



VicHealth

SUCCESS STORY

Sunshine Heights Cricket Club

Victorian Health Promotion Foundation

“I Don’t Like Cricket – I Love It!”



The Sunshine Heights Cricket Club was founded by a group of local shopkeepers back in 1954 at Castley Reserve in Sunshine West. For over 55 years, the club has led the way in promoting cricket participation in one of Melbourne’s most culturally diverse communities. Immigrants have flocked to Sunshine for many years. In the 1960s, post-war Europeans (including Greeks, Italians, Poles, Turks, Cypriots, Maltese and Yugoslavs) settled and raised their families in the area. More recently, arrivals have come from Vietnam, Sri Lanka, India and Sudan.

Throughout this period, the club embraced newly arrived migrants and today includes members from over 30 different cultural backgrounds.

President Chris Hatzoglou, of Greek background, has been involved with the club as a player and administrator for over 24 years. He remembers that diversity existed way back when he started playing. “My team mates in junior cricket were from many different backgrounds. We were all made to feel part of the club, regardless of our differences. This is something that I and the current committee are proud to continue.”

“Our club reflects the community make-up and is on the front foot in accepting newly arrived migrants. We believe this diversity is our strength and has allowed the club to continue to grow at a time when traditional clubs have experienced major challenges in attracting and retaining new members.”

Progressive ideas and a strong sense of social inclusiveness amongst the committee have led to some breakthrough programs. This is illustrated by the strong growth in participation, particularly junior participants from newly arrived communities. A lack of reliable transport was identified as a major barrier to the participation of children from CALD backgrounds. The club’s Senior Coach, Matthew Shawcross, and Administrator, Gavin Mahoney, identified and developed options to help overcome these barriers. For season 2009/10, with support from Cricket Victoria, the club secured funding for an aide who assists with picking up and dropping off children to training sessions, matches and events. This has underpinned the formation of a new under 13s team.

Annie Hateley, Community Program Manager at Cricket Victoria, said that she is “...thrilled to find a progressive club which already has a well established program with potential to grow. The work that Sunshine Heights is undertaking within its local community and for cricket should be highly commended”.

The club is conscious of the changing priorities of individuals and families. It provides a flexible environment to cater for competing priorities. “We understand that people have family, school, work and other commitments and we accept that people can’t attend every single training session or play every match. We have a large membership to help us manage this,” explains Chris.

Sunshine Heights is proud to promote the message of cultural diversity in sport and has recently established a relationship with Youlden-Parkville Cricket Club to help promote ‘Harmony in Cricket’. In December 2009, a Twenty-20 match named the Harmony Cup was played at the historic Ryder Oval in Parkville. George Myconos of the Youlden-Parkville Cricket Club emphasised that “...the game was organised to celebrate the different cultures that enjoy the game and cricket’s power to bring people together”.

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The match featured players from many ethnic backgrounds, including former Zimbabwean international player Waddington Mwayenga who said: "Playing cricket is a way of meeting people from lots of different countries and getting involved in the local community. That's great for everybody but especially people who have recently arrived in Australia. Cricket really gives your life another dimension".

The event was played in great spirits and demonstrated to those not exposed to such diversity the benefits of removing barriers from traditional clubs to attract new members. Most of the participants in the Sunshine Heights team were first year members and enthusiastically embraced the opportunity to play in this match to show their support of cultural diversity in cricket.

"This approach is leading to a new and exciting landscape where people from many parts of the world come together in a positive and team-based sporting environment. It helps everyone get a better understanding and appreciation of the diverse experiences we all have," says Chris.

Stuart Clark, Cricket Victoria's northern region manager, says: "Cricket clubs should be places where everybody regardless of their cultural background, religion, gender, age or ability feels welcome".

That's a view fully supported by Mr Mwayenga. "If a person has a passion for cricket, our club has a place for them", he said.

Diversity extends to the volunteers involved with the club. Rather than rely on people who have been involved with the club for many years, the club encourages new members to take on leadership and volunteer roles to help shape the club's future. Four of the club's current senior captains are from CALD backgrounds. The club is proud of its track record of encouraging people to get more involved with a community-based organisation.

In addition to participating in cricket, food is an important part of the club's post-training activities and reflects the cultures represented at the club. For some members it is just as important as cricket. Selection night meals reflect the diverse tastes of members. It is not uncommon to have lamb souvlakis, marinated chicken fillets, pasta and Indian curries on the menu for selection and weekly meals. The traditional hamburgers and snags are not the favourites anymore.

The Sunshine Heights Cricket Club has evolved into a diverse club that is growing steadily and providing more opportunities for people to participate in a community-based organisation.

More Information

See <http://sunshineheights.cricketvictoria.com.au> or phone Chris Hatzoglou on 0416 101 637.

Through its Partnerships for Health Scheme, VicHealth is supporting 49 State Sporting Associations and their affiliated clubs to create healthy environments and promote the physical and social benefits of belonging to a sporting club.

VicHealth

15-31 Pelham St, Carlton 3053
PO Box 154, Carlton Sth 3053
Phone: +61 3 9667 1333
Fax: +61 3 9667 1375
Website: <http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au>

