

Sports CONNECT Panel: Webinar 3 and 4 – Benefits of inclusion for sport and people with disability



Clinton Fullgrabe

- Clinton is currently employed as an Access For All Abilities Coordinator within the City Darebin and is Chairman of the Ringwood Spiders Football Club which is a football team for people with a disability based in the outer eastern suburbs of Melbourne.

www.ringwoodspiders.com and <http://www.darebin.vic.gov.au/>



Peter Ryan OAM

- General Manager of the Football Integration Development Association (FIDA) with a long involvement in Australian Rules Football, Special Education and marathon running.

<http://www.fida.org.au/>



Denise McMillan

- Newly hired Inclusive Practices Officer for Bowls WA (State Sport Authority). Denise intends for bowls to be an option for individuals with disabilities who might otherwise not consider becoming involved.

<http://www.bowlswa.com.au/>



Max Binnington

- Currently employed as Sport Education Manager with vicsport and last year celebrated 40 years as a member of the famous Glenhuntly Athletics Club. Max has a long involvement with sport as an athlete and now coaches at the Glenhuntly Athletics Club where his squad includes athletes with disability.

<http://www.glenhuntly-athletics.com/> and <http://www.vicsport.asn.au/>



David Swaine

- Currently employed as Manager of Community Development at SCOSA (Spastic Centres of South Australia Inc). David has seen the role that sport can play in providing a connection to community for SCOSA clients and has implemented practices to embed sport and physical activity in the organisation.

<http://www.scosa.com.au/>



Simon Darcy

- Simon Darcy is an Associate Professor at the University of Technology Sydney Business School where he specialises in developing inclusive organisational practice for diversity groups. His work with people with disability has investigated sport participation and accessible tourism.

<http://datasearch.uts.edu.au/business/staff/details.cfm?StaffId=190>

Questions and Answers

Engaging the Demand

Q: How do you go about establishing relationships with people with disability and their families who may not know what sporting options are available?

Peter: Our clubs and FIDA target Special Schools but generally it is by word-of-mouth. We have also received good publicity through the media and have utilised the internet to our advantage.

Clinton: Relationships have been built through local service structures – day services, school, support groups, respite programs, outreach. Discussions focus on the add on benefits of being involved in sport and recreation such as; social interaction, friendships, participation in community, new experiences, etc

Denise: Typically families and/or disability providers are contacting us to make arrangements to try the sport of bowls. We hope to be more proactive in the future by having specific clubs run 'Come & Try' days that will develop into pathways to further participation in the sport.

Q: Do you as a sport provider sport offer opportunities across a range of times and venues that are different to the regular sport club timeframes to try and engage more people? If yes, how did you go about this?

Clinton: Our opportunities and club operate like any other local football club across Victoria. In terms of our recruitment, yes we do deliver satellite skill clinics with schools and disability services at different times as it's a captured market where we can engage with a number of potential members/ participants at once. This is achieved over time by building relationships and being flexible and working in with the needs of schools or services.

Max: Our Club does this only on an event basis. So twice per year we round up upwards of 80 volunteers to conduct a track and field Meet and a Cross country Meet and these are conducted during school hours for the participating schools. Beyond that we do not have the capacity to provide services other than the normal Club training and competition times. I believe this is a common theme for most local sporting clubs.

Denise: Most clubs are open 6 to 7 days a week and run a range of bowling events for social bowls, pennant bowls, and club bowls during all times of the day. Opportunities to bowl can be incorporated into these situations or independent of them – a sport like bowls can be flexible in that regard.

Q: What strategies can disability service organisations use to motivate service users and their families to see the benefits of being involved in sport and active recreation and to make the choice to be involved?

Denise: Encourage social inclusion, physical fitness, and personal independence/responsibility to people with disability in order to encourage participation in sport.

Max: This is a huge question. Frankly my recent experience suggests there are more road blocks here than with sporting clubs and organisations. Disability Sport Organisations need to ensure they are working with sports, especially local clubs, in the interests of all athletes and not creating a segregated environment by making unmanageable and unnecessary demands on clubs. More significant though is the large group of disability service providers who don't even think about sport as an option for their clients. There are many groups who don't realise how effective sport can be in helping their clients manage their disability and they often don't connect with the fact that sport operates out of hours whereas their service provision is in normal "office" hours. There is much work to be done here but also lots of opportunities for sport and the disability sector.

Clinton: You can't beat actual participation! Look at initially delivering opportunities at the sites (schools, services) to increase the awareness and the motivation of the service users. This has been useful for the Ringwood Spiders.

Q: Specifically to Simon Darcy (UTS) - what outcomes from the research conducted can be used to convince my organisation as to the importance of sporting involvement for people with disability?

Simon: I think that the benefits of sports participation findings are a terrific lever in getting organisations to understand that sport participation is more than the activity itself. For example, the benefits of sports participation for people with disability in this study transverse two major areas. The first is what most people would automatically identify as the health benefits of sports participation. For example, improved fitness and weight loss - it would be hard for any organisation not to want its members fitter and more healthy. Yet, while these certainly featured in what people with disability identified as being a benefit to them individually, what they identified as the overwhelming benefits to them was the social benefits of sport participation. Whether the person was an elite participant or somebody just starting out it was the fun they got from the activity, the sense of belonging and the share friendships that they developed through sport. Quite simply they just felt their life was far more enjoyable through their sporting involvement and this in turn change their outlook on their whole lives.

Making Links and Connections

Q: How can schools get involved with a club, so students with a disability can avail themselves of the clubs expertise and or specific knowledge?

Peter: Schools should get local clubs to provide players to run clinics and taster sessions at schools. Most clubs have players who have spare time during the day - schools shouldn't rely solely on elite players to provide this service.

Denise: Know your sport and know your product when going in to different markets. Most bowling clubs are willing to talk about further participation and have the added hook of reduced membership fees for juniors.

Clinton: We have liaised with the PE/Sport Teachers and looked at their curriculum to see where links can be made.

We have also accessed schools through school sports days, sporting carnivals, after school programs or school holiday programs.

Q: There are providers who offer sport to only people with disability. How do these providers find and link with traditional clubs who will welcome them as new members?

Denise: Most bowling clubs are willing to talk about further participation and options available to join the bowls community. Try and find the person that can make it happen – many State Sport Authorities will have an Inclusive Practices Officer or someone who is responsible for development/participation.

Peter: We try to link our FIDA teams to local football clubs, but not all are linked. Football clubs are now seeing the value of involving the whole community in their organisations and generally see the benefits a FIDA team can provide.

Clinton: Ringwood Spiders was specifically created to provide opportunities for people with a disability to participate, but for us it's the pathways and links we make with mainstream clubs that are promoted within the club. We have managed to create links with number of different local clubs around our area through conversations and support with our local government. Liaising with local government and other networks (eg Victorian AAA) can provide assistance with linking to inclusive and well-run clubs.

Q: Specifically to Peter Ryan from FIDA (Football Integration Development Association). How much support (not just financial) do you receive from the state body (AFL Victoria) and can you explain the working relationships that you have with them. Interested to see the link / working relationships between the state body and the clubs that has assisted FIDA to achieve what you have?

Peter: For many years we have been linked to the Victorian Amateur Football Association however many our clubs are not in the Amateurs. In recent years AFLVic have seen that FIDA aims to be a state-wide organisation and are very keen to strengthen our relationship and for us to utilize their facilities. Last season they provided a synthetic football and a season's pass to VFL matches for each of our registered players. I think our relationship with AFLVic will only grow and strengthen. We are keen to see the AFL support programs such as ours as well as in other states.

Clinton: From a local perspective, the Ringwood Spiders has strong relationships with the local football league (Eastern Football League) and support is provided via the access to umpires and networks through the league at no cost. Furthermore positive promotion to other clubs across the region has been very valuable.

Changing Attitudes

Q: How has the structure of your club/s changed to cater for people with disabilities and how long has this taken?

Clinton: It's important to remember initiatives like these are at times cultural changes within clubs and associations. There is no exact science to it. Changing an organisations culture needs to have a commitment at all levels and people need to feel part of the process.

Denise: This is still a work-in-progress but we have made a strong commitment to creating welcome and inclusive environments within our sport. There have been some wins, particularly with bowlers with hearing and/or vision impairments being fully integrated in to the club structure.

Peter: Fortunately football clubs in Victoria are coming to the realisation that to survive and prosper they need to engage their whole community. Many have women's, youth, girls and super rules teams; a FIDA team fits well in this environment. Changing attitudes is challenging and can be a long-term process.

Q: Specifically to David Swaine (Spastic Centres of South Australia). Do your disability support staff play an important part in enabling sporting opportunities for your client? When employing new staff at scosa, do you look for people with these skills?

David: Yes, our staff play a very important part in enabling sport opportunities for clients. It is imperative that staff have high energy levels and enthusiasm and we try to match staff, clients and activities accordingly. There are many conflicting priorities for our staff, however it is very important to identify key staff or 'champions' of the activities. It can take some time to get real buy in, but if you are starting a new sport program internally you really need someone with high energy to impart and maintain enthusiasm and drive it. In employing new staff the key is attitude and enthusiasm. We employ to our culture which is high commitment, high accountability and high FUN! We don't employ around

sporting/sports ability or involvement, however many people play sport and we find that will transfer into people's work. We conduct a number of whole of organisation sports events where the focus is on participation and fun. We work hard to create a tournament/finals environment to build atmosphere and excitement for all – clients and staff alike.

Q: In what ways can you work with people involved within your organisation to alter the attitudes of club administrators & athletes to be more inclusive to people with disability?

Clinton: It's great if it comes from the top of the organisation and filters down. Identify local leaders within clubs who have great influence and are respected, they are in a great position to be the change. Always reinforce the benefits – people are much more likely to commit to something if they can see the positives that will come out of it.

Denise: One of the best approaches is to believe and live your own positive attitude – lead and show by example. Also you could:

- Make inclusive/disability policies and stick to them.
- Create a simple action plan with established roll out dates.
- Create events specific to individuals with disabilities and test their involvement in the sport in order to create specific programs and pathways.
- Providing training to clubs to highlight positive attitudes and behaviours and provide practical advice.

Max: Again I would say this is largely by the attitudes of coaches and administrators in simply accepting people for who they are, but occasionally there is need for discussion with individuals to ensure the athlete with disability can compete and to break down traditional approaches or attitudes. One example was where we wanted some wheelchair athletes to compete in a 1500m race with able bodied athletes. The officials in charge on the day were against the idea citing the dangers of chairs and runners. There was a very cordial discussion involving a wheelchair athlete coach, a highly qualified Athletics Australia official [qualified in both able bodied and disabled competition], a local club official the two key event managers for the day and managed by the then Athletics Victoria President. While this might seem to be a bit over the top with “high” positioned people all were in fact members of local clubs in this competition. The officials were able to voice their concerns and have them responded to, have the race start modified to suit all the participants and then a position was taken by Athletics Victoria that their concerns were noted but the race would go ahead including the wheelies and that all care was to be taken to ensure a satisfactory outcome for all the athletes. The athletes were unaware of the discussion, all went in the race and it went off without a hitch. No similar problems have arisen since. We need to recognise that some people do have concerns that may be well founded in issues of safety, rules or some other area and should be given the courtesy of a hearing. In the end the controllers of the sport, event or Club must take the responsible position and often the result will win the doubters over.

Modifying the Environment

Q: I am secretary of Macleay Valley Baseball in Kempsey NSW. We plan to introduce opportunities for players with disability this year. Is it best to establish a separate competition or should we aim at integration? Or is it a play-it-by-ear situation which will be determined by the cohort that we attract?

Clinton: Choice is important for people with a disability – disability specific or inclusive programs/competitions can both meet the needs across the local community. It will be determined by a number of factors:

- The needs of the people involved – their capacity and experience
- Capacity of the clubs and local infrastructure to support a separate competition

At our club we have a number of pathways that are both disability specific and inclusive. Most of our players remain in the disability specific stream because of their cycle of friends/peers and the enjoyment they receive from playing with mates.

Denise: In bowls we are aiming at integration but offering different pathways. We offer social bowling which may have modified rules, equipment and environments and is played on a casual level; we also offer competition bowling at club, pennant or state level.

Q: Are there opportunities to develop different involvement for different disability such as physical versus intellectual. Quite often they are put together in the same groups however they often have very different needs. How is this overcome? Do sports clubs offer different programs for different levels of ability?

Peter: We are working to ensure all our FIDA clubs have at least two sides to cater for the huge range of abilities. Our competition is for players with intellectual disability but we do include some players who would otherwise not get an opportunity in mainstream footy.

Clinton: This is something that Ringwood have had to deal with over the past few years. We had an ageing playing list and need to inject some youth, but by doing this the spectrum of ability across the playing group was very wide. We have a range of age groups with juniors from 12 years of age to seniors who are 40 years. It was important that both age and ability specific opportunities within the club were developed. We solved this by looking at a number of different levels of participation across the club eg Junior Development Squad, Senior Playing Squad (Seniors & Reserves), Cheer Leaders Group, Senior Training Group, Supporters – we are very clear with the level of expectation and the associated ability levels that are required. This has worked really well for us and our overall numbers have increased significantly. Further details of our opportunities are available at www.ringwoodspiders.com

Max: Athletics in Victoria is run as a graded competition and allows for the athletes with a disability to slot into a “grade” that suits their ability. Officials are trained to assist, be tolerant and act according to the needs of the athlete. And it works for all sorts of disability. At training the coaches are aware of the issues to do with individuals and in some case, where behavioural factors are involved, there may be a greater involvement of the parents directly with the coaches. One such example at our track has developed to the point where the individual has been able to become much more part of the group and requiring less direct involvement of his parent. So our programs are not designed around specific programs for different ability groups but they are flexible enough to accommodate different ability individuals whether they are able bodied or not.

Q: What are the critical things to have in place before offering opportunities for people with a disability?

Max: A little over 10 years ago our Club took the bull by the horns and accepted the opportunity to conduct an event for children with disability at local special schools. With the strong support of our local Access for All Abilities staff and the enthusiasm of one Club member we were able to rally around 50 Club volunteers to conduct a track and field Meet. The fun and enthusiasm of the kids was infectious and since then we have had no trouble getting volunteers to do two programs each year. This had the effect of changing many attitudes to people with a disability, making an effort to ensure access where it had previously been limited and simply welcoming people as members with varying levels of ability. The short answer is simply having a couple of people prepared to have a go was the critical factor. The rest of the things fell into place because we wanted it to happen.

Denise: From a lawn bowling perspective you need a point of contact at the club that wants to help people with disabilities be involved in the sport and who is willing to give guidance and patience to those involved.

Clinton: Have plan in place to direct the initiative and know what it will look like. Be clear, realistic and specific about what your club can provide. You can't be all things to all people. Also, make sure the initiative is supported and understood by the clubs decision makers

Peter: The most important ingredient is the “driver” – our clubs need a coordinator who develop and run the FIDA side. They need the passion and commitment to ensure the interests of the FIDA team and its players are met at all times. Ideally they have support in the form of a small sub-committee, but should also have a link and report to the general committee running the parent club.
