



The Contribution of Sport to Indigenous Wellbeing and Mentoring

vicsport
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1.0 Introduction

vicsport represents the collective interests of Victoria's single largest community sector. With over 170 member groups, 16,000 clubs and associations and 1.8 million participants, workers and volunteers, the community sport and active recreation sector make a significant contribution to the social, physical, mental and economic well-being of our communities, as well as creating vital capacity within metropolitan and regional communities.

vicsport welcomes the inquiry by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs examining how sporting bodies can increase opportunities for indigenous participation, including for indigenous women.

Much of the evidence provided in this submission regarding barriers and enablers to physical activity programs is based on vicsport's understanding and observations of Indigenous participation programs delivered by vicsport member organisations such as State Sporting Associations (SSAs), Local Government Authorities (LGAs) and key stakeholder organisations such as the Victorian Government, Department of Planning and Community Development- Sport and Recreation Victoria and VicHealth.

2.0 Statistical Overview

There is widespread acknowledgement that participation in physical activity is a fundamental means of improving the physical and mental health of individuals (WHO 2004,p3) however Indigenous Australians are less likely to be physically active than non-indigenous Australians (Pink & Albon 2008, ABS 2007). According to research conducted in 2002 two-thirds of non-indigenous Australians took part in sport and physical recreation activities, while less than half the indigenous population participated in sport and physical recreation (Thorpe, 2009). The gap in health indicators between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the United States, Canada and New Zealand is narrowing however in Australia the gap continues to widen (Nelson, A. Abbott, R & Macdonald, D 2009).

The effects of the non-participation are significant. Physical inactivity is responsible for 8.4% of the total disease burden for Indigenous Australians. It is of further concern that overall rates of sedentary and low levels of exercise are notably higher among Indigenous Australian females (82%) compared to Indigenous Australian males (67%) (Pink, 2008).

The benefits of successfully implemented sport programs highlights the importance of sport to Indigenous communities. Programs may divert young people from crime (Coleman, A 2000), motivate them to attend school, build leadership skills, foster community role models and provide opportunities for employment and volunteering. Sport and recreation also provides alternatives to antisocial behaviours such as alcohol abuse and this can have flow-on effects for the community in terms of reduced violence, injury and suicide prevention (Tighe, J & McKay, K 2012) (Coleman, A 2000). Indigenous people participate in community sporting events with great enthusiasm, skill and passion, and this has been reported to bring pride and cohesiveness to communities. (Mason, G, Wilson, P. 1988)

Considering the poor statistical analysis regarding indigenous Australian's participation in sport and their overall poor health outcomes ,it is appropriate that the House of Representatives standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs conducts and inquiry into the contribution that sport makes to Indigenous wellbeing and mentoring. In particular how sporting bodies can increase opportunities for Indigenous participation, including for Indigenous women and how non

government organisations can use sport as a vehicle to improve health outcomes for indigenous people.

Unfortunately there has not been much in the way of empirical research in order to demonstrate key enablers to successful programs and barriers to establishing Indigenous sporting programs. More comprehensive research is required to develop a sound evidence base in order to facilitate more effective program design and delivery.

Whilst there is evidence highlighting the lack of physical activity and the impact this has on health outcomes for Indigenous people, there is a shortage of evidence outlining the contribution that participating in sport provides to health and well being and effective intervention studies (Shilton, TR & Brown, WJ 2004). In particular to females who are underrepresented in participation in physical activity (Mason & Wilson, 1998). If there is to be large organisational investment into Indigenous sport programs this needs to be supported by more robust and rigorous research.

3.0 Barriers to Program Delivery

We know that structural barriers can decrease participation in sport. Such barriers include limited access to facilities and high costs of transport, membership and uniforms. Factors such as race-based discrimination can also exclude participation (Thorpe et al 2009, NPHP 2005).

Instead of focusing this submission on the barriers that are presented to introducing programs it is more productive to highlight the facilitators and enablers that have allowed successful programs to be run and developed in Indigenous communities.

4.0 Facilitators to Program Delivery

There are a number of useful examples and case studies that can be cited from the Victorian Sport and Recreation sector that can be examined when identifying key program facilitators that have a large bearing on whether Indigenous sporting programs are successful. This information needs to be shared and understood from all stakeholders involved such as funding organisations and organisations responsible for program delivery.

4.1 Community Engagement

A key element expressed in successful program establishment is community engagement. Having a sport come into a community to deliver a program for a set period of time and then leave provides no lasting benefit beyond the period of participation. Successful program design and delivery requires community ownership and support. Engaging with communities to establish what activities they would like delivered and in what format is a key starting point. This requires sport to step back from what they think should be delivered to consulting with the community and delivering what they want.

It is important to recognise that engaging with the community does not just involve the sport providers and the participants but also the broader community stakeholders such as community members responsible for health, police, education and welfare. (Cairnduff, S. 2001). The focus on enhancing features such as community connectedness support programs to become more sustainable. (Tighe, J & McKay, K 2012) Sport has proven to provide an effective vehicle to connect with family (Nelson, A 2009) and successful programs such as the Rumbalara Healthy Lifestyles Program targets elders, supporters and non-playing community members to encourage full community support. (Victorian Government Department of Human Services 2009)

Whilst sport and recreation is a vital ingredient in helping to build the health and wellbeing of communities it should be acknowledged that sport is one part of a complex myriad of issues surrounding Indigenous health and well being. To solely focus on sport as a determinant of wellbeing fails to appreciate the vital role that all government departments play in the health of communities including key community services such as education, employment, health, law and order. All relevant government departments should be working towards a whole of government approach in tackling health inequalities prevalent in Indigenous communities.

4.2 Program Design- From Unstructured Towards Structured Participation

Traditionally sport occurs in a very structured setting with formalised rules and procedures however previous experience demonstrates that successful Indigenous sporting programs often commence in an unstructured manner. This includes modifying sport formats so that they are recreational in nature. As communities become familiar and engaged with the sport the nature of participation can move towards a more structured format. A good example of this is Surfing Victoria's Indigenous Surfing Program (Appendix A). It was initially established so that participants could attend on a casual and ad hoc basis. The program, which was funded by VicHealth, involved Surfing Victoria working with community leaders and engaging them in the formulation process. In the early days of the program sometimes nobody would attend or partake in sessions however over time as more and more participants became involved leaders were established and the community 'owned' the program, it then moved towards a more formalised process. Each year the Indigenous surfing carnival is now held attracting hundreds of participants. It is a major event and success story for Victorian coastal communities.

This example also demonstrates that whilst Indigenous communities are historically linked to participating in football codes there is a broad range of potential sports and activities that hold appeal. While whole-of-community participation may be desirable from a western health perspective, it may not reflect local priorities. It may also be necessary to look at different models of sport and recreation delivery from those used in urban areas. (Beneforti, M. and Cunningham, J., 2002).

4.3 Program Design- Social/ Recreational Participation

Being flexible in sport selection, program design, delivery and also being prepared to modify them to meet the requirements of the community is essential. This point is especially relevant to female Indigenous participation. Traditionally programs are offered to males in structured and competitive formats however we know from research into non-indigenous female participation in sport that female interest drops off in the teenage years due to females not necessarily seeking a competitive sporting experience, demonstrating a preference for more social non-competitive sport. This barrier should be considered when tailoring programs for Indigenous female participants.

ABS data from 2001 shows that participation rates for girls in organised sport is lower (54.2%) when compared to boys (68.6%). Females have higher participation rates than males in the following activities, with some exceptions they are largely unstructured and non-competitive in nature, they are; aerobics (13.0%) swimming (11.8%), netball (5.3%), yoga (3.6%), bushwalking (3.3%), dancing (2.8%), martial arts (1.6%), horse riding/equestrian (1.3%).

Combining the preferences for teenage girls to select sports which are predominately recreational together with the main reasons they play sport, which according to a 2006 ABS study on Women's participation in sport and physical activities, highlights that they want to;

- socialise and have fun
- learn new skills

- keep slim and fit
- feel good and relieve stress

Whilst these statistics and rationale might not fully translate into Indigenous settings, it is a good starting point to consider how sporting programs should be tailored towards encouraging participation from Indigenous females.

4.4 Creation of Community Role Models

Many sport and recreation programs operating in Indigenous communities do so in an environment of high turnover of development officers and low community involvement. Despite a general understanding that programs need to function as part of a 'whole-of-community' approach, there often appears to be little integration of the sport and recreation program with other parts of the community. (Beneforti, M. and Cunningham, J., 2002).

It is important to recognise that role models play an important part in the successful delivery and ongoing sustainability of sporting programs. Role models at the community level are very important for the success of programs. Often strong leaders and role models within the community are the driving force behind successful programs. Sports have a role to play in developing and nurturing community leaders, this includes skills transfer to local residents so that they can carry on once the sport and development officer leaves the community. (Beneforti, M, Cunningham, J., 2002)

The aim of the sport and recreation officer's job, and hence the responsibility of organisations that fund and/or employ sport and recreation officers, should be to build the capacity of the community to such an extent that local residents can take over the program and the officer can move on to a more needy community. (Beneforti, M, Cunningham, J., 2002). And it is not just within the sport program that community leaders can have an influence. Community leaders have a role to play within broader community activities such as art & craft, employment, school studies, making healthy lifestyle choices and suicide prevention (Tighe, J & McKay, K 2012).

There is a distinction between community based role models and elite athletes role models. Often there is a great sense of pride with elite athlete role models who are promoted and celebrated within communities however whilst there are many male Indigenous athletes succeeding in National and International sport, female elite role models are not as prevalent. There is a greater role that media can play in supporting and promoting female athletes, especially female elite athletes in order to encourage the next generation of female participants.

4.5 Building Capacity of Sporting Organisations

Considering the important role that sports play in developing community leaders who go on to achieve broader community outcomes, the sport sector has a role to play in developing the capacity of sporting bodies and staff delivering programs. There needs to be widespread understanding of the barriers and enablers that ensure successful program delivery. This includes cross cultural awareness training to ensure they are sensitive to the needs and requirements of different communities. The effective delivery of sport and recreation programs also requires appropriately skilled and trained personnel who can ensure programs are designed and implemented strategically to tackle broader social issues. (Cairnduff, S. 2001).

It is not just staff delivering programs that should undergo education and training. Management and boards need to understand that successful program implementation will not necessarily happen immediately or within the financial year to which they report. Expectations need to be adjusted accordingly. It is evident from previous research that management also need to be aware that

development officers often feel like they are on call 24 hours a day. This can lead to burn-out, meaning that the sport and recreation officer may only stay a short time in the community. (Beneforti, M. Cunningham, J., 2002).

4.6 Taking a long term view

Successful program delivery generally takes place over a long timeframe however the funding and a management of program implementation takes place over shorter time periods, usually 12 months. Funding agencies need to take this into consideration when funding programs so that longer term goals and considerations are taken into account. In addition short term funding cycles create uncertainty about future provision of funds that can affect continuity of development officers and programs. (Beneforti, M, Cunningham, J. 2002). Grant terms, conditions and evaluation need to be tied to the delivery of sustainable and achievable outcomes in order to provide ongoing certainty to staff and communities undertaking programs. (Cairnduff, S. 2001).

It is intuitive to look at the number of sporting organisations applying for funding to work with specific population groups under the VicHealth funded State Sporting Association Participation Program 2011-14 (SSAPP).

SSAPP is a pilot program of \$10.2 million administered by VicHealth in conjunction with 30 State Sporting Associations (SSAs). The program aims to increase participation in community sport and active recreation, particularly among priority populations, such as people with disabilities, Indigenous Australians, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, women and girls.

Whilst 30 SSAs have been selected to participate in the project only 4 SSAs elected to target Indigenous Groups these include Canoeing Victoria, Victorian Rugby League Inc, Victorian Rugby Union Inc and Surfing Victoria. The reasons for this relatively low selection of Indigenous participation requires further analysis. One of the reasons may be the lack of a Victorian State Peak body for Indigenous Sport. Previously the Victorian Aboriginal Youth Sport and Recreation organisation (VAYSAR) acted as a peak body by which SSA's could partner and learn from in order to deliver programs however this organisation has been dormant since 2010. VAYSAR was also responsible for delivering sport carnivals however this has not occurred in Victoria for a number of years. These types of carnivals can provide an opportunity for the community to connect through sport. (Nelson, A 2009)

5.0 Conclusion

vicsport thank the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs for the opportunity to provide feedback on this important inquiry. Sport and recreation has an important role to play in improving the health inequalities that exist within Indigenous communities however it is not the sole solution. Sport can play its part by engaging with communities, modifying programs to suit requirements and taking a long term/ broader view of the role they play within communities. By learning from and sharing knowledge that has been gained from successful programs run in the past, sport can more effectively offer participation opportunities that will help improve outcomes for Indigenous communities.

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7.0 Appendix A

Surfing Victoria – Inclusion of Indigenous Australians



Photo: Courtesy Justin McManus



Surfing Victoria (SV) has spent many years running an Indigenous surfing program, through this time they have faced many hurdles and enjoyed much success. Through their learning's, your sport can be educated on some of the strategies that worked, and some of those that did not succeed and use their experience to guide a program your sport would like to run to increase participation within the Indigenous community.

It is important to note the time that it may take a sport to enter this space, and for success to come their way. It is the view of SV staff that some members of the Indigenous community may not welcome you immediately, but that is not a negative sign. It has taken time to prove their loyalty, commitment and to gain trust and a 2 year project may limit the amount of time you have to generate positive relations and provide the foundation to achieve successful outcomes. It is important that not only do the staff who are rolling out the program understand this matter, but also senior management of the State Sporting Association (SSA), the Board of the SSA and the funding body responsible for supporting the project. Educating your workplace and management in cultural awareness is imperative and there needs to be a shift to looking for positive outcomes of a project rather than simply numbers of people who attended. Truthful, honest communication with leaders in your sport is important along with education on the differences you may be facing working in the field of Indigenous inclusion.

This honest, truthful communication is vitally important in dealings with the Indigenous community too. It is important to be clear of what your sport can and cannot deliver, and then to run the program within these constraints. To over promise and under deliver will prove to be a critical misstep in your projects success.

Some successful strategies in SV's Indigenous Surfing Project have been;

- A flexible work plan is imperative. There is a need to manipulate the program to accommodate the group/culture you are working with.
- If you are finding it hard to begin, chose one small community and focus your efforts on them. Working very closely with one group will ensure you have the time, resources and commitment to deliver a great program. It will build your foundations before you branch out into a wider community. Start small and achievable, because if you are in and out of communities you won't develop the relationships and get the traction you require to immerse your program into that group.
- Working in small communities and having success leads to great word of mouth promotion which is strong in the Indigenous community. It has been very successful for SV to have a successful program and then carry that brand into new communities.
- Targeting the whole community is important. Elders are very important in Indigenous culture so ensure they are participating in and/or supporting the project.
- Encourage families to participate as a whole. This supports outcomes in mental health, lifestyle, improvements to the community and in minimizing domestic violence. SV provided surfing camps where parents attended along with their children to encourage the connection between children and their parents.
- Indigenous role models are one of the most significant strategies employed by SV. Find a person within the community who you are working with who is passionate and they will be your driver in the community. Assist this person with education and support and they will be your Champion of Change. Provide guidance and feedback and acknowledge their time and effort. Ensure these people have a chance to own the project and be able to influence the plan. This will prove to be of great assistance to your project.
- Ensure the program continues to progress and is a sustainable model.
- Encourage structures that are strong in the Indigenous culture, such as kinship. SV takes advantage of this by using senior coaches to teach older children, and then using the older children to teach the younger children.
- Immerse yourself in the community. Be visible, attend other events and support them so they will support you.

Some hurdles that SV faced were:

- Filtering through the community to find the right people to be a part of the project. Then being able to work with these people to influence, develop and customize the program.
- Transport has been an issue for SV. The key is to work with the community and get an understanding of what any limitations are and then best providing assistance to support participations. This may be in the form of a travel allowance. It is important that the community are involved in these decisions to ensure self drive and ownership. If the program is a good model, they will do their best to make it work.
- Being honest about failures. If no attendees turn up to events then it is difficult to report back to senior management and funding bodies of these disappointment, however it provides an opportunity to evaluate the program and how to make it more successful next time.

Overall SV have had huge success in an area that many sports have failed. Their successes and hurdles provide guidance to sports who continue to work in this field in the future.



the active voice

