

# INCREASING CULTURAL INCLUSION – COLLINGWOOD BASKETBALL CLUB

## THE NEED

Collingwood Basketball Club is located in a community with many high-rise public housing flats and many young people from low socio-economic, migrant and refugee backgrounds. The club had noticed some children were turning up at training nights asking to play, but the standard process of requesting permission from their parents and bringing the registration fee wasn't resulting in these children joining up. The club was also receiving some 'referrals' from local community organisations, who were bringing young people to the club who they felt would benefit from playing sport, but whom would need some extra support.

## THE RESPONSE

In recognition that the barriers children faced could include finances, access to transport, other family priorities and parental understanding about the role of a sports club and how it operates, the club implemented a range of strategies to make it easier for young people who wanted to join. The club also wanted the players and families to feel supported once engaged with the club so they could enjoy the full benefits of sports participation.

### Overcoming barriers to participation

In 2011 the club established an after-school 'come and play' program which provided a fun, safe and informal opportunity for children (5-12 years) to experience basketball. Since then, the club has seen many children move into competitive teams and start playing regularly. The club also introduced flexible approaches to reducing the financial burden of membership, including utilising a City of Yarra grant to subsidise uniform costs, registration fees and game fees.

Teams work together to create transport rosters and, to facilitate this, the club suggests a centralised pick up place for children. Training is held centrally where possible and the club altered its training schedules so the need for volunteer transport support could be limited to weekend games.

"It can be hard work, and requires many volunteers but parents are amazing and go out of their way to help engage kids." – Megan Rouse, Operations Manager

### Engaging with families

In 2013, the club employed a Community Liaison Officer whose role is to liaise between the club, teams and coaches, and the families of members or young people who are interested in playing. This is a challenging role which involves helping families understand in particular the benefits of sport for their children.

"Many parents from migrant backgrounds will say 'We didn't come here for sport, we came for education'. So I spend time explaining to them how sport can change lives and all the benefits such as improved health, greater social engagement and that sport can help keep kids in school and away from trouble." – Akech Manyiel, Community Liaison Officer

"At this club, we help everybody."

As someone whose life has changed thanks to sport, the Community Liaison Officer, Akech Manyiel, is available as an understanding support for players, especially those who might be struggling or facing competing priorities.

"It can be hard for some of the young girls whose family may keep them away from training so they can babysit siblings or attend community events. Relationships with parents are essential to help them understand what



Pictured: Collingwood Basketball Club players having a ball

participating in a sport is all about and encourage them to allow their daughters to come regularly." – Akech Manyiel, Community Liaison Officer

The club recognises that communication can be challenging with parents who speak English as a second language and encourages other parents to keep messages such as pick up times clear and easy to understand. They suggest strategies like calling mobiles rather than texting, limiting communication by email and calling after school when players are home and able to help translate.

### A welcoming and culturally responsive club culture

The club has developed a culture of 'at this club, we help everybody'. Their focus is creating supportive relationships with young players to help them feel a greater sense of belonging and members are encouraged to understand the challenges families from migrant, refugee or low socio-economic backgrounds may face.

## THE OUTCOME

The club went from having a handful of members from the high-rise communities, to now having more than 80 children and young people (over 10% of their membership) from this cohort, including many from migrant and refugee backgrounds, with a significant number of South Sudanese players. Players are engaged from the under 5's age group up to senior players who have moved into the adult competition, are playing at high levels or have become coaches. The benefits for the young people are significant. They have the opportunity to do things and visit places which they never would have before and involvement helps establish positive environments for them away from difficulties of living in the high-rise flats.

"The best thing is seeing the diversity, acceptance and friendships at our club. So many people have really embraced helping kids to play. It's a really important part of our club." – Megan Rouse, Operations Manager

"I'm very passionate about sport. I see sport change lives. It can help guide where they're going." – Akech Manyiel, Community Liaison Officer

The club was named Basketball Victoria's Inclusive Association of the Year in 2014.