



Inclusion of people with disabilities in sport and recreation

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www.victoria.ymca.org.au/aaa

Sport and recreation is firmly embedded in Australian culture, and forms a significant part of our daily lives. It provides not only an arena to stay physically fit and healthy, but also plays a crucial role in the development of social networks, maintaining mental health, and improving quality of life and wellbeing.

But not all people are enjoying the benefits that sport and recreation brings. Statistics show that on average 19% of the Victorian population has a disability. If we include people with a temporary disability this percentage rises to 35%. *The Australian Social Trends 2004* states that 'while the proportion of people with a disability who had access to family and community support was similar to people without a disability (84% and 89% respectively), the proportions who attended culture and leisure venues and participated in sport and physical recreation was lower.' If sport is so important, why is it not truly representative of our society?

What can you do to change this?

Over the last ten years there has been a major focus on promoting inclusion in the sport and recreation sector. Although there is still a lot more to be done, there are a variety of programs and services that aim to increase inclusion and improve access to sport and recreation for all people. Through programs like Sports CONNECT, the Australian Sports Commission has been focussing on the supply side of sport which is about getting sports ready for inclusion. Sports CONNECT is a national program aiming to ensure that all Australians with disabilities have opportunities to participate in sporting activities at the level of their choice. Sports CONNECT is currently working with thirty national sports organisations to support them in implementing inclusive practices as well as managing a range of initiatives aimed at increasing opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in sport.

Access for All Abilities (AAA), funded by Sport & Recreation Victoria is another initiative available to sport and recreation providers and individuals. AAA aims to promote positive community values, by providing and supporting opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in sustainable, quality sport and recreation activities.

A dedicated Access for All Abilities Officer is located within each local government area of Victoria and works with a variety of community and sports organisations and individuals to facilitate and promote inclusive and accessible sport and recreation opportunities.

Your local AAA Officer can put you in touch with inclusive programs and events in your area, liaise with clubs and providers that may need some assistance to become more inclusive, advocate for inclusive sport and recreation environments and provide you with more opportunities to be social and active.

To view the list of AAA Program contacts visit: www.sport.vic.gov.au and follow the links to Grants and Funding, then Access for All Abilities. Alternatively you can contact the Community Access Unit at Sport and Recreation Victoria on 9208 3435 or email: info@sport.vic.gov.au.

While such initiatives as AAA and the work of Sports CONNECT are having a positive impact on the level of inclusion in the sport and recreation sector, it can not be assumed that people with disabilities will simply turn up to participate.

We all know there are a number of barriers to participation for people with a disability to get involved in local sport and recreation. These include transport, physical access, attitudes and opportunity. It can be difficult. History has shown that social inclusion for people with disabilities has been less than desirable and there is still a long way to go. However we should no longer let this prevent inclusive participation. There needs to be a shift in focus to what you can do to support your family member to become included in sport and recreation. So what can you do? Here are some ideas:

1. The most important thing to do is establish what your family member is interested in. For anyone

beginning a new activity, there needs to be motivation and interest. There's no point enrolling in a Tai Chi class if your family member actually wants to kayak. For some people, the opportunity to get involved hasn't come around very often, so they might not know what they're interested in. Try to isolate a couple of activities that might be of interest and arrange to have a go at a few different things.

2. There is no rush to make a decision, so always encourage your family member to trial a sport or recreation activity at least three times before making a decision. This allows time to get more comfortable and focus on the activity rather than nerves. As for anyone joining a new group the first session can be daunting when you don't know the people, the place, and of course the routines involved in the session.

3. Build relationships along the way – this can work from two angles. Firstly, think about the relationships and networks you already have, the people you know. What are your friends and family currently involved in – and more importantly how did they get involved? How did they make a connection and maintain that connection? (These people have already done the hard work! Learn from them.) Do you know people who have similar interests who might like to try something as well? Use these examples and follow the footsteps of the success stories around you.

Secondly, build relationships with the clubs or facilities you are supporting your family member to get involved in. Make sure it's a two way relationship as some clubs and facilities may never have catered for someone with a disability before and may feel inadequate and overwhelmed. Gently educate the club or facility and try to focus on positive stories. Reassure them that it's not as hard as they may have thought to include someone. If this is a positive experience for them, they are more likely to be receptive in the future which means you are also supporting other people in the community to get involved. As many clubs are run solely by volunteers there may be an expectation that family members assist in volunteer roles on weekends, during games and so on. Make sure you're clear about these expectations to avoid stepping on any toes. You want these relationships to have positive outcomes for everyone involved, so it's important to start off on the right foot.

The development of meaningful relationships and connections within the club or facility environment will mean a much better chance for your family member's involvement to become sustainable and ongoing.

4. Complete a mapping exercise of your community. What opportunities are available? What are the assets in your local community? What is going to help you reach your goals of getting your family member active? Think creatively – these could be people, places, events, organisations...

5. Keep it simple! What would you do for another family member? What are the steps you would take if you yourself wanted to join in and participate? It might look something like:

- Research local opportunities (see examples below).
- Make enquiries.
- Visit, have a look.
- Ask for a trial before you make any decisions.

With all the resources in the world, joining a club or class can still be a bit daunting, especially if you don't know anyone – so keep your eye out for beginner sessions and take your family member along, or ask the club for a good time to drop by and have a go. Focus on the abilities of the individual and even if you think they don't have the right skills, ask the coach or trainer what they would need to do to reach their goals. Or just go along and be a part of it as a spectator, which might be the first step.

Some good starting points to find an activity in your area are:

- Your local Access for All Abilities (AAA) Officer should be your first point of call. Contact the Community Access Unit at Sport and Recreation Victoria on 9208 3435 or email: info@sport.vic.gov.au for your local AAA Officer's details.
- Your local YMCA not only runs a variety of programs and services but also a range of camps throughout the year that can be either for the whole family or specifically for children or teenagers. To get in touch with your closest YMCA call 9403 5000 or visit www.victoria.ymca.org.au.

Contact your local Council who can advise you on a range of programs and services available in your area (such as school holiday programs, fitness groups, camps) or explore their website.

To find your local Council visit www.dvc.vic.gov.au/web20/dvclgv.nsf/headingpagesdisplay/find+your+local+council and enter your suburb, town or post code.

- Your local Metro Access Worker who is employed through local Council works to improve and develop your community to be inclusive for all people. Contact your local Council for more information.
- Your local Neighbourhood House runs a variety of recreation activities. To find your nearest Neighbourhood House contact your local Council or alternatively call the Association of Neighbourhood Houses & Learning Centres on 9654 1104 or visit www.anhlc.asn.au.
- Look in your local newspaper for advertisements or try the Yellow Pages. You might even like to Google your preferred activity and your suburb/town and see what comes up.
- Look for flyers on notice boards at your local council, library or shopping centre.

When making enquiries about sport and recreation don't forget to remind the person you are talking to that you would like to know about a range of activities – not just those that are disability specific. This will give you greater avenues of choice.

In general, stay informed about what is going on in your community – you never know what will become available in the future. Add your email to mailing lists that send regular community updates such as:

- Your local Access for All Abilities Program: www.sport.vic.gov.au
- Go for Your Life: www.goforyourlife.vic.gov.au
- Infoxchange: www.infoxchange.net.au
- Disability Online: www.disability.vic.gov.au

Sometimes we underestimate the challenge of someone with a disability becoming truly engaged and embraced within the culture of a club or leisure facility. Sometimes it might take some persisting before there is a positive outcome. While there are hurdles along the way, don't forget there are a number of ways to get involved and participate that don't necessarily include physically 'playing'. Your family member might enjoy spectating, volunteering, coaching, scoring, becoming a committee member, supporter, official, and so on.

It's not just about playing. It's about participating and belonging.

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REFERENCES:

- Australian Sports Commission: www.ausport.gov.au/participating/all/disability
- The North Western Disability Case Management Action Group: *Disability Information Kit*
- Sport and Recreation Victoria: www.sport.vic.gov.au
- YMCA Victoria – Access for All Abilities: www.victoria.ymca.org.au/aaa
- Australian Social Trends 2004: www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/1020492cfc63696ca2568a1002477b510478185eb37fe097ca256e9e00277edc!OpenDocument