

# SOCIAL GLUE

The contribution of sport and active recreation to community wellbeing

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## Research questions

1

What is the nature of the relationship between individuals' involvement in sport and active recreation and perceptions of social inclusion and connectedness?

2

How does involvement in sport and active recreation impact on the social connectedness experienced by individuals and their subsequent wellbeing?

3

What is the role of formalised sport and recreation organisations in facilitating or supporting social inclusion and connectedness of individuals?

## 2 stages of data collection

**Stage 1** involved two surveys of 5655 Victorians to identify the nature of the relationship between individuals' involvement in sport and active recreation and perceptions of social inclusion and connectedness using a variety of measures.

**Stage 2** involved interviews with 142 people from 16 different sport clubs to investigate how involvement in sport and active recreation impacts on the social connectedness experienced by individuals and their subsequent wellbeing; and the role of formalised sport and recreation organisations in facilitating or supporting social inclusion and connectedness of individuals.

## Why people join?



### There are 4 categories of people who join sport and active recreation organisations

(Each with a different degree of identification with their organisation and what they are seeking through being involved)



**The Player** joins to play the sport or participate in the active recreation pursuit that they love and is most interested in what they can get out of the club in terms of a sporting experience. 'The Player' could be focussed on the competitive element of the sport and is prepared to move clubs on the basis of better opportunities, better chance of success or in some cases, better financial remuneration. 'The Player' is not interested in the social networks and connections that membership gives them access to, beyond a brief acquaintance with their team-mates.

**The Socialiser** joins to socialise with others and making friends. The sporting experience is important, but only in so far as the sport appeals to them as one of a range of possible activities that they might have chosen. The physical activity that the sport provides is a bonus, but their primary goal in joining the club is to meet people. 'The Socialiser' might have a small friendship group, have recently retired, or recently been divorced or bereaved and is looking to expand their social network.

**The Clubber** has been with the club an extended period of time, perhaps five to ten years. The person has a love of the sport, but over time their friendship group has developed around the club and their stronger friendships are with fellow members. 'The Clubber' continues to be a member of the club because the club largely represents their social network outside of family and their work-mates. The sport itself is still important as a shared interest with other members, but the social aspect of the club is now the most important driver of their continuing membership.

**The Identifier** is a long-term member of the club, usually for twenty years or more. This person identifies themselves as a member of the club almost above all else (they are still a spouse, parent or worker, for example, but being a member of the club is an essential part of their identity). 'The Identifier' is invariably a member of the committee of management and has a vested interest in seeing the club succeed. This person has a very strong social network within the club and takes joy or satisfaction from being known around the club. Over time the social network of this person may have moved from the players to fellow committee members and administrators.

## Question 1 – RESULTS

Involvement in sport & recreation leads to feeling more socially connected



1. Social networks developed through involvement in sport organisations are of more value for perceived social support than those developed through non-sport community organisations.
2. The type, tenure and intensity of involvement had no significant impact on the value of the social networks – being involved with merely one organisation is sufficient to sustain a useful social network.
3. Sport involvement does provide a resource upon which people can draw, often at times of need, yet it appears that it is no more important than other community settings in which people voluntarily come together for mutual benefit.
4. Involvement in sport does have a relationship to heightened social connectedness.
5. Generalized trust is generated from membership of community sport organisations rather than the other way around.
6. Sport involvement is positively linked to physical and mental health while other forms of community involvement are not associated with higher physical health scores and were more weakly associated with higher mental health scores.

## Question 2 – RESULTS

Membership of sport & recreation clubs leads to the development of social networks



1. Membership of sport and active recreation clubs leads to the development of social networks which are used in four primary ways:
  - a. the development of friendships, which reduce people's isolation and provide them with joy or happiness,
  - b. enabling members to access a network of resources, which can reduce transaction costs and provide people with access to opportunities and experiences to which they would not otherwise have,
  - c. providing people with support and assistance at times of stress, hardship and crisis, and
  - d. allowing members to engage with the broader community.
2. Sport and recreation clubs can be considered as 'fly paper', attracting people who share a common interest or goal, thus facilitating their access to a larger social network.
3. Club members can access resources through their participation in the club's social networks (which in some cases were exclusive); these additional resources are based on the skills and competencies of fellow club members.
4. Sport club members who viewed their sport club as an opportunity to socialise, develop social networks or develop friendships were more likely to have developed strong friendships and were therefore more likely to call on fellow sport club members for help or support.

## Question 3 – RESULTS

Sport & recreation organisations help build community



1. Many club members view their club as a 'family' or a 'community' and thus with a sense that they were also members of the broader community in which the club was located and many of them lived.
2. While organisations may not emphasise the creation, development and maintenance of social connections among their members, it is clearly an outcome generated through the very nature of being associated with an organisation made up of people with a common interest.
3. The actions of club leaders and club members in creating and maintaining a positive culture is an important element in providing the environment in which social connections among members will flourish.
4. Connections of club members to tradesmen, local business owners, other community groups and the local council are vital to overcoming the financial burden of running a sport and active recreation club.
5. Volunteer organisational leaders invested significant amounts of time in creating, developing and maintaining connections on behalf of their organisation. These connections not only provide organisations with access to knowledge, funding, expertise, resources and facilities but provide significant benefits to the individual volunteer leaders in the form of increased locally based social connections and networks.