

VicSport Review

Multicultural Programs in Local Sporting Clubs

Considering that somewhere in the vicinity of 45% of Victorians have at least one parent who was born overseas, it is fitting that multicultural inclusion is one of the current major focuses of funding and program development for the Victorian sport and recreation sector. The growth of migrant and refugee populations across Victoria provides community clubs with a unique opportunity to engage with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) groups. Many have already taken up this challenge and demonstrate the real benefits these activities can have both for the club and the community groups involved.

At the 2007 VicSport Victorian Sport Awards Burden Park Tennis Club was named the winner of the inaugural Outstanding Community Club award, highlighting the achievements and positive impact community clubs can have through connecting with the local population and building a multicultural membership. Located in Springvale, Burden Park's efforts demonstrate how the effective execution of simple strategies has allowed them to achieve a significant increase in membership from multicultural communities, both within the Springvale municipality and across wider metropolitan Melbourne.

The club's 'open door' policy welcomes all ages, abilities and cultures, however the great success in recruitment of a multicultural membership stems from a number of contributing factors. Listed below are some of the key strategies Burden Park list as the key to their success thus far:

- Actively promoting the benefits of membership to short term and social court users.
- Inviting and encouraging members from various multicultural groups to join the Committee, to participate and have a say in club activity and management.
- Creating an environment in the Clubhouse that is open and welcoming to members of all ages and backgrounds, and encouraging use of the area as a social meeting point.
- Nominating a Committee member as the designated Club ambassador who is responsible for maintaining a regular communication pathway between the Club and the State body.
- Burden Park have also been successful in the past in securing sponsorship from the local RSL, allowing them to provide uniforms for players. This strategy assisted in developing a sense of team belonging at the club.

A final, but key strategy in engaging CALD communities at Burden Park involved translating information regarding the Club's open days into three languages and distributing them to local schools, businesses and through the 'what's on' section of the local newspaper. This shows how effective targeted marketing strategies can be utilised by a community club to great effect, as well as taking advantage of free promotion opportunities.

Of course, many other clubs across Victoria currently engage in activities that address inclusion both independently and under the direction of their relevant State Sporting Association. It is important to note that while sport and recreation opportunities for newly arrived Australians play a vital role in assisting with effective settlement, providers also need to be aware that they need to educate themselves on the needs of the communities they are targeting prior to engaging with them. For example, Southern Pirates Cricket Club in Dandenong found that a simple initiative such as inviting local CALD families to club barbecues was not effective as many were not able to eat barbecued food, such as sausages due to cultural and religious beliefs. Finding an appropriate alternative, such as a 'bring a plate' night, may enable the club to negotiate this small obstacle and create an event that is inclusive for all parties.

The Centre for Multicultural and Youth Issues (CMYI) provides a valuable resource for clubs seeking information and assistance with creating an inclusive environment for people from Culturally and Linguistically diverse backgrounds. Their website, (www.cmyi.net.au) provides access to sport and recreation resources with a focus on multicultural youth communities, including major research projects as well as regular Sport Tip Sheets focusing on engagement and inclusion strategies.

In conjunction with VicHealth, VicSport is currently working on a Welcoming and Inclusive Checklist, that will be available to State Sporting Associations and their clubs to assist in the development of effective approaches towards creating an all-encompassing club environment.