

Football United: Refugee Youth Soccer Development Program

Organisations Involved & Contact Details

Organisation: School of Public Health and Community Medicine

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Aims & Target Group

Aim: This program seeks to assist young refugees in their immigration and integration to Australia by providing a supportive and enjoyable environment through a soccer development program.

Target group: The target group in this specific case study within the program was young Muslim Australians from Iraqi, Afghani and African refugee communities and young working class Anglo Celtic male volunteers from the Maroubra area and Sutherland Shire.

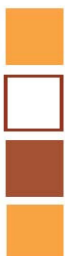
Project Description & Components

While the program is particularly focused on youth, it contains elements designed to contribute to building community cohesion among the different refugee communities, but also explores the potential to bridge across different Australian communities.

The program combines a number of approaches that have documented successes such as the use of sport to bring people of differing communities together.

Football United has formed partnerships with various community organisations including Blacktown, Liverpool, Auburn Councils, STARTTS, Migrant Resource Centres, the Police Communities and Youth Clubs (PCYC) and Football clubs throughout Sydney, as well as establishing a strong base of committed volunteers. Through these partnerships Football United delivers weekly after-school soccer skills programs, vacation training camps, coaching and referee training, family gala days, a mentoring program, and 'Football in the Park' every Saturday for refugees and local residents.

This particular case study focuses on one part of the 'Football in the Park' (FIP) component of the program. Football in the Park is a Saturday football training and fun program where kids





can get involved in training and informal mini-games, rather than participate in the mainstream soccer competition. Among the volunteers assisting with FIP were young anglo-celtic males.

Process

This is an innovative program based on a community capacity building model. Whereas other refugee soccer initiatives (see Auburn Football Cultural Diversity cases study) focus on providing one off funding support to cover registration fees, the Football United project aims to 'prepare the ground' for participation of refugees in mainstream competitions by fostering links and relationships between refugee communities, service providers and soccer clubs, and provides the training, support and mentoring to grow these relationships. The model is premised on the idea that it is not enough to simply provide funds for registration fees without preparation of players, and without ongoing support.

Outcomes

The involvement of the Anglo-Celtic male volunteers with these young refugee players made the Anglo volunteers feel a sense of delight at watching and helping their charges play and enjoy soccer and also appeared to create sense of empathy in the volunteers for the refugee experience.

There was a distinct shift in attitude from a somewhat racist and assimilationist perspective, to an awareness of cultural difference and acceptance of Australia's refugee program. This in itself represents a major shift and indicates that, managed well, there is potential for further attitudinal change.

This program was unique in engaging Anglo-Celtic working class men in a situation that exposes them to cultural difference and moves them out of their comfort zone.

Challenges & Obstacles

There were differences in the quality of relationships between the Anglo-Celtic men and the young Iraqi and African players. The relationship with Iraqi youth was a more challenging one, and possibly increased or at least reinforced negative attitudes towards Middle-Eastern youth, with whom the Anglo men had had encounters in their own beachside suburbs.

The more positive relationship with the African players possibly had to do with their more deferential attitude to the Anglo volunteers and similar cultural dispositions.

The more difficult relationship with the Iraqi young people had to do with a complex mixture of cultural differences, previous negative encounters with young people of Middle Eastern background, and prevailing stereotypes about them. Issues of power and competing masculinities also came into play.

Where some cultural mediation and preparation took place, the relationship was improved with the African young people.





Volunteer 'fatigue' was a looming issue, particularly where the volunteers had to travel long distances and give up whole Saturdays.

Funding

Currently Football United operates on approximately \$100,000 per year. This includes cash and in kind support from:

UNSW (85%)

Mary McKillop Foundation, Sisters of Charity Foundation, Macquarie Bank Sports(5%)

STARTTS and MRC's (10%)

