

INCREASING CULTURAL INCLUSION - GEELONG BAYCATS BASEBALL CHARTER

THE NEED

In 2015, with the support of Baseball Victoria, a group of baseball clubs came together to form the Geelong Baycats Charter, in order to pool resources and increase collaboration between existing members of each club. Baseball in the region is a small but growing sport and as the Charter came together to further develop their clubs, the Baycats felt it was vital to embed culturally inclusive policy and practices throughout their programs.

As a vibrant regional community, Geelong and surrounding towns are very culturally diverse, and yet many young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds face barriers to sports participation including access to transport, costs, a lack of information about how sports clubs in Australia operate and what opportunities are available in their area.

THE RESPONSE

The Baycats' aim is to align the culture of their clubs with Baseball Victoria's 'Baseball for All' mantra, ensuring that club activities are inclusive, welcoming and safe. In order to achieve this, a number of committed volunteers are working towards removing barriers faced by people of all backgrounds, some of which are targeted to specific groups such as young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

A welcoming and culturally responsive club culture

Each of the Baycats' clubs has a 'Welcoming Officer', who has received inclusion training from Baseball Victoria, and who is present in the community to engage with and support new members.

The Baycats also established the position of 'Member Protection Officer' who is available to support players, coaches or other members who may be facing issues within the clubs.

The Baycats decided to use the Baseball Victoria 'Inclusion Deed' which requires all members to contribute towards a welcoming and safe environment for all.

Inclusion Deed

1. We believe that everyone should be able to participate in and enjoy baseball – whatever their background.
2. We believe participating in baseball is about fairness, equality, respect and dignity.
3. Baseball teaches individuals to strive and succeed, to cope with success and disappointment, and brings people together with common enjoyment of the sport.

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4. We are committed to making these values a reality for all people involved in baseball.
5. We will make baseball a welcoming place for everyone.
6. We will challenge unacceptable behaviour in the sport and foster inclusion at all levels.

Engaging with families

Parents of existing club members are actively encouraged to come along to games and club events and to take on active roles within the Baycats. Establishing this sense of ownership within the program helps increase retention and fosters a feeling of belonging.

Overcoming barriers to participation

The Baycats implemented free trial periods, allowing young people to try the program prior to registration. Each club also has a vibrant exchange program, championed by parents within the club, with uniforms and equipment available to use and return to ensure all players have access to the equipment they need to participate fully.

Creating sustainable change

With the support of Baseball Victoria and a regional Charter Development Officer, the Baycats Committee is reviewing its policies and procedures to improve the clubs' inclusive activities.

THE OUTCOME

The Baycats' approach to creating a safe and welcoming environment and reducing barriers to participation has led to increased retention of the current players and increased engagement with external programs.

By implementing these policies and approaches from the beginning, the Baycats have developed a solid base from which the clubs can continue to grow their membership and an inclusive club culture.