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Social inclusion through sports and games

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Abstract

Not only is sport and physical activity a basis for personal, social and learning development, but it also motivates social inclusion and integration. Sport and physical activity promote tolerance, solidarity, inclusiveness and many other sporting values. Marginalised and underprivileged groups such as migrants and people at risk of discrimination for example, have the opportunity to interact and integrate with other social groups through sport. Sport also provides people living with a disability an opportunity to increase their participation in society, showcase their talents and challenge stereotypes. The social benefits of sport do not always achieve their full potential. Many groups of marginalised people are under-represented amongst sporting professionals, volunteers, and membership of committees and governing bodies. This occurs at all levels, whether local or national.

Keywords: Inclusion, disability, tolerance, discrimination

Introduction

Social inclusion is the process of improving the terms on which individuals and groups take part in society-improving the ability, opportunity and dignity of those disadvantaged on the basis of their identity ^[1]. Inclusion is pro-active behaviours, options and actions to make people from all backgrounds, ages and abilities feel welcome, respected and that they belong at your club. Being inclusive is about following best practice for what sport should be so that everyone can get the most out of it ^[2]. The World Bank's definition of social inclusion is the process of improving the terms on which individuals and groups take part in society - improving the ability, opportunity and dignity of those disadvantaged on the basis of their identity.

Sport is about participation. The most basic element of sport is people coming together to play. This is an extremely powerful tool. Sports break down barriers and build bridges where boundaries usually exist. Sport can be understood across cultures, languages and religions. These things that are often very divisive in today's society are no longer a barrier. Sport can be a facilitator for making things more accessible, empowering women and girls, and build communities for newcomers, long-time residents and marginalized groups in our society. We know that sport touches many aspects of someone's life, such as:

- Social networks
- Sense of connectedness

Sport can create a feeling of inclusion in society, no matter what age, sexual orientation, gender expression, whether you are able-bodied or disabled, religion, ethnicity or socio-economic status you are or hold. And in bigger cities like Ottawa, you can even find "community-specific" teams like gay and lesbian friendly sport leagues that can help people find other people like them and a better sense of belonging ^[3].

Sport has the potential to be a catalyst for inclusion and people who work in sport have a responsibility to make this happen. Sport is better when its purpose and direction aim toward inclusion. Inclusion in and through sport means providing every person full respect, dignity, value and belonging in any roles they may play - athlete, coach, official, administrator, or

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¹ Social Inclusion (worldbank.org)

² <https://www.playbytherules.net.au/got-an-issue/inclusion-and-diversity/inclusion-and-diversity-what-is-it>

³ Social Inclusion through Sport (sportsforsocialimpact.com)

spectator. Inclusion encompasses all populations across race, culture, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and disability. Sport for inclusion matters because it promotes the values, ideals and vision for acceptance, human rights and non-discrimination. Sport for inclusion questions and challenges the very notion of exclusion^[4].

The benefits of inclusion

Positioning your organisation as a champion of inclusion will:

- Enhance your brand and reputation.
- Ensure consistency in ‘walking the talk’ to meet your strategic objectives.
- Allow you to meet sport regulatory obligations.
- Increase governance and risk management and decrease potential legal risks.
- Increase membership.
- Increase pathway and participation opportunities.
- Increase sponsorship opportunities.
- Increase public support and volunteer base.
- Ensure greater publicity and positive public image.
- Provide a better connected and diverse sports community.
- Break down barriers and promote social inclusion.

Pillars of Inclusion

The pillar of inclusion is a broad framework to give sports clubs and associations a starting point to address inclusion and diversity. The Pillars model is about giving you a ‘helicopter’ view of inclusion which looks at the common elements that contribute to creating inclusive environments that reflect the communities that we live in. The seven pillars are:

Access

Access is both physical and attitudinal. Here, we briefly consider physical built access and then focus on how to create a more accessible, welcoming environment in your club. There is much to consider and review when determining whether you provide accessible options. For example:

- providing ramps for people who use a wheelchair
- people with injuries or on crutches
- parents with prams/strollers
- making sure to reserve disability parking places in front of your venue
- ensuring toilet or canteen facilities are accessible to all
- making signs coloured and clear for people with a vision impairment.

Attitude

Attitude is often cited as one of the biggest barriers and underpins all the pillars of inclusion. Without doubt, a positive attitude goes a long way to making inclusion a reality. Translating positive attitudes into action can be challenging as sometimes people don’t recognize the behaviors that are excluding people in the first place. Some may be hesitant to change, while others might be protective of how the club is run and who it engages with. Think about this and ask yourself – Can I see these habits and behaviors in my organization? How do I feel about inclusion? Is my club ready to welcome people with disability or those from a different cultural background?

The good news is that it just requires a slight attitude change; so it’s not necessarily “that anyone can join”, but refocusing

on what you can do to actively encourage people to join or open up opportunities to those in your community to be a part of your club.

Choice

Sport is not ‘one size fits all’. The focus for clubs should be on finding practical ways for all people to participate in sport at a level of their choice. Inclusion is about providing this range of options. A common misconception about inclusion is that it is solely about including people with disability in regular sport activities without any modification. Inclusion encompasses many different options in different settings. Inclusion in sport can be viewed in terms of a spectrum. Each section of the spectrum is as important as the next, and ideally there would be programs for people with disability available in all sections to choose from.

Partnerships

Inclusion rarely happens in isolation. For inclusion to work you need to have effective, mutually-beneficial partnerships. You don’t need to tackle inclusion on your own. There will be other organizations in your community who share your inclusion goals and will work collaboratively with your club to achieve a common objective. Get to know the make-up of your local community. Once you become aware of their needs and the barriers to participation in your sport then you can start to engage from a positive standpoint. Working with various groups or intermediaries to reach the key people within them and connect is crucial to the success of any kind of community engagement program.

Communication

Effective communication is critical to the success of inclusion. Inclusive communication means you may need to change your habits and adapt your methods on how you speak and listen to existing and new members. How people and organizations communicate is often linked to existing cultures and habits. We rarely question our communication style because that is how we naturally communicate and that’s the way things are always done. But if, for example, you are interested in attracting new members and participants to your club from different cultures, where English is a second language, then your communication style may need to change. Think about where people from different ethnic groups gather in your community. Use a variety of mediums and channels to communicate your message. Your message may need to be translated into another language to have maximum impact. Produce posters about your club or ‘come and try’ days and distribute them to community groups or at libraries for wider promotion. Make sure your social media and your website reflect your commitment to inclusion. Include photos of people from diverse backgrounds, Indigenous people, people with disability and older adults. Use simple, direct language and avoid stereotypes. Have open communications with all your members so that new ideas and suggestions regarding policies and practices are considered and people feel confident they are being listened to.

Policy

For inclusion to become part of core business for any sport or club there needs to be a firm commitment and responsibility to member protection and complaints resolution. This is best done in the form of policy.

⁴ <https://www.sportanddev.org/en/article/news/power-sport-inclusion-including-persons-disabilities-sport>

Opportunities

New opportunities in sport don't happen by chance. Often, we need to make practical changes to what we do so that all people get a fair go. We are all products of our environments and communities (good and bad) and sport plays such an important role in our culture. Sport helps us to be healthy, make friends and learn new skills. But it also assists in the growth and development of communities.

However, a lack of awareness of the value and barriers to inclusion reduces the potential to see the opportunities and options available to include people from a range of backgrounds and circumstances in all facets of sport. When we see the person first and what unique skills and abilities they can bring to your club, and not the barrier, the opportunities open up in front of us ^[5].

Sport contributes to social inclusion

The most basic element of sport is people coming together to play. Sports break down barriers and build bridges where boundaries usually exist. Sport can be understood across cultures, languages and religions. Sport can create a feeling of inclusion in society, no matter what age, sexual orientation, gender expression, whether you are able-bodied or disabled, religion, ethnicity or socio-economic status you are or hold.

Conclusion

Sport can create a feeling of inclusion in society, no matter what age, sexual orientation, gender expression, whether you are able-bodied or disabled, religion, ethnicity or socio-economic status you are or hold. And in bigger cities like Ottawa, you can even find "community-specific" teams like gay and lesbian friendly sport leagues that can help people find other people like them and a better sense of belonging.

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