

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.

The reasons for this are varied:

- If clubs are doing well and have a strong membership base, they may not see the need to further diversify;
- Developing new networks, programs and procedures may be seen as too difficult, too expensive or too time consuming for already over-stretched volunteers / staff;
- A lack of knowledge about the benefits associated with diversification;
- A lack of knowledge about the needs and backgrounds of specific cultural groups;
- A lack of knowledge about where to source assistance and support;
- A lack of awareness about available support options;
- Unwillingness to become culturally inclusive.

In order to address some of the above perceptions, there is a need to educate service providers and SSAs about the benefits of becoming more culturally inclusive. Cross-cultural training is another important key to the diversification process, including attempts to address the barriers preventing CLD young people participating in organised sport. Equipped with information, organisations may be more prepared to diversify.

5. Barriers preventing CLD young people's participation in sport...

Through extensive community consultation, research and program development, CMYI has identified a number of barriers preventing participation in sport. It was found that although CLD young people participate in sport on an informal level (i.e. at school or on a social basis) there are many reasons preventing the next step into structured sporting participation.

- **Lack of parental support**

The experience of resettlement in a new country is both difficult and daunting for the newly arrived. People are required to adjust to a different culture while also learning a new language. New social systems include health, education,

employment and accommodation. Unfamiliarity with procedures and support services can sometimes make accessing these services difficult. Humanitarian entrants are faced with additional burdens such as the physical and mental impact of torture and trauma and the loss of family members. With all of these daily challenges, children's involvement in sport and recreation is not seen as a high priority for newly arrived parents.

Keeping the above issues in mind, it is unrealistic to expect parents or guardians to be involved as volunteers in sporting organisations, to come and watch their children participate, or to be available to transport them on a regular basis. Some successful sporting programs involving CLD young people have relied on support from youth workers or program leaders substituting the place of parents.

- Cost

It costs an average of \$652 for people aged 15 and over to participate in organised sport or physical activity, ⁴ with many of these costs requiring up-front payment. Costs include membership fees, transport and weekly fees, clothing and equipment and other miscellaneous expenses. As a result of the difficult resettlement process, parents / guardians often have trouble earning enough to provide their families with daily living essentials. Therefore, the costs associated with sport and recreation activities can often be too much for a family to cover. Government and sporting groups need to take this into consideration when planning to include newly arrived young people in their sporting planning and activities. Alternative options need to be examined such as subsidising, fund-raising and grant opportunities.

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Participation in Sport and Physical Activities, Australia*, ABS Media Release. Cat No. 4177.0, 1997, Canberra.

- Transport

Young CLD people tend to rely on public transport because of the lack of parental support in recreational activities. Sporting grounds or facilities that are centrally located and close to public transport play an important part in accessibility of sport for CLD young people. In situations where accessibility is limited, groups can look at such options as:

- Reassessing training locations (eg. incorporate training at the local school) and;
- Using a ‘buddy’ system whereby club members who live close by could assist with transport.

- Lack of knowledge about Sporting Associations and Clubs

The report “Sport – Creating a Level Playing Field” revealed that a majority of ethno-specific organisations, particularly youth groups and community-based ethnic schools, were unaware of the local sporting associations and clubs and the services which these groups offered. ⁵ This indicates a need and an opportunity for clubs, associations and local government, to promote their sporting services within ethno-specific organisations.

A lack of understanding of sporting club procedures also prevents involvement in clubs. This can be easily explained by way of example: A group of newly arrived young men from the Horn of Africa were meeting regularly on a local oval to train and play soccer amongst themselves. Trouble began when the club who officially used the ground discovered that the young men were playing there and told them that they couldn’t use the facility. The local council and CMYI were asked to intervene. Discussions revealed that the young men didn’t understand the processes involved in using an oval in Australia i.e. that regular use of an oval necessitates payment and approval by council. Their understanding from past experience was that ovals are accessible to anyone at anytime. With the support of the council, the group were given the opportunity to join a more established club who offered to act as a mentor club for the young men.

⁵ Wilson, Steve. *Sport: Creating a Level Playing Field*. 1998, Sport and Recreation Victoria.

- Options for CLD young women

CLD young women have limited opportunities to participate in sport and recreation due to barriers experienced from both sporting environments and from within their own communities. Sporting environments can often be inappropriate. Some Muslim women for example need to participate in a female-only environment. Barriers can include: a lack of appropriate facilities; difficulties in securing female coaches at appropriate times; and the lack of programs available. The dress requirements of particular sports can also restrict participation, especially for Muslim women who wear a 'hijab' (the dress covering worn by some Muslim women). Within their own communities, young ethnic women can also be restricted from participation due to cultural, religious or gender expectations. These include beliefs that they should to be less physical than males and focus more on domestic responsibilities.

- Discrimination

Experiences of racism or discrimination can deter a CLD young person from participation in a new sporting environment. If they are not made to feel welcome, there is little incentive to continued participation. Discrimination is unfortunately prevalent in sport and is manifest verbally, through actions, physical abuse and exclusion. All sporting organisations should have anti-discrimination policies in place and be able to address promptly incidents of racism or discrimination accordingly.

In 1995, the Australian Football League (AFL) became one of the first sporting bodies in Australia to adopt effective procedures to deal with racial and religious vilification. The necessity for a policy was identified following an on-field incident that led to Essendon player Michael Long lodging an official complaint against Collingwood's Damian Monkhorst. A racial and religious vilification rule was subsequently developed which incorporates education, conciliation and potential tribunal sanctions. There is now an annual education program that involves all AFL players, coaching staff and administrators. The rule is also supported by a public education campaign.

6. CASE STUDIES...

6.1 CASE STUDY 1: Female Sports Programs

The focus of this program was to develop sporting opportunities for young Muslim women.

Project Aims:

- To offer extra-curricular sporting opportunities for young ethnic women as a response to an identified community need;
- To develop a sustainable program;
- To link key stakeholders to form a project partnership;

The need to develop a Muslim girls' after school sport program was identified following discussions with young Muslim women in the area of Reservoir, Melbourne. Initial planning involved consulting with young women and cultural workers in the area. The consultation process involved ascertaining the type of activities of interest to the females, appropriate costs, times, locations and cultural needs (eg. female instructors).

The CMYI sport project officer then began meeting with possible project stakeholders. A number of schools, leisure centres and sports clubs in the area were identified and contacted. A community sports stadium was deciphered the most suitable location for the program due to its appropriate facilities, accessible location and the management's interest in becoming a key partner. Two out of five schools contacted confirmed that they would participate in the program and promote it within the school, as well as providing supervision and transport if required. Finally, the Darebin Women's Sport Club offered to provide coaches for a soccer program on a volunteer basis.

To ensure the programs' sustainability, participants were charged \$2 per session to cover the stadium hire. CMYI provided the equipment and the stadium managed any administration on the day. PE staff were provided with an information letter for students and the program was promoted within the school. It was confirmed that there was no need for translation of materials. Parents were supportive of their daughters' involvement because the program was supported by the school, held in a familiar environment and took place straight after school.

Verbal and written feedback was obtained from the students, coaches, teachers and leisure centre staff. This assisted in the ongoing development of the program. It was because of the feedback that the location of the program changed in the second term to a more accessible venue. The sport also changed from soccer to basketball, which proved to be a more popular among the participating students.

The following are important points that need to be considered when developing programs such as these:

- Initial stages of program development should include research to ascertain if similar programs exist in the area. If this is the case, coordinators could look at the possibility of working together to strengthen the existing program;
- Program planning should examine the possible CLD issues and ensure they are addressed in the developmental stages. For example, often community elders need to be consulted to approve of a program before the young people are allowed to participate;
- Project organisers need to ensure that all key stakeholders are committed to supporting and taking ownership of the program to ensure its smooth operation and longevity. This support can be sustained through regular committee meetings;
- Each stakeholder needs to know that they have support and assistance if and when required;
- Extra funds need to be included in the program budget to cover any initial program losses.

6.2 CASE STUDY 2: All Nations Soccer Competition

This program was developed by CMYI in response to the numerous enquiries from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) young people wanting to play competition sport, but restricted by unfamiliarity with procedures or inability to afford the cost of state sporting association competitions. The project initially focussed on the development of a soccer competition for young men due to the overwhelming amount of interest in such a program. It then extended to the provision of a volleyball competition for young women in response to the growing interest from the female community members attending the soccer games.

Aims of the program:

- To offer a low-cost competition;
- To offer a competition that brings different community groups together in a social and sporting environment;
- To educate newly arrived ethnic community groups in the processes of structured sport competitions and clubs;
- To link teams into mainstream competitions and clubs;
- To divert young people from possible involvement in 'high-risk' behaviour

STAGE ONE - The Development phase

After developing a project model, CMYI approached the Victorian Soccer Federation (VSF), Volleyball Victoria and the *Onside Soccer* group to become key-stakeholders in the All Nations soccer/volleyball competition. *Onside Soccer* is a program initiative of the Victorian Magistrate's Court and Victoria Police, aiming to provide social and sporting opportunities to disadvantaged newly arrived and refugee young people. These particular stakeholders were targeted because their involvement was deemed necessary for the success of the program.

Two locations were identified as appropriate areas to hold the competition: one in the South East and the other in the Western suburbs of Melbourne. These areas were chosen as a result of the sheer number of enquiries received from CLD groups in the area. Recreation Officers at the local council level were consulted and became part of the process, offering valuable support and assistance.

The project's stakeholders offered in-kind or financial assistance and were extremely proactive with their involvement. The All Nations competition was seen by them as a beneficial program for both the participants and their organisation.

STAGE TWO

A. The soccer competition

Each soccer competition ran for 6 weeks. Teams were charged a small fee, with the money going towards covering some of the competition costs. Team meetings were held before and after the competition and support was made available to the groups at all times. In order to minimise costs and develop participant skills, each team was required to provide a linesman for all of their games. The competition provided a valuable learning experience and 'stepping-stone' to VSF competitions. Participants' knowledge was broadened through direct involvement in time management, registration processes and liaison with the range of organisations involved.

Both competitions ended with a final 'All Nations Cup' held between the West and the South East. Each of the teams designated 3 – 5 players to form an integrated team of 15 players to represent their area. This mixing of the teams was a deliberate strategy, in line with the VSF's commitment to encourage the diversification of clubs and a movement away from association with specific ethnic backgrounds.

B. The volleyball competition

An informal volleyball competition was organised for the female community members attending the All Nations soccer competition each week. Onside Soccer responded to the popularity of the competition by working with Volleyball Victoria to offer a clinic to gauge commitment and to enhance young women's skills.

Volleyball Victoria has now committed to the program and is currently working with Onside Soccer in the provision of an All Nations female volleyball competition, to run concurrently with the soccer program. The participants will be linked to accessible clubs and competitions at the conclusion of the program.

STAGE THREE – Sustainability

Following the successful implementation of the All Nations pilot program, the local government and VSF facilitated linkages between a number of the teams and local clubs who volunteered to take on a mentoring role. An accredited soccer-coaching course was also offered to committed program participants at a reduced cost. Finally, to reduce the costs and further skill participants, a first aid course is planned prior to the competition start next season.

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.