



Podcast 4 - Netball Victoria

Tom: Welcome to Are You On Board! You're listening to a Vicsport podcast about helping our sport industry be more inclusive. Support comes from the state government of Victoria.

Sam: Hi, I'm Sam Bramham. I'm a Paralympic gold medalist, ambassador for disability sport and recreation, and a motivational speaker. I'm also currently working with the National Disability Insurance Scheme, otherwise known as the NDIS. Today I'm speaking with Amber Koster, General Manager community and facilities development and Kiemi Lai community development manager both from Netball Victoria. They're here to chat with me about how to embed disability inclusion in all levels of a sporting organisation. Welcome Amber and Kimmy.

Kiemi: Thank you.

Amber: Thanks for having us.

(0:42) Sam: You're welcome. Well let's get straight into it. So Netball Victoria really encourages clubs to become more inclusive of people with disability. In both a practical sense and strategic sense how are you helping clubs improve their inclusion policies and practices?

(0:56) Kiemi: We try to show through leadership by reviewing our own inclusion policies and practices and by showing clubs how to do it. We set the example of how they can develop it at a grassroots level. So that's one way that we've done it through leadership. Another way, in terms of practical example, is over the last two years we've been working with Netball Australia through their One Netball initiative to deliver connected clubs and community training so their face to face workshops where we go out to clubs and associations from metro Victoria right through to regional Victoria where we go out and talk to the volunteers, administrators, coaches and do a 45 minute to 60 minute presentation on what it means to be inclusive and a lot of it is centered around getting clubs to think about their own policies and practices, their own programs, what they offer and getting them to think broader than their current membership base. A lot of that work is now done online through One Netball where clubs can actually go online to write up an inclusion action plan, do their online training and come out of it with hopefully some practical steps that they can implement straight away at their clubs and associations. That's probably our primary example of where we've tried to encourage the clubs to develop inclusion policies. We've also tried to really encourage them to embed inclusion in their bylaws. So once again we try to set the example of templates around what bylaws could look like, but policies are just words until it actually gets implemented and someone does something about it. So where we step in there is try to create the pathways that people can enter teams or individuals in for people with disabilities in particular. Another thing that we've done to encourage clubs is we have a separate membership fee for people with disabilities so it doesn't seem daunting for clubs and associations to include people with disabilities. It gives them a bit of an incentive so by setting a reduced membership fee we're actually proactively encouraging clubs to include people with disabilities.

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(3:38) Amber: So still on a policy perspective everything that Kimmy has just said around the training and resources provided, we ensure that staff across the board are aware of all those opportunities as well and what the resources mean and how to apply them. So we have regional staff in our regions to work directly with clubs as well as our staff internally so that everyone's on the same page. So that goes right from board executive to staff level. So it isn't just words, we actually look to provide that hands on experience so that policy documents actually mean something to them. From our strategic plan, we have three really clear goals around increasing participation, building our capacity, people and places, and growing the support for our sport. So those three goals are embedded throughout our organisation and every staff member is accountable for achieving those so whether it be mainstream or inclusion or general participation throughout the organisation they all link back to those three objectives.

(4:52) Sam: So from this work, what did Netball Victoria want to achieve? That is, what do you think is the value of disability inclusion for your sport?

(5:00) Kiemi: It's essentially trying to increase participation of netball amongst all the communities. And what we want to achieve is to be reflective of our community. So not everyone is (I hate to say it) female, white, active. What you might see when you see some of the images or automatically think about when people talk about netball so we want to show through our program and through our policies and practices that netball is a sport for all. It's not just for a specific segment of the market so by having pathways for people with disabilities we can actually give people an opportunity to participate in netball and to give them a goal to play netball.

(5:44) Amber: The unique and beauty of netball is that it can truly be a mixed sport where on the court both boys and girls and of all abilities can play equally so that is something that netball can really hang its hat on around having that opportunity to really have a go at our sport where there aren't the segments if anyone wanted to just walk into a club or an association to play there are lots of modified options or clubs willing to ensure that there is that opportunity for participation.

(6:24) Sam: In your work to advocate for netball's greater inclusion for peoples with a disability, what has stood in your way? In particular have clubs been receptive to your messages about inclusion?

(6:34) Kiemi: Our clubs and associations have been extremely receptive every time we mention all abilities and how to include people with disabilities. One of the barriers though is it's almost too much, like where do you start when you talk about disability and inclusion? So they get a little bit overwhelmed with the fact that they would love to do it but where do we start? So we've really tried to encourage them to start small and to grow from the grassroots up so that's been one of the barriers. Another barrier has been when we talk to clubs and associations about inclusion they may think they are inclusive because they're not exclusive so we're not exclusive so we must be inclusive then. So when they have that perception about what inclusion is it can be a barrier because they don't look outside their square and they see themselves as inclusive anyway so they don't need to do anything proactive about inclusion, they don't need to go out and seek new members because everyone's welcome. We're not stopping them, but they don't see the barriers that perhaps other people see. These could be little things like whether they have accessible facilities, whether they have their marketing and promotion material that reflects the community that they want to reach, does it reflect everyone, or is it only reflective of one small segment of the community? So in general I think everyone's got the best interest at heart. I think where people struggle is making it happen and knowing where to start.

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(8:17) Amber: Kimmy touched on the accessibility of facilities so our community is really receptive of being inclusive but there are physical barriers in our community that prohibit some of those opportunities. There is a massive piece of work that Netball Vic is doing around a state-wide facility strategy and identifying and ensuring that there's enough specifications and resources available to councils our associations and leagues to ensure that when they build a facility that it is all compliant and accessible. We've also put together an inclusive fact sheet to just be mindful of ramp access, public toilets, amenities, change rooms and things like that. We're hearing what the community are trying to do and we're providing some resources around the rest of the stakeholders and community to actually then look for resources and have the right information to then do something about it.

(9:28) Sam: And it is interesting that you say the physical barriers and the misconception is that it's those physical barriers that are the hardest and most expensive part about inclusion. Is there ramp access? Are the doors wide enough? Can wheelchairs go on the nicely new polished courts that you need to play on? So things like that. What other barriers have you guys found from Netball Victoria's point of view? In terms of attitudinal barriers and things like that?

(9:52) Kiemi: Yeah like I said, everyone's got the best interest at heart. They are really keen to include people with disabilities. I think the biggest attitudinal barrier is that they think by not being exclusive they are inclusive. That already is a barrier because they think they're already doing it, but they're not proactively doing it. So that's been the biggest challenge. Another challenge has been with clubs who are reliant on one or two champions within the community to increase participation amongst people with disabilities, but once they leave that's it for that program or the interest in working in all abilities space finishes because that person is no longer there. So trying to create organisational change and club cultural change rather than working with individuals has been really important for us because what we found, and it has happened, is, where one person, he or she drives all abilities does it for 10, 15, 20, 30 years and for whatever reason they decide not to do it anymore is when the programs start to fall apart. And they may not have created the organisational and cultural change for it to continue so it's about trying to change the attitude or not just one or two individuals, but within a whole club. An example has been (one of our biggest success stories) out in Drouin way (near Gippsland) where they've got an all abilities program that pretty much stem from one person's passion for all abilities. We actually had an all abilities forum on Sunday and she spoke at it and she spoke very passionately about how she really wanted to engage with people with disabilities in netball. She's a netball person, she loves her netball, she just wants everyone to play netball. So that's her motivation so she essentially started the all abilities program at Drouin and it started off with one person participating in an open day then it became two and then four and then it becomes eight and it just snowballs. She's driven a lot of it and now she's really recognised a need to get more people engaged in coaching and umpiring in particular so it's not reliant on one person. And growing the participation base from juniors right up through seniors. Another lesson that we have learnt from our clubs and associations who have all abilities is that they are very reliant on one core group of players and once those players get married, have kids, play other sports, become too old to play then it just dies. So trying to get the buy in from the whole club and association more input from just one person is more important.

(13:12) Amber: And I think with all of our success stories, it has never been done in isolation, it is a massive community partnership and it is around engaging with local groups so regional sport assemblies, other providers that actually are the experts in the space and ensuring that there's support from Netball Vic, but there is drivers on the ground as interested parties that just want to do something

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about this. Then we make sure that the experts were brought on as part of the journey so anything that we do try to implement or do as a come and try, always a long term is sustainability.

(13:56) Sam: Okay let's have a look at the grassroots level, do you think disability participation in netball has increased? And whether that be a yes or a no, can you explain why?

(14:05) Kiemi: People with disabilities playing netball has occurred for years, way before I started so some of our clubs and associations program stems back over 30 years, which I think is quite amazing. Over the last 5 to 10 years there has been more of a push from Netball Victoria as we get more sophisticated about who our market are and how we're going to grow our sport. It's probably remained quite stagnate over the past 5 to 10 years it's neither increased or decreased like I said before you get one person driving it and it becomes very successful and then it kind of dies, but then it will pop up in another area. It is something that we have recognised as a challenge and something that we really want to address for the remainder of this year and beyond is how we can actually create sustainable increases in participation, sustainable being the key word because we don't want to have small fires going up everywhere and then we're just managing them. What we're doing to address it is looking at our pathways and competitions and what we can offer so everything is aligned. Once it's aligned with our organisational structures that's when again it can be more sustainable then just one person within Netball Victoria or one department within Netball Victoria (i.e. the community department) driving everything. Everyone needs to be on board with everything. Everyone needs to have a role in making netball more inclusive so whether that's from coaching or high performance, to marketing, it impacts on the whole organisation and until we can get that buy in and until we do have that buy in from the whole organisation, our numbers will always be stagnate. We've had some successes in certain areas where it has increased quite dramatically (is really pushing it) but it has increased a lot in the last two or three years in particular. One of them is actually Barwon and we did wonder if that was maybe related to the NDIS roll out in the Barwon region first. There was a lot of buy in from the local community, lots of buy in from the regional sports assembly and buy in from us as well and they grew from two teams to the most sustainable, most competitive all abilities competition we have in all Victoria. And they smash everyone at state title cause they're that successful. We're trying to get all of our clubs and associations to work up to that level. We don't know whether it has anything to do with NDIS or whether that's just a coincidence, but we would like to think there is and once that gets rolled out in other areas maybe we might see some more successes as well. But we need to make sure that we have the pathways to support that.

(17:14) Amber: What we also have seen around disability participation is not just the physical participant, but it is the growing community of the coaches, the umpires, the administrators, the families, the supporters so from a club perspective and a community engagement perspective there is certainly a lot of growth, interest and support around that space.

(17:44) Sam: So Netball Victoria's inclusion work with clubs is valuable lessons for other sport associations. To finish our chat today, what do you say is your main advice for achieving disability inclusion at all levels of an organisation?

(17:57) Kiemi: I think for me the partnerships is the key. You can't do everything yourself. Whether you are an organisation and passionate about all abilities like the example I just gave about Drouin. You just can't do everything yourself whether us, in the community team within a state sporting association, we can't do everything ourselves so we need to be smarter about working in partnerships and spreading the

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load. My motto has always been "one dollar plus one dollar equals two dollars" so we only have a dollar, but someone else has a dollar somewhere so let's combine our resources and create those partnerships and that's where we go back to the sustainability. So that if I leave tomorrow or there's no longer a community funded department within Netball Victoria (I'm not saying that this is what is going to happen, but if it does) there will be other people to pick it up because we have formed those networks and partners.

(18:57) Amber: We also need to work locally. Use the expertise around and build from the community, talk from the community and support from the community at the local level. I think we also need to not look at it from a disability point of view, but look at what we can do, not what we can't do.

(19:23) Kiemi: So that goes with more of an individual level. I know there are a lot of slogans out there about "Don't look at the disability, look at the ability" so I think that's a really great way for us to spread the message with our clubs and associations is for them to think about what can be achieved instead of (what Amber said) what can't and think about all the barriers or the time. I think it's well we haven't grown but imagine if we got our ducks in a row we'll be able to grow this sport to everyone.

(19:59) Sam: now very inspiring stuff guys. Thank you so much for chatting with me today Amber and Kimmy I have really enjoyed hearing about Netball Victoria and their effort to drive disability participation through its clubs. Thank you.

Amber: Thank you

Kiemi: Thank you

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Key Messages:

- 1. In both a practical sense and a strategic sense, how is Netball Victoria helping clubs improve their inclusion policies and practice?**
 - Netball Victoria has been trying to lead by example by reviewing their own inclusion policies and practices. They have also been working with Netball Australia through their One Netball initiative to deliver presentations on inclusive practices to various netball clubs around Victoria. Netball Victoria makes sure that their staff are on board for making the sport more inclusive by making sure that proper training and resources are available to them. Inclusion is also an item in Netball Victoria's strategic plan so they have definitely made it a priority from the top down. **(0:42)**
- 2. What do you think is the value of disability inclusion for your sport?**
 - Netball Victoria is hoping to break stereotypes that exist around the sport. Netball can be played by boys and girls of all abilities and can be easily modified and adapted to suit all. **(4:52)**
- 3. In your work to advocate for netball's greater inclusion for peoples with a disability, what has stood in your way? In particular have clubs been receptive to your messages about inclusion?**
 - Clubs have been extremely receptive around making the sport more inclusive for people with disabilities. The idea of inclusion can be a bit overwhelming without specific guidelines and policies in place, which can be a barrier. The cost of making netball facilities accessible can also be a barrier. In order to combat these barriers, Netball Victoria has created fact sheets and other resources around making clubs more accessible. **(6:24)**
- 4. What other barriers have you guys found from Netball Victoria's point of view? In terms of attitudinal barriers and things like that?**
 - Everyone seems to have the best interest at heart, but most clubs think that because they're not exclusive, they're inclusive. They don't feel as though they need to take steps to be more inclusive because they don't see themselves as being an exclusive club, which is the biggest attitudinal barrier. Netball Victoria is trying to create organisational and cultural change instead of just having one Champion of Change in order to get the entire club on board and create long term change. If there is only one person that is driving the change then what most commonly happens is that once that one individual leaves so does the change that they influenced. Netball Victoria has realised that when they do see long term success stories it takes an entire community of people to make inclusive practices sustainable. **(9:28)**
- 5. Do you think disability participation in netball has increased? And whether that be a yes or a no, can you explain why?**
 - In the past, disability participation and inclusive practices have gained popularity and some action is taken towards improving clubs in that area, but in many cases over time or after the individual leading the change moves on the participation numbers die down. Programs and initiatives in the past have not been sustainable. In order to change that Netball Victoria is working from the top down and establishing inclusion policies and practices to then be implemented in all areas of the organisation. This will hopefully lead to increased participation and more sustainable inclusion practices. There has also been a lot of growth

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and support around coaches, administrators, umpires, and families in that space as well.

(13:56)

6. what do you say is your main advice for achieving disability inclusion at all levels of an organisation?

- Getting the whole community involved is important. Support from the local community will lead to more sustainable inclusive practices. It is also important to take advantage of partnerships. There are many organisations that want to be involved in making clubs more inclusive so utilise those connections and partnerships in order to make a bigger impact.

(17:44)