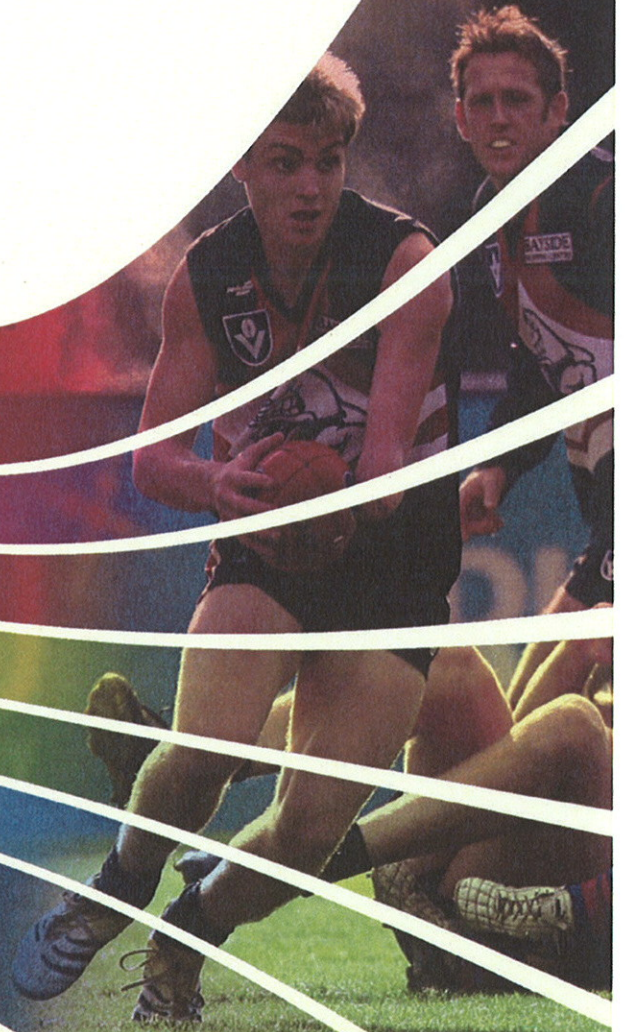
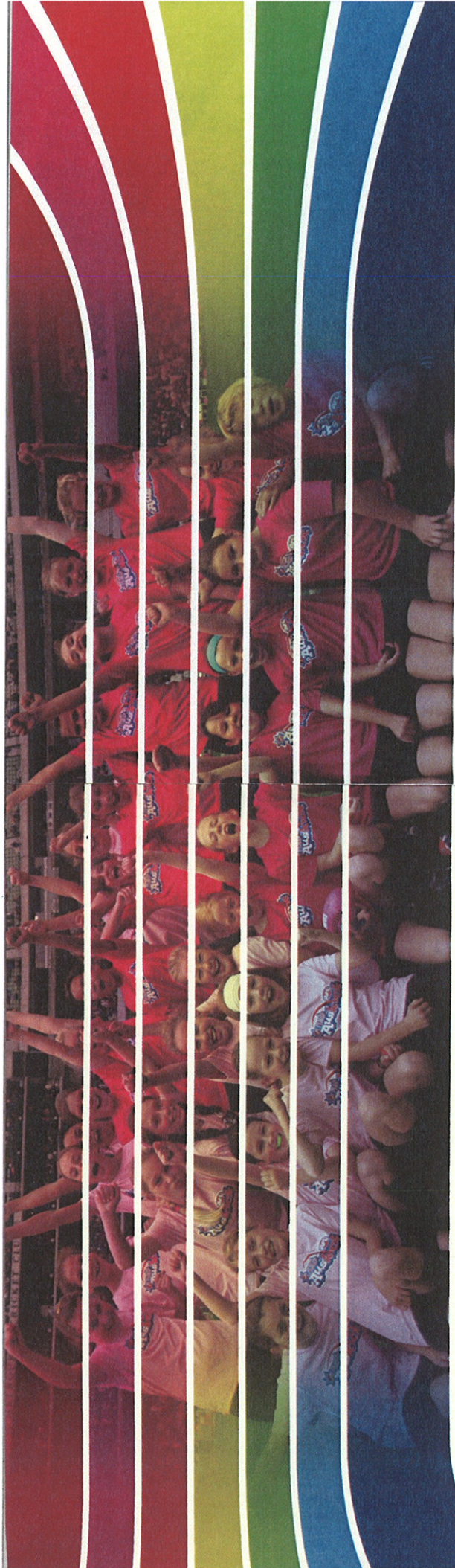




AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL

A PLACE FOR EVERYONE





AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL - A PLACE FOR EVERYONE

Ideas on how to create an inclusive football environment

Our society is in a state of continuous and rapid change. To attract on and off-field participants in the future it will be necessary for Australian Football organisations at all levels to develop inclusive practices aimed at embracing people from diverse population groups and ability levels to a football code that will be unfamiliar to many of them.

AFL Victoria has produced the 'Australian Football - a place for everyone' resource with support from VicHealth to illustrate a range of initiatives other football groups have put in place to attract a wider portion of local people living in their communities - therefore increasing the number of players, coaches, umpires, volunteers and supporters.

Through creating inclusive football environments football organisations will prosper as people from all walks of life come together at a club, umpire group or Auskick centre to participate and develop a strong sense of belonging.



Mick Daniher
Manager Development and Planning
AFL Victoria

WHAT IS INCLUSION?

Inclusion is about opening up the game of Australian Football to the whole community including diverse population groups.

Our diverse population encompasses groups such as people with a disability, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, people within the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered community and people from low socio-economic backgrounds. It also means significant support around populations such as women and families as well as retirees who represent one of the fastest growing population segments of our community.

'An organisation that creates an inclusive and welcoming environment often finds that they attract more members, and the added benefits that this brings, than they thought possible.'

WHY BE INCLUSIVE?

Broadly speaking, individuals and organisations have both a legal and moral responsibility to be inclusive of any individual or group.

It is unlawful and immoral to exclude on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, race, or ability. Involving a broad range of people in Australian Football introduces the sport to more people - as players, coaches, officials, administrators and supporters.

The benefits of inclusion are:

- **More members** who can add a richness and diversity to the environment;
- **Wider community promotion** of Australian Football covering local councils and prospective sponsors who will be drawn to the 'welcoming of all' philosophy;
- **Gain increased use** of council facilities and grounds;
- **Greater connection to the local community;**
- **Increase in volunteers** from either the 'new' person or their family and friends;
- **Re-invigoration of an organisation** with 'new blood' and fresh ideas; opening up new possibilities.
- **New levels of competition** and
- **Additional expertise** in officiating, coaching and administration.

"Although I was unsure at first, when I started coaching footballers with a disability it immediately became apparent that I just need to focus on their Football. Their type of disability is irrelevant."

THE COACHES' ROLE IN INCLUSION

Good coaches adapt and modify their coaching to create an environment that caters for individual needs and allows everyone to take part. Inclusive coaching should not be considered a separate coaching skill but a reflection of good coaching practice.

Inclusion is not an issue specific to people who have impairments, and there may be many reasons why a person may not be fulfilling their potential. Being inclusive means adapting and modifying coaching practices and activities to ensure that every participant – regardless of age, gender, ability level, disability, socio economic status, sexual orientation and ethnic background – is included.

Any activity or skill drill can be modified to better cater for all participants. In most instances a rule, equipment, environment (such as playing surface), timing of sessions or instruction style can be changed to allow all participants to better improve their skill level and enjoyment. If unsure, always ask the participants what modifications could be made.

Everyone Deserves a Fair Chance

"Have I given everyone a fair chance?" is something that Fitzroy/Carlton Auskick Coach Phil Murdoch asks himself at every single session. His desire to ensure that every child has the opportunity to experience success and a positive football experience is typical of the Auskick Coach of the Year.

Fitzroy/Carlton Auskick is a mix of all abilities and backgrounds - some with disabilities, indigenous children, some from a migrant and refugee backgrounds and all just mad about their footy. Regardless, all are treated with fairness, respect and consistency. This Auskick has not specifically recruited such a broad cross section - word of mouth has grown throughout the community and friends have introduced more friends to this great football experience. Put simply, Fitzroy/Carlton Auskick is representative of its local community because it values diversity and equality of opportunity.

Phil uses mentoring, peer teaching and loads of positive reinforcement to ensure all skills and abilities are catered for. His mentoring group, the "Punt Club" pros, are used to guarantee that all kids at the Centre have mastered the skill of the punt kick in some way. Many parents have also been mentored into a coaching role at the Centre, and have quickly blossomed in such a welcoming environment.

Phil is proof that being inclusive really is best practice coaching.

Discovering a Pathway for Girls

The Narre South Lions Junior Football Club often found that when their junior girls turned 14 they either gave up football or moved to another club. The Narre South Lions JFC established a Youth Girls team in 2006 to give girls the opportunity to continue playing football with all sides wearing the same guernsey.

Narre South Lions JFC President, Peter Gajanovic said "The girls are a crucial team to the club, they have been fantastic. The enthusiasm and keenness of the girls is no different to the boys. They are very much a part of the club and are integral to everything we do."

The club currently has a number of girls participating in both junior football and Auskick. The presence of a strong pathway for girls has been a fantastic benefit to the club. "The younger girls can definitely see evidence of a pathway now that we have the Youth Girls team at the club. We currently have several girls playing in the Under 13's who are very excited about playing Youth Girls next year - and that is fantastic, knowing they can continue playing a game they love" Gajanovic said.

Several of the Youth Girls also assist with Auskick on Saturday mornings which is a fantastic help to the club but also provides the younger girls with great role models.

Lost Without the Magpies

"We can't imagine what our Club was like without the Magpies. They have added so much to every aspect. Not only has it increased what the Club offers the community, it has also meant that we have had an increase in the number of helpers and members at the Club."

The Moonee Valley Magpies team is made up of players (both men and women) with an intellectual disability, who play in the FIDA (Football Integration Development Association) League. They are a part of the club in both playing and non-playing roles.

Former senior coach, Chris Tankard, tells the story of his "assistant" coach, Jason, who also played with the Magpies. He would be there at every senior training session and match - taking stats, organising equipment, giving words of encouragement and helping out in anyway needed. "Honestly, he was invaluable in his role. If he ever missed a training session or match we would be lost!"

Other Moonee Valley Magpie players have also run water or boundary umpired at other games. It seems that there is always a Magpie player around the Club willing to lend a hand. President Mick Intagliata comments, "There are always many jobs at a footy Club and it seems that there are always players from the Magpies side that are willing to lend a hand."

THE OFFICIAL WORD IS?

Great umpires follow the rules and officiate to the level of competition, regardless of who they are umpiring.

There is a huge potential to increase the number of umpires and umpiring support from under-represented groups in football, such as women and girls, people with a disability, the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered community, those with a low socioeconomic background, indigenous or people from a culturally and linguistically diverse background.

There are numerous examples throughout Victoria where Leagues have recruited from other areas of the community and reaped huge rewards.

"Our club is made up from a diverse lot – there are over 28 different nationalities represented. This really is irrelevant though, Football is our common language. Basically everyone is welcome and valued."



A Great Way to Integrate

As immigrants from China, Yanping Xu and her daughter wanted to learn more about the Australian community and improve their English skills. They were attracted to Australian Football because of its popularity, so when they discovered that their local league was looking for umpires they decided to join. They were surprised at the enthusiasm of the league and were offered training and support in their new roles as goal and boundary umpires.

"This was very exciting to us. We loved umpiring because of the discipline and fun. We also found Australian Football to be friendly and family orientated."

Yanping Xu has also actively promoted umpiring within the Chinese community and has written articles for the Chinese newspaper. She also officiated in the 2008 International Cup matches.

"It was great to see the number of international teams competing. Sport should not have boundaries and should be open to everyone to be involved."

The Gatekeepers

Acquisition of volunteers to assist with the running of a football club can be a nightmare for some. The Boronia Football Club stumbled across an interesting volunteer strategy through dual members of the Club and the local RSL.

A meeting was held between the Club and the RSL to discuss initial interest in small voluntary roles. A number of suitable and interested parties were discussed to approach for involvement.

As a starting point RSL members met with a couple of the Football Club Committee members to determine their requirements, capabilities and interest. Three people were recruited and it was decided the role of home game gate keeping and ticket collection was most suitable.

The RSL members took on their new role with such enthusiasm that they would even stay on for the remainder of the game once their duties were complete at half time. Through this activity they met other members of the football club and became integral members of the football club community. The RSL group really took pride in their roles as gate keeper and it got them out of the house, got them active and enjoying the social outlet with all three of them looking forward to each home game throughout the season.

THE VOLUNTEER AND ADMINISTRATOR APPROACH

Making your League/Club inclusive of all people in the community does not require a great deal of hard work, rather a common sense approach. Above all, it is a best practice approach to running any sporting organisation.

It is not about creating more work for the overstretched and dedicated volunteers. It is about working smarter!

An example of practical steps that your League/Club can take include:

- Provide a comfortable physical and emotional environment. Encourage positive and sensitive interaction by all members that is welcoming and accepting of difference.
- Make it publicly known that your club is accepting of ALL people, regardless of ability, race, gender, sexual orientation, religion or age.
- Establish an induction process to make all new comers feel comfortable and welcome.
- Ensure that offensive or harassing behaviour is not tolerated within the club environment. For further guidance refer to AFL Victoria's Member Protection Policy, Respect and Responsibility Program and the Bouncing Racism out of Sport Program.
- Inform all members, families and spectators of the Codes of Behaviour.
- Educate members about the inclusion of people from different backgrounds and the participation opportunities available to them. It is possible to adapt and modify practices to include all without affecting the integrity of the game.
- Consider both playing and non-playing roles.
- Review registration forms and procedures, and modify if required, ensure documents are easy to read and follow.
- Consider developing transport systems where regular participants give others a lift to and from the ground. Investigate the use of community buses and drivers, or alternative venues that reduce the need to travel.
- Minimise the financial strain by:
 - providing membership concessions for people living on a pension or fixed income;
 - offering monthly or periodic payment systems;
 - creating a pool of second hand equipment or equipment that people can borrow for a small fee from the club.

"We don't care where you are from, what your abilities are, or what gender you are. If you want to be a part of our Club then we will find a way to fit you in!"

All Access, All Abilities

Greythorn NAB AFL Auskick centre, which is situated near Balwyn North, is currently one of five centres, in metropolitan Melbourne and Geelong that implement a program to foster and develop children with special needs. John Whaling, coordinator at Greythorn, with the help of his enthusiastic management team and strong support from parents has been able to produce and implement a "Coaching Kids with Special Needs" framework. John developed this framework in conjunction with AFL Victoria, local council and interest groups like Autism Victoria. The framework has a strong focus on safety and fun, spanning community engagement, parent involvement, planning, communication and execution.

John currently coordinates close to 100 participants and said "Those who bring the most joy are those who try their hardest, yet through unfortunate circumstances of life have special needs; like asthma, autism or physical disabilities.

Johns framework for the Greythorn NAB Auskick Centre has been compiled into a presentation that consists of a PowerPoint instruction presentation, a sample plan for the centre and an individual participant special needs plan. Mark Smart, Oakleigh Regional Development Manager said "The program enables kids to experience the fun and enjoyment of NAB AFL Auskick within their capabilities in a safe and caring environment."

"John received an amazing response and people were full of praise for what he had been able to achieve at Greythorn NAB AFL Auskick centre."

Nelson Park in Geelong, Northern Special Schools in Moonee Ponds, Vermont South Special School and Narre Warren North are the four other centres who currently run a NAB AFL Auskick Program for children with special needs. These centres are helping to coach and develop over 250 special needs participants and one thing they all have in common is that each centre is driven by a passionate coordinator who has developed a strong support network to assist in the delivery of the program.

Conquering the Financial Barrier

The Western Regional Football League supports and encourages its Clubs to cater for the specific needs of their local community. One constant barrier is the lack of money to pay membership fees and buy equipment or uniforms. The League has actively supported its Clubs to come up with a variety of innovative ways to better cater for footballers of all different levels of financial means.

Great examples of this flexible approach:

The Glenorden Football Club partners with specific local community organisations that allow the Club access to those that are socially and economically disadvantaged. It offers discounted memberships to those that cannot afford it and prides itself on offering the lowest membership fees in the League. It also offers an innovative senior/junior sponsorship program where each senior club member sponsors a junior member by paying for their uniform.

The Braybrook Football Club offers free junior membership and sponsorship of the Under 16 and 18 teams for their equipment.

Hoppers Crossing Football Club offers a payment plan for a member that is experiencing financial hardship.

These great examples highlight that inclusion is not just about targeting specific populations but about breaking down the barriers to participation in Australian Football.

Community Stars

Fitzroy Stars Football Club is a fabulous example of a football club that has embraced its local community and used this community to give new life and values to the club. The club has recently re-formed after a period of some years, and now plays in the Northern Football League.

In order for the club to be successfully re-formed it had to go through a planning process and identify its principles and values. Essentially, the Club planned to be a well run organisation that reflected its local community, which has resulted in an increase in membership.

95% of Fitzroy Stars membership is from the indigenous community and this has enabled the club to focus on family friendly values. Some of these values that have been put in place have included a ban on the sale of alcohol during matches. This has been so successful that other clubs are looking at this example. The club sees that football can be a vehicle to promote a healthy and successful life and has also noticed an improvement in fitness, weight loss and the general health of its members.

The Fitzroy Stars Football Club boasts a playing list of 108 players and has plans for the redevelopment of the ground and facilities in the future.



GETTING STARTED...

Planning is the key to success with any new initiative. It is always best to start small. Gather a small group of keen people and work through the following:

- **What are you going to offer?** Start with what is existing. Inclusion does not necessarily require anything new or different.
- **Who can you target?** It is best to look at the demographics of the local area. Talk to community groups and find out what they want to do and what their needs are.
- **When should you offer the programs?** Remember to be flexible and creative.
- **How are you going to seek out these groups and conduct the programs?**

Partner with another organisation. There are many organisations that are available to assist you. Look locally at the services available and try to link in with these. The local council may be a great place to start.

Gather the right people. Get other eager people involved either directly in the planned activity/program or as "champions of the cause." Create an "army" of enthusiastic people that will spread the word.

Time is the key. Don't rush into anything. Build a foundation of information to help build confidence.

A welcoming environment. Ensure that policies and procedures are in place to ensure that your organisation values all of its members, volunteers, coaches and officials. This would include a transparent and open communication where all can have their concerns listened to. It also includes a facility that is well signed and clean.

Celebrate the successes. Including other groups that have not traditionally been involved in your sport can be a fabulous promotion to the local community and can bring many benefits.

Recognition. It is important to recognise the important work of volunteers, especially in new initiatives. Recognition can be as simple as a thank you card, certificate, special event, or public recognition. For further information try www.govolunteer.com.au or AFL Victoria's Quality Club program and Community Club awards at www.afvic.com.au

GENERAL THINGS TO THINK ABOUT...

- **Never assume** /suspend judgements.
- **Start small** and be specific in terms of any initiatives.
- Always ask a person how they can be included.
- Look at **what is most applicable** to your area and the needs of your organisation.
- **Learn from others** – look at other clubs/leagues in both football and other sporting codes to learn about how they have been inclusive.
- **Perceptions** of the ability and desire of people from different backgrounds to participate in sport. **Negative attitudes** towards new participants provide the biggest barriers and must be addressed if any program is to succeed.
- **The cost of participation** which may include costs associated with equipment, clothing as well as membership.
- **Consider training and competition timetabling** – weekends or late at night may not be the best time to attract certain population groups.
- **How are you advertising** activities or your Club in general? Think about how new potential groups can learn of the opportunities available to them?
- **Transport** issues including the location of the venue, lack of accessible and safe transport.
- **Lack of appropriate or appealing role models.** Football is traditionally seen as a sport for fit, young Caucasian males. What images can you provide to broaden this perception?
- **SEE THE PERSON FIRST rather than the background** – similarities to peers should be highlighted; not the difference/s.
- **Think ability, not disability, background, gender, sexual orientation, age or race** – Work with what the person can do. Everyone has their own unique skills and abilities, find out what they are and focus on them to get people from a range of backgrounds involved.

FURTHER INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE

AFL Victoria

AFL Victoria provide many resources and programs that can assist the football community in becoming more inclusive.

These include:

- Auskick manual and Centre support
- Tackling Volunteers and Club Management Program
- Umpire training and support
- Coach training and support
- Quality Club Program
- Bouncing racism out of sport
- Respect and Responsibility program
- Member Protection Policy
- Indigenous Program
- Multicultural Football program
- Female Football program

Contact details:

Ph: (03) 8663 3000

E-mail: afvicreception@afvic.com.au

www.afvic.com.au

Sport and Recreation Victoria (SRV)

Sport and Recreation Victoria (SRV) works to get more people involved in the community through sport and recreation. SRV assists the sport and recreation sector to develop and improve community sport and recreation facilities throughout Victoria.

Contact details:

Ph: 03 9208 3333

Email: info@sport.vic.gov.au

www.sport.vic.gov.au

Australian Sports Commission (ASC)

The ASC is Australia's primary national sports administration and advisory agency, and the cornerstone of a wide-ranging sports system. It can assist Club and Leagues with any issues relating to coaching, club administration, inclusion and resources.

Contact details:

Ph: (02) 6214 1111 (reception)

www.ausport.gov.au

Football Integration Development Association (FIDA)

Football Integration Development Association (FIDA) provides opportunities for people with an intellectual disability to play club football. It is affiliated with the Victorian Amateur Football Association (V.A.F.A.) and caters for 18 teams, most located within Football Clubs throughout Victoria.

Contact details:

General Manager - Peter Ryan

Ph: 0417 372 070

E-mail: ryan_doc00@hotmail.com

www.fida.org.au

Reclink

Reclink can offer specific advice and support for Leagues/Clubs on including groups with social and economic disadvantage.

Contact details:

Ph: (03) 9419 6672

www.reclink.org

Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY)

CMY website gives you access to the full range of publications, including research reports, policy papers, sport tip sheets, translated resources, as well as details about CMY programs and services.

Contact details:

Ph: (03) 9340 3700

Email: info@cmv.net.au

www.cmv.net.au

Gay and Lesbian Health Victoria (GLHV)

GLHV is a Health Resource Unit for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex Victorians, the first of its kind in the world. The role of the Unit is to enhance and promote the health and well being of GLBTI people in Victoria.

Contact details:

Ph: +61 3 9285 5382

Email: info@glhv.org.au

<http://glhv.org.au/>



'Above all, administering, umpiring, coaching and the general inclusion of people from different backgrounds is nothing more than good practice.'

