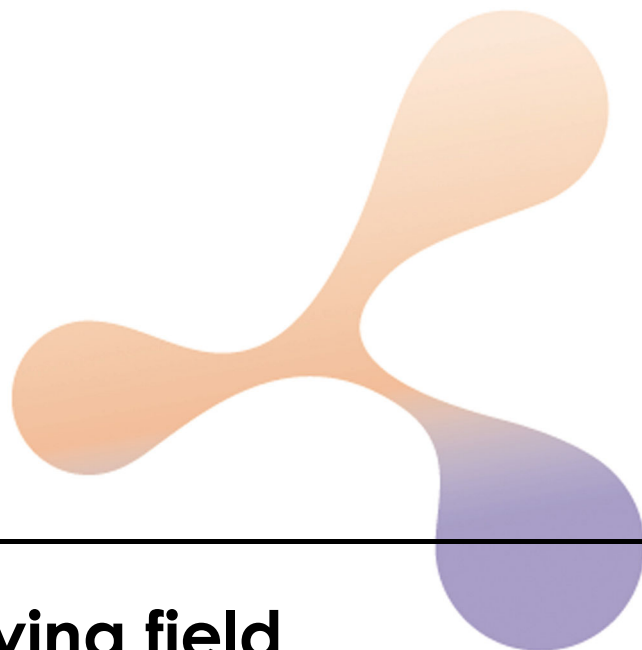


DISCUSSION PAPER



Creating a level playing field in more than just sport

**A report on culturally and
linguistically diverse (CLD) young
people's access and participation
in Leisure and Recreation Centres
within the City of Yarra**

April 2006



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Executive Summary

The Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMYI) and the City of Yarra engaged LOTE Marketing to undertake a research project to examine the involvement of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) young people in leisure centres within the City of Yarra. The aim of the project was to gather information from both young people aged 12-25 from CLD backgrounds and City of Yarra leisure centre staff that would inform both the City of Yarra and CMYI's strategic directions in increasing participation and access for CLD young people to leisure centres.

Our findings suggested that while some CLD young people participated in activities at the leisure centres, their involvement was ad hoc and most were not financial members. Local young people were aware of services that the centres offered; however newly arrived young people were less familiar with the centres.

Staff from the leisure centres also commented that the City of Yarra has a high proportion of overseas students who participate on a regular basis. However some of these young people also stated that the demanding workload from university studies meant that they had little time to participate in recreation activities.

Consistent with our research in the sports sector, participants identified cost as a prohibitive factor to access. While wet area programs such as casual pool access were seen as reasonable, dry area programs such as access to the gym and group exercise were too expensive for some.

While the centres are centrally located and close to public transport, access to and from venues after dark was an issue for some CLD young women in terms of personal safety concerns.

Young people identified that while most of them could speak English, they felt more comfortable reading and speaking in their first language. Others said that translated information or perhaps even having a bilingual worker would help to make them and their parents feel more comfortable.

Again, consistent with research from our work in the sport sector, many young women identified the lack of culturally appropriate activities as a barrier to participation. Most stated that gender specific activities were a cultural requirement if they were to access the centre. In fact, some of the women only attended the centre when female specific programs were offered.

The findings showed that swimming was by far the most accessed activity by young people, however young people also suggested that they would like the centre to organise more structured sport competitions such as basketball and soccer games.

About CMYI

CMYI is a statewide organisation which aims to strengthen and build partnerships between young people, support services and the community in order to enhance life opportunities for young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. We have a particular focus on newly arrived and refugee young people. Our key role is 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.

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 from 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 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 revealed 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 1-year scoping exercise has developed into a project lasting almost seven years. The Multicultural Sport and Recreation Project is now funded by VicHealth and is one of CMYI's core policy areas.

Rationale

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 we have a responsibility to provide service to those most at need and to help eliminate structural barriers that prevent our clients from accessing those services, such as sport and recreational activity.

Leisure and recreation centres can provide the physical environment for people to socialise and connect with the broader local community. While physical activity can be a valuable tool for social harmony and integration, it can also be by its very nature, competitive, exclusionary, elitist and expensive. While the sports sector may not be in the best position to deliver community development outcomes, (see Morrone 2005, *Sport, Community Development and Social Responsibility*) it seems that leisure centres are better placed and better connected to meet the needs of their community. The issue here is for leisure centres to see inclusion for CLD young people as part of their core business, not a separate program that is externally funded. It is this mind shift that will set good practice for the industry.

Methodology

Focus groups were used for the information gathered in this report. This method of research was used to obtain several perspectives about the same topic. Attitudes, feelings and beliefs may be partially independent of a group or its social setting, but are more likely to be revealed via the social gathering and the interaction which being in a focus group entails. Compared to individual interviews, which aim to obtain individual attitudes, beliefs and feelings, focus groups elicit a multiplicity of views and emotional processes within a group context.

As with all research we must acknowledge the limitations of the project and state that problems can arise when attempting to identify the individual view from the group view, as well as in the practical arrangements for conducting focus groups. We also acknowledge the findings in this report are not totally reflective of the view of all CLD young people.

A total of five focus groups were conducted over a 3-month period. The project conducted one focus group with City of Yarra Leisure Centre Staff with questions attempting to draw out information about:

- The level of involvement of young people from CLD backgrounds at the centres
- If the centre conducted activities specifically targeting CLD communities
- What, if any, recommendations they had on how to better engage with young CLD clients.

Another four focus groups were conducted with CLD young people from various communities including China, East Timor, Somalia and Vietnam. The purpose of these groups was to draw out information about:

- What did young people know about the services leisure centres offered
- Whether they were accessing the services of leisure centres, and if not, why not?
- What, if any, benefits they gained from using the centres
- Suggested strategies that would increase their use of leisure centres

Findings

Leisure Centre Staff Focus Group Findings

Leisure centre staff were asked what benefits they thought the young people would gain by visiting the leisure centres. The staff all identified benefits such as health, fitness, fun and social connection.

Staff were also asked what they believed to be the major issues that prevented some young people from accessing their services. Most staff surmised that perhaps a lack of awareness about what was offered at the centre was the main barrier. Other barriers included language difficulties, financial difficulties and safety concerns late at night. Interestingly, most staff did not see cultural issues as a prohibitive factor.

When asked what strategies they thought council could adopt to address these issues, staff suggested: discount memberships and offers, free information sessions, transferable memberships between centres in the City of Yarra, translated information, provision of transport for programs run late at night, and to work collaboratively with other services such as the North Richmond Community Centre.

In relation to the Collingwood Leisure Centre, staff also suggested changes to the physical environments including a new gymnasium, new pool area with more family friendly change rooms, more meeting rooms for community groups, indoor facilities such as basketball courts, and culturally appropriate food options for members.

Concerns were also raised that staff shortage was an issue at most of the centres and that higher staff levels were required to deliver targeted programs to CLD young people.

Community Focus Group Findings

Thirty-three young people aged between 15 and 25 attended four separate focus groups run by Lote Marketing. The young people were sourced with the help of Youth Services for Council and North Richmond Community Health Centre.

While most of the young people were able to articulate the benefits of participation in physical activity, only 16 attend the leisure centres in the City of Yarra on a regular basis.

Most identified barriers such as cost of gym membership, safety concerns at night for young women, lack of culturally appropriate programs, lack of time, and lack of encouragement by parents as major prohibitive factors.

The most attended activity was swimming. The reasons given for this was that it was reasonably priced and there were also women's only sessions available.

While most of the participants spoke English, they identified that a bicultural or bilingual worker would increase access by CLD communities, as a CLD worker would be more culturally sensitive to the needs of the community.

The young people in the focus groups made a number of recommendations that they believed would help to increase their participation and the participation of CLD communities. These included:

- Financial discounts and incentives for use of the gym areas and group classes
- Programs targeted to specific cultural groups
- Translated information targeting parents about the benefits of physical activity
- Targeted advertising through ethno specific radio and newspapers
- Cultural and social activities
- Targeted information sessions for young people about the services available
- Appropriate and representative promotional material
- Bicultural or bilingual staff
- Organised structured sports activities such as indoor soccer or basketball

Recommendations

The authors of this report recommend that

- The City of Yarra explores options for a coordinated and targeted campaign to promote their facilities to CLD communities to address the lack of awareness.
- The City of Yarra considers specifically targeting CLD community members in their recruitment of staff.
- The City of Yarra review their existing programs and policies to reflect the needs of CLD communities in their local areas.
- That the City of Yarra explores joint initiatives and programs between its services and facilities and local schools, clubs and community centres.
- That the City of Yarra considers the establishment of a Youth Advisory Committee consisting of community representatives that are able to represent the needs of CLD young people.
- That the City of Yarra considers developing resources and information that are culturally appropriate and that material should be translated where appropriate.
- That the City of Yarra supports a reduced cost initiative for all young people in their municipality for their leisure centres.
- That the City of Yarra considers the appointment of "community ambassadors" whose role would be to act as liaison persons for the leisure centres.