

# INCREASING CULTURAL INCLUSION - SUNSHINE HEIGHTS CRICKET CLUB

## THE NEED

In the late 1990's the Sunshine Heights Cricket club had dwindling membership numbers, a 'blokey' culture and the future was not looking bright. The committee recognised a new course of action was needed if the club's outlook was to improve.

The club is located in a culturally diverse area and is surrounded by many refugees and asylum seekers who would both enjoy and benefit from participation in sport. However, these community members faced many barriers to participation including transport, costs, a lack of information about how sports clubs in Australia operate and what opportunities were available in the area.

## THE RESPONSE

Over the past 15 years the club has implemented a range of strategies to encourage people from diverse backgrounds to participate in cricket.

### Culturally inclusive advertising and club promotion

As well as increasing advertising through schools and community organisations, the club asked existing players to spread the word via their network of friends and family. The club also included positive images such as young club members from diverse cultural backgrounds on brochures, billboards and other club materials.

### A welcoming and culturally responsive club culture

The club established a 'buddy system' to ensure new participants were welcomed to the club by existing members from similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Cultural events, such as sharing 'cultural food evenings' also help communities feel part of the club.

The club is extremely flexible around cultural and religious activities, with players able to undertake fasting and prayers as necessary (including players given time to leave the field and privacy to pray). Halal and vegetarian food is provided at all catered club activities and no alcohol is served. The club is also developed policies

around discrimination, inappropriate behaviour and cultural awareness as well as a Code of Conduct that players must abide by.

### Building community partnerships

The club reached out and established strong partnerships with a range of organisations and schools including Brimbank City Council, Mother of God Primary School and the local Adult Migrant Education Services (AMES). These organisations

now direct interested participants to the club and Council provides significant funding to cover membership costs and essential equipment via In2Sport and asylum seeker programs.

### Overcoming barriers to participation

The club employed Multicultural Transport Aides to help members get to games, training and events and set membership fees low, as well as seeking external funding and grants to prevent the costs of participation being prohibitive.

"If someone can't afford a cricket bat or uniform, if someone can't get to training or a match, the club bands together to find a solution. And that's what community spirit is all about." - Paul Stockwell – Club President

"This club is bringing communities together through the game of cricket."



Pictured: Back row left to right - Chris Hatzoglou: Administrator, Sunshine Heights Cricket Club, Lydia Lassila: Olympic freestyle aerial skiing Gold Medallist, Paul Stockwell: President, Sunshine Heights Cricket Club & Kim Crow: Olympic medallist and World champion Rower

Front row left to right - Nybol Mayoum: Sunshine Heights Cricket Club Under 11s & Leo Hatzoglou: Sunshine Heights Cricket Club Under 13s

## THE OUTCOME

"The flow-on effect has gone beyond our wildest dreams, with older community members acting as volunteers to support younger participants with transport, coaching and mentoring. We see kids who are struggling at school, who find it hard to fit in, and then they walk onto the pitch or into the club rooms and instantly feel like they belong... Community sport is a perfect vehicle to help young people develop their self-esteem, view of the world and view of themselves. We teach them that everyone is equal." -Paul Stockwell, Club President

The benefit for the club is not only a significant increase in membership, but a membership which now reflects the local community. Members include South Sudanese, Afghani, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Indian, Vietnamese, Maltese and various European backgrounds. The club has been recognised as a leader in cultural inclusiveness and was awarded 2015 National Good Sports Club of the Year.

"The club has broken down cultural barriers to get local people from all walks of life involved. This club is bringing communities together through the game of cricket." - Jon McGregor, Head of Good Sports.