?

³ Cameron & MacDougall, *Crime Prevention Through Sport and Physical Activity*. September 2000, Canberra, General Editor, Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice series.

1. Recommendations...

Although there are some positive steps being taken to address cultural diversity in sport, there still is a great deal of work that needs to be done in order to sustain a level playing field.

7.1 There is a need for on-going funding and support

A current focus of many grants and funding opportunities is to support sustainable programs. This is a logical direction for funding bodies to take. However in reality sustainability is often extremely difficult to achieve. CLD groups as well as other marginalised groups have varied needs. This is especially the case with newly arrived immigrants or refugees who require intensive resettlement support. The barriers mentioned in this report exemplify the plethora of reasons why ongoing participation in organised sport is so difficult to achieve. The key to the development of programs and the linking of CLD groups into structured sport relies on education and on-going support from community workers and the sporting sector. Consequently, there is a significant need for increased funding and grant opportunities for sport and recreation initiatives in the community and sporting sector.

7.2 There is a need for Government and State Sporting Associations to pro-actively support cultural diversification policies and initiatives

Change on a grass-roots level will only occur if it is actively promoted and supported by policy makers and industry leaders. A responsibility lies with the sport and recreation arms of State Government and State Sporting Associations to promote changes including:

- Providing anti-discrimination education programs and policies;

- Initiating cross-cultural training for clubs and sporting providers to assist in the development of culturally appropriate programs and services. Clubs should also be encouraged to keep statistics on the cultural background of participants as part of their data collection;
- Including ethnic groups in sporting bodies' development programs and promotions. This includes targeting ethno-specific schools, organisations and events;
- In order for valuable community development programs to continue, there is a need for changes in current legislation relating to the cost of public liability insurance for community sporting programs.

7.3 There is a need to increase ethnic community groups' awareness of sporting bodies

Information on how CLD groups can access sporting facilities / clubs and their role within the community needs to be disseminated. Many CLD groups are unaware of how to access sporting clubs. With information comes knowledge and with knowledge comes the empowerment necessary for participation.

Sporting Associations and sporting providers need to play an active role in increasing links with CLD young people. Key stakeholders and organisations can be identified by establishing networks with ethno-specific service providers, schools and community groups. In Victoria, sporting providers are fortunate to have access to CMYI's multicultural sport & recreation officer who can assist in this initial networking process.

The responsibility of providing CLD groups with knowledge of organised sport rests not only with sporting bodies. Local government need to play a role in the education of their CLD residents by linking them to appropriate programs, clubs, sports, training and funding opportunities. Local governments should also have an

active working relationship with local ethnic service providers such as migrant resource centres, youth groups and ethnic community schools through which information can be disseminated.