

# Count Me In

## Research summary



### Introduction

Participation in sport is an important way to improve the physical and mental wellbeing of young people. However, research by The University of Melbourne shows that young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds are missing out on the benefits of sport.

The University of Melbourne Centre for Health Equity, Melbourne School of Population and Global Health's Count Me In research project, funded by VicHealth, showed that the cost of participation, lack of transport and competing priorities connected with settling in a new country are major barriers to these young people taking part in physical activity.

These barriers are compounded by a lack of knowledge amongst migrant and refugee communities about how local sports systems operate, a low number of welcoming programs, and the need for clubs to cater for specific cultural requirements, such as through providing Halal food or female-only programs.

With the aim of finding the best ways to overcome these barriers, The University of Melbourne trialled the employment of bilingual Community Support Coordinators (CSCs) in partnership with local sports clubs, Merri Health, Hume City Council and Moreland City Council.

**The role of the CSCs was to connect participants from migrant and refugee communities with local clubs by providing information and supporting communication.**

The research demonstrated that local partnerships and employment of bicultural Community Support Coordinators, who facilitated relationships at a grassroots level, were the key to Count Me In's success in increasing participation amongst migrant and refugee families.

The lead researcher for the Count Me In project was Dr Karen Block from The University of Melbourne. The project was funded through VicHealth's Innovation Research Grants Program.

Key findings are summarised below, followed by a checklist for sports clubs and community organisations seeking to increase participation in sport by young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

### Supporting sports participation for wellbeing and social inclusion

The Count Me In trial successfully supported **298 children and young people** (aged 3–16 years) to begin participating in mainstream sports across the Victorian local government areas of Moreland and Hume.

All the families involved reported a Muslim religious affiliation and mothers reported having lived in Australia on average for 6.8 years. Of the 267 participants who were contactable at the end of the project, 180 (67%) of young people were still participating, either at the original club to which they were connected or in a new setting.

The project team worked with individuals and families to encourage and facilitate sports participation. The project was also effective in increasing social connections and in building resilience. Surveys conducted at the beginning and end of the project showed a measurable increase in young people's physical activity, social connections and resilience and, in addition to enjoyment and fun, focus group participants reported a range of physical and mental health and social benefits that they attributed to their participation in Count Me In. Many participants wanted more opportunities to play more often, access to more sports and longer seasons or programs.



As a result of the Count Me In trial:



**30 organisational partnerships were formed**



**298 children & young people** (aged 3–16 years) began to participate in a sport



**22 sporting clubs** were engaged from Moreland and Hume LGAs, comprising 8 types of sports



**44 women and 29 girls**

took part in a newly developed badminton program established due to demand from the group

## Summary of key findings

Community Support Coordinators and local partnerships were key to the success of Count Me In

Bilingual CSCs were employed to represent the main language groups of migrant and refugee families in the local community.

The CSCs were strongly **connected to their communities**, effective in encouraging and facilitating families to join clubs and promoting the value of sports participation.

The CSCs attended **registration sessions** to assist with communications and help make families feel welcome.



**Local partnerships** between community organisations and sports clubs helped foster connections to local migrant and refugee groups and communities.

CSCs engaged in **ongoing advocacy** to reduce barriers such as cost and lack of transport.

**CSCs provided information** to clubs about cultural norms that could prevent ongoing participation (such as alcohol at events).

CSCs provided with **ongoing support, guidance and resources** from the partner organisations that supported the program (generally community health organisations and/or local government)

## How Community Support Coordinators helped families to overcome barriers to sport participation

### Costs

CSCs worked with clubs to arrange discounts and/or payment plans when needed.

### Lack of knowledge about sports

CSCs educated families about clubs and sports systems, equipment and clothing, need for consistent attendance, communications with coaches and team managers.



### Lack of access to transport

CSCs worked with clubs and families to arrange transport (e.g. carpooling).

### Discrimination or lack of appropriate and welcoming programs

CSCs worked with clubs to ensure a welcoming environment, discuss barriers, explain need for halal food and facilitate ongoing communications.

### Competing settlement priorities

CSCs educated families about the benefits of sport, facilitated registration and followed up with ongoing communication.

### Culturally determined gender norms

CSCs worked with clubs/recreation venues and community organisations to provide female only options where needed.

## Critical learnings



It's not enough to share information, refugee and migrant families require support during their first engagement with a local sports club and until they feel comfortable to attend independently.



Positive outcomes were facilitated by club personnel who made an effort to welcome families, explain how the club worked, were open to and appreciative of diverse cultures, and ready to discuss and accommodate specific religious and cultural issues.



Specific cultural and religious issues affecting participation by culturally and linguistically diverse families, such as gender, alcohol, religious observances and food need to be openly discussed and accommodated to effectively engage CALD communities.



Encouragement and education regarding the benefits of sport were necessary to recruit families.



Education for migrant and refugee families about the commitment required to participate at a local sports club was also critical and it was important not to assume families were aware of norms associated with sports clubs in Australia. For example, the commitment to turning up for games, wearing appropriate footwear, and communicating if unable to make it.

## CASE STUDY: BADMINTON PROGRAM

**In response to community demand, Count Me In established a partnership with Badminton Victoria (BV) to develop an indoor badminton program exclusively for females, providing a culturally-safe space for those uncomfortable in a mixed-gender and/or outdoor non-private environment. A group of 44 women (many of them mothers of participating children) and 29 girls took part in a badminton program.**

The cost of running the badminton program – which included court hire, equipment and coach fees – was initially covered by BV. After the first term, participating women and girls were asked to contribute to the costs.



Eight women went on to become accredited Badminton coaches, taking over coaching the sessions for other migrant and refugee women and girls. Several of these participants went on to work with Moreland City Council to establish the new 'Northern Badminton Club'. This is the only badminton club in the area and has plans to broaden their player base to include boys and men.

In addition to the physical benefits, there were positive self-reported impacts on mental health for women engaged in the badminton program and increased community leadership by women from a CALD background.



## For further information

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