



Establishing a Women's Swimming Program

No. 2 | March 2003

Overview

This CMY Information Sheet is designed to provide sporting providers, community agencies and workers in the human services sector with a simple step-by-step guide to establishing a women's swimming program. This information has been developed as a result of requests made by service providers and local councils to the CMY Multicultural Sport and Recreation Project (funded by VicHealth and Sport & Recreation Victoria).

In establishing a women's swimming program, two key factors need to be addressed: program sustainability and cultural appropriateness. Good planning and consultation in the initial stages of the program will ensure these areas are addressed appropriately.

Based on best practice principles and experience in the sector, the information contained in this document is designed only as a guide and should be modified according to local circumstances.

For further information contact the CMY Multicultural Sport & Recreation Officer on (03) 9349 3466.

The development phase

There are four key elements associated with the development phase of a Women-Only Swimming program:

- 1 Identify the need and viability of establishing the program. This stage should involve community consultations with relevant ethnic organisations, community leaders and community members.
- 2 Develop a comprehensive project plan identifying possible problems/barriers and taking into consideration the appropriateness of facilities, transport, advertising, translations and staff etc.
- 3 Establish a steering committee with representatives from ethnic communities, leisure centre staff and local government. Obtain feedback on appropriate prices to charge participants, appropriate session times and days, and other relevant issues.
- 4 Apply to the Equal Opportunity Commission for permission to run a women's swimming program. In the past, programs have only been approved if operated outside of normal pool operating hours. The Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) will review the application at a formal hearing.

Program components: implementing the program

There are seven key elements associated with a successful and sustainable women's swimming program.

1 Funding

Many programs commence with an initial funding source. This is beneficial, but not vital in the establishment and development of the program. The common theme among unsuccessful programs has been reliance on the initial funding without planning towards ongoing sustainability beyond the funding period.

2 Community Leaders and Volunteers

Successful programs are those driven by volunteer community members who can assist with liaison between pool staff and female participants. It is preferable if volunteers are community members who are known to participants, speak the same language and have an understanding of appropriate cultural and religious practice. Women feel more comfortable listening to instructions and approaching members of their own community.





Program components (cont.)

3 Cross-Cultural Training

It is vital that program staff receive cross-cultural training and are able to apply it in the pool environment. Many programs have failed as a result of misunderstanding and lack of communication between staff and participants. Training may also be necessary for participants, particularly if attended by all women (not just Muslim women).

4 Pool Safety Awareness

Participants should be educated on pool safety issues such as child safety, water safety and pool rules. Information sheets and pool rules should be drafted (translated) and provided to each participant. Many of these women have little or no experience and understanding of water safety. Education and enforcing pool rules is an on-going process and should be approached in a firm, but understanding way. Rules and repercussions for not following rules, must be set and enforced from the very first session.

5 Transport

If providing transport for participants is not a long-term option financially, it is wise not to offer it at all. Once transport has been offered to participants, it is difficult to change direction and ask participants to make their own way to the venue. More effective strategies include linking participants with other program users who have their own transport and supporting participants to become familiar with public transport options.

6 Fees

It is advisable that each participant be charged an affordable entry fee as a contribution towards program costs. An example of a reasonable fee structure is presented below:

Adults	Children (5-10 years)	Children (4 and under)
\$3.00	\$1.50	free

7 Advertising

The program can be advertised through local community and health centres, migrant resource centres, ethno-specific organisations, local government and local/ethnic media. Programs have proved to have higher success rates if the coordinator makes contact with a number of community groups and works in partnership with them to develop the program.

Case study: Women's Swimming Program

A group of Muslim women from the Northern area of Melbourne approached a local council operated pool to start their own swimming program. The pool centre agreed to allow participants one session a week on the proviso that the group cover the costs of lifeguards, staff and insurance.

The program is currently operated by a group of volunteer women who liaise with staff, collect money from participants and educate participants on safety issues.

The program has proved to be so successful that up to two hundred participants have attended some sessions. The average number of participants tends to range between 50 and 100 per week. Surplus takings are used to cover annual insurance charges and other expenses.

The group has a good working relationship with pool staff and attribute part of the program's success to the professionalism and understanding of lifeguard staff. The group have also decided to train a number of participants as lifeguards in order to increase program viability.

While both Muslim and non-Muslim women participate in the program, membership is primarily Muslim. In keeping with cultural values, participants are asked to wear modest attire during pool sessions (tee-shirt and knee high shorts).

