

# Getting Diverse Young People **Active**

by Assunta Morrone

Sport and recreation can have a significant impact on the quality of life and the sense of community for young people who participate in it. On an individual level, engaging in sport can be a catalyst for change. It can also assist in addressing young people's need for a sense of belonging, enhance community connections and reduce feelings of isolation. On a societal level, participation in sport and recreation has the potential to positively impact on wider social issues, such as crime, health and inequality.

For culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) communities—including those that are newly arrived—sport and recreation represents more than just physical activity. It can assist in addressing settlement issues such as the impact of torture and trauma, intergenerational conflict, language proficiency and social exclusion. While sport can provide a vehicle for integration into the broader community it can also assist with cultural identity and maintenance.

But such complex social issues cannot be dealt with in isolation and require a community development approach. Community development is a process of addressing structural disadvantage by using the knowledge, skills and experiences of communities to guarantee maximum participation and meaningful involvement.

Traditionally, sport and recreation has been the domain of clubs, associations and sports regulating bodies, but recently the community sector, the health sectors and local government have used sport and recreation as a vehicle to address health and wellbeing issues for CLD young people.

## THE CENTRE FOR MULTICULTURAL YOUTH ISSUES

The Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMYI) is a state-wide organisation which aims to strengthen and build innovative partnerships between young people, support services and the community in order to enhance life opportunities for young people from CLD backgrounds. The centre has a particular focus on newly arrived and refugee young people with its key role being to act as a research, policy and advocacy body on issues relating to CLD young people. While CMYI is primarily an advocacy body, we also provide direct support services to CLD young people.

## CMYI'S INVOLVEMENT IN RECREATION AND SPORTS PROJECTS

In 1998, via funding from Sport and Recreation Victoria (SRV), CMYI established the Ethnic Youth Sports Development Project to increase the sporting opportunities for young people of CLD backgrounds. This project produced the report *Sport: Creating a level playing field* (Wilson, 1998), which indicated that CLD young people are under-represented in formalised sport and recreational activities. The report also found that sport and recreation opportunities for CLD and newly arrived young people were limited due to a range of barriers such as:

- ▲ lack of parental support
- ▲ lack of access to transport
- ▲ the high cost of memberships
- ▲ registration and uniforms
- ▲ the perceived fear of racism and discrimination; and, lack of knowledge about the structure of sport in Australia.

The report found that a large number of CLD young people participate in sport, although not necessarily through structured clubs and competitions linked to state sporting associations. It also found that CLD young people are initially more likely to participate in sport in familiar and supportive environments such as schools and ethnic organisations, rather than unfamiliar environments such as mainstream sporting clubs, associations and competitions.

What began as a one year scoping exercise has developed into a project lasting almost seven years. Sport and recreation is now

one of CMYI's core policy areas.

## SPORT AND RECREATION: A COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT APPROACH

To achieve structural change, CMYI works at both state and local levels in all settings and across all sectors. Working within the VicHealth Mental Health Framework, CMYI believes that access to sport and recreation for CLD young people is related to social and economic factors. These include:

- ▲ social inclusion (supportive relationships from family and friends and the community);
- ▲ freedom from racism, discrimination and violence (the valuing of diversity, physical and emotional security, self-determination and control over one's life);
- ▲ access to economic resources (employment, education, housing, financial security).

VicHealth (2005), Mental Health Framework

Unless these issues are addressed in the lives of young people, access to sport and recreation will always be limited.

Through representation in sport and recreation, CLD young people can feel a sense of belonging to a society that values diversity, as well as improve their physical and mental health.

As a youth advocacy body working under a framework of social justice CMYI have a responsibility to provide services to those most at need and to help eliminate structural barriers that prevent clients from accessing those services, such as sport and recreational activity.

While sport can be a valuable tool for social harmony and integration it can





also be by its very nature, competitive, exclusionary, and elitist. Because the way the sports industry is structured it is not in a position to service the needs of CLD communities and deliver community development outcomes on its own. For this reason CMYU has at times moved into a program delivery role in partnerships with sports organisations to provide opportunities for CLD communities to access the benefits of sport and recreation participation.

### THE ALL NATIONS COMPETITION

CMYI had an idea to deliver a low-cost soccer competition for newly arrived ethno-specific young men. As a community base organisation CMYI had neither the experience nor the resources to run a 12 week soccer competition. CMYI contact OnSide Soccer and Football Federation Victoria (formerly Victorian Soccer Federation) to form a steering committee that would assist the delivery of the competition. The All Nations competition brought together partners such as Football Federation Victoria, Onside Soccer, Maribyrnong City Council, Dandenong City Council, Horn of Africa Network, Magistrate Court Sunshine and Wise Employment.

The partnership with OnSide Soccer and FFV gave CMYI access to grounds, umpires and the resources of FFV, which freed the CMYI project worker to promote the competition to the communities and ensure that the needs of young people were addressed.

In June 2002 the first All Nations Soccer Competition was run in the City of Greater Dandenong. Since 2002 OnSide Soccer has run two successful competitions. However, in 2005 the All Nations Competition was put on hold due to a lack of funding.

### THE WOMEN ONLY SWIMMING PROGRAM

In 2005 CMYI and the City of Hume joined to deliver The 'Women Only' swimming program. The program ran for seven weeks at the Broadmeadows Leisure Centre. The aim of the project was to engage young women between the ages of 12-25 who were from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds (CLD) into the centre to take part either in swimming lessons or recreational swimming.

CMYI was the facilitating body of the program. This required CMYI to provide two employees to supervise the program and promote it to the community. The Broadmeadows Leisure Centre would ensure that swimming instructors and a lifeguard would be available for the duration of the project.

CMYI agreed to assist with the project with a view to make it sustainable by demonstrating that the demand for such a program exists and therefore working with leisure services to recognise it as part of their core business. It was also agreed that the City of Hume would provide opportunity for young women to access further training as swimming instructors.

This project brought together the City of Hume, Dianella Community Health and Broadmeadows Leisure Centre.

### WOMEN IN BASKETBALL PROGRAM

As part of Basket Victoria's (BV) Women in Basketball program BV decided to increase the participation of CLD young women. BV contact CMYI to assist them in engaging these young women into their program.

Rather than asking newly arrived young women to fit into the existing

basketball structure, it was decided to run the course over four weeks at Noble Park English Language School.

As the aim of the program was not merely to deliver a basketball program, but to also link the young people back into the community BV provided the participants with some information on how to join a club and where they could play basketball after the completion of the program and after school. The final session was conducted at the local basketball stadium so as to give participants a link back to a mainstream existing structure rather than just an isolated sports experience.

While we have briefly outlined three examples of successful projects these outcomes cannot always be achieved using a prescribed formula. If we apply principles of community development then each situation will require a different strategy depending on a host of local, cultural, economic, social and political factors.

It is the process that ought to be valued and not simply who wins the competition or how many people become members or volunteers in your sport. This process cannot be rushed or forced and we need to encourage the natural consequences and pace of development. Each project, each community and each issue presents its own unique differences and challenges

Sport and recreation strategies need to be adapted, considered and reconstructed accordingly to the local context. To be too prescriptive and specific when working within a community development model can jeopardise the very principles and outcomes that you may be trying to achieve.

**Assunta Morrone** is senior policy officer with the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMYI).