

INCREASING CULTURAL INCLUSION – ST MARY’S NETBALL CLUB

THE NEED

While St Mary’s Netball Club had a number of members from migrant and refugee backgrounds, five years ago they attended a multicultural information event for clubs and decided they could do more to increase their engagement with local culturally diverse communities, such as the Sudanese community in Dandenong.

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 five years the club has implemented a range of strategies to encourage people from diverse backgrounds to participate in netball.

Culturally inclusive club promotion

The club approached the mum of a current member who agreed to spread the word in her community about netball. As an advocate from within the local community, this has been a highly effective strategy. The club also used its existing social media platforms to showcase photos and stories of players from refugee and migrant backgrounds which resulted in new people ringing up the club.

“It helps them think, ‘they’re like me, I can do this’” – Penny Collins, Club President

The club attends community based events to promote netball to local culturally diverse communities and runs ‘have a go’ days, where players can come along and see what netball is like without having to pay or become club members up front.

Engaging with families

Communication with parents can be challenging, especially if English is not their first language or if they don’t have an understanding of the sports context in

Australia. In response the club developed processes for bringing mums and dads together with the young players in order to familiarise parents with the club and answer questions or concerns. The club focussed on open, patient and respectful communication, using visual aids such as pictures to assist and asking players to help translate anything their parents didn’t understand.

A welcoming and culturally responsive club culture

The club worked hard to develop a supportive and welcoming environment for new members, with a focus on fostering enjoyable and genuine relationships.

“We have become a family,
not just a club.”



L to R: Verona and Abuk - St Mary’s Netball Club
Abuk umpires at St Mary’s and Verona has made it through to elite level sport

“We have become a family, not just a club.” – Penny Collins, Club President.

Existing members form a ‘support network’ for players whose parents aren’t available to attend games or training, and who also help younger members to manage their time between sport, schooling and other commitments. St Mary’s has a ‘no tolerance’ approach to discrimination and, as well as adhering to Netball Victoria’s rules and regulations, they are developing their own club policies around cultural inclusion.

Overcoming barriers to participation

The club introduced a number of initiatives to reduce barriers to participation:

- Providing pick-ups and transport support for games, training and events
- Ensuring umpires were notified that young players who are Muslim will be wearing long pants, sleeves and head scarves to ensure they are not questioned or made to feel embarrassed about it during matches
- Providing second hand uniforms and making the club’s tops a plain white t-shirt so they are easier and more affordable to purchase
- Putting clear signs up around the club venues including contact phone numbers so the club is easy to find and approach
- Looking for sponsors and fundraising for players who want to go further in elite levels of netball which can be very expensive.

THE OUTCOME

Over the last few years, St Mary’s has seen a dramatic increase in the number of its teams (from seven to thirteen), and now has players from refugee and migrant backgrounds in all age groups including the under 5s. Four older girls have progressed to playing at elite level and a number of club members aspire to play for Australia. The success the young people have seen in netball has had a positive flow-on effect into other aspects of their lives.

The club was recognised for its leadership recently and won the 2015 Australia Post One Netball Community Club Award for its efforts to support girls, women and families from multicultural communities in Dandenong.