

## Auburn Football Cultural Diversity Project

### Organisations Involved & Contact Details

**Organisation:** Auburn Council and Granville and Districts Soccer Football Association

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### Aims & Target Group

**Aim:** The aim of this project was to help newly arrived migrants and refugees who have arrived in Australia in the past five years to get involved with existing local soccer clubs. The initiative came about due to an increased awareness that newly arrived and refugee communities in the region, who are interested in and enjoy playing soccer, were not accessing mainstream competitions due to financial, social and cultural barriers.

**Target group:** The target group were newly arrived migrants and refugees. However, anyone in the local area was eligible to participate in the soccer coaching and referee courses associated with the project.

### Project Description & Components

An important component of this project was to integrate newly arrived migrants and refugee players into existing teams, rather than form ethno specific ones. However where whole groups approached a club to form a team, it was not possible to be discriminatory on racial grounds and insist particular ethnic groups be split up.

Players were expected to participate in information sessions to help increase their understanding of how to get involved in soccer. The sessions covered topics such as how to get involved in soccer, how soccer clubs function, basic rules of the game and how to manage anger.

Newly arrived migrants and refugees were offered subsidised registration fees and their families were encouraged to participate in club activities such as canteen duty, preparing fields, coaching and team management and helping out with other aspects of competitions.

### Process





Registration fee subsidization was a key aspect of the project as this was one of the major barriers to newly arrived migrants and refugee families to actively participate in local soccer competitions.

## Outcomes

Subsidised players under the age of 16 were well integrated into the competition with few, if any problems. This is largely attributed to their age and the fact that these young people are integrated in other ways through school and so forth.

Also, successful for the most part were those players that integrated into existing teams. This was put down to the likelihood of the mentoring role that the experienced players were able to provide.

The project was successful in producing a more constructive relationship with those of other cultural backgrounds, working together for a common end (for their team) rather than a competitive situation where one ethnic group is pitted against another.

The coaches and other representatives from the clubs involved were from various backgrounds, some Anglo-Celtic, others from CALD backgrounds, including Lebanese. An important outcome seems to have been that the coaches and other club representatives had a sense of empathy and understanding of the experiences of their newly arrived migrant and refugee participants and then were able to explain to others how some of the time, these experiences contributed to more difficult anger related behaviour among participants.

## Challenges & Obstacles

There were significant issues with one particular group of adult players who had formed their own ethno-specific teams, rather than integrate into already existing teams. Mid-way through the season both teams were suspended from the competition and the club for various breaches of the clubs code, after repeated warnings. The breaches related to playing unregistered players, heated tempers on the field and in a number of instances, abusing the referee and the crowd on the sideline.

A significant obstacle was racism or perceived racism from referees, as well as racist taunts from other teams aware that this is a useful means of 'getting a rise' out the players who then may be sent off.

The negative experiences encountered in this first trial provided some valuable lessons. The club manager involved with the unsuccessful ethno-specific team felt that more support needed to be given pre-season and during the competition. He particularly emphasised the importance for funding for seminars and mentoring around player behaviour, and also mentoring for parents and spectators.





Parental involvement also tended to be quite limited. There was a level of assumed knowledge about Australian 'Saturday Sport' that in fact was quite foreign to parents. This particularly related to the role of parents and volunteers in club life.

#### Funding

Living in harmony grant.

