

Centre for Sport and Social Impact



The social value of a Reclink Australia
structured sport program –
'Reclink Australia Victorian Football League'



Final report

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Contents

- 1. Introduction 5
- 2. Social Return on Investment methodology 7
 - Phase one: Establishing scope and identifying stakeholders 7
 - Phase two: Map outcomes 8
 - Phase three: Calculating the SROI 9
 - Phase four: Reporting the findings 9
- 3. Key findings 10
- 4. Reclink Australia and the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League 12
 - The Reclink Australia Victorian Football League 12
 - The Reclink football teams 12
 - Scope of this research 13
- 5. Resources 14
 - Resources for the football program provided by Reclink Australia 14
 - Resources from team Lead Agencies 14
- 6. Activities 17
 - Reclink Australia activity 17
 - Football-specific activities 18
 - Social support and personal development for players 20
- 7. Outputs 21
- 8. Why football? 22
- 9. Outcomes (Benefits) 26
 - Benefits to participants in the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League 26
 - Benefits to participating agencies 33
- 10. Logic map and calculation of the SROI of the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League 36



1. Introduction

Reclink Australia's mission is to provide sporting, social and arts activities to enhance the lives of people experiencing disadvantage. Targeting some of the community's most vulnerable and isolated people—those who experience mental illness, disability, homelessness, substance abuse issues, addictions, and social and economic hardship—Reclink Australia has facilitated cooperative partnerships with a network of over 200 member agencies that are also committed to encouraging participation in sport, recreation and arts programs by a population group under-represented. Through a range of structured and informal programs and activities, Reclink Australia promotes and delivers the health, social and economic benefits of physical activity to an otherwise largely inactive population group.

Participation in sport has often been linked to improved health and well-being. However, it is not clear what the outcomes of participation are for specific population cohorts, such as people experiencing disadvantage. Anecdotal information collected by Reclink Australia indicates that participation in Reclink Australia programs has a range of benefits for participants. However, it is unclear what the exact nature of the benefits is across the population of Reclink Australia participants.

In 2016, Reclink Australia commissioned the Centre for Sport and Social Impact (CSSI) at La Trobe University to determine the social value of the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League. The aim of the project was to identify the ways in which the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League contributes to the physical, mental and social health of people experiencing disadvantage. A secondary aim was to identify the benefits of the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League to participating agencies and volunteers. This report presents: an outline of the methodology used; a description of the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League; the themes identified in the data relating to the resources, activities, benefits and outcomes of the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League; the challenges and opportunities identified from the study; and finally a calculation of the social return on investment (SROI) for the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League.



2. Social Return on Investment methodology

An SROI methodology (Cupitt, Sally, ed. A Guide to Social Return on Investment. Cabinet Office, Office of the Third Sector, 2009) was used to identify the resources, activities, outputs, benefits and social value of the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League. The four phases of this process are listed below.

Phase one: Establishing scope and identifying stakeholders

The first phase was to identify the scope of the research. This was negotiated with the Chief Executive Officer of Reclink Australia and further refined in response to challenges experienced during the data collection process. The initial scope of this research was to include people who had participated in the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League during the 2015 season. However, the difficulty in recruiting past participants (i.e. those no longer actively involved with a football team) led to the scope of the project being adjusted to those participants directly involved in activities of the 13 Reclink Australia Victorian Football teams during the 2016 season.

Internal and external stakeholders for each of the 13 teams were initially identified by Reclink Australia. Additional internal and external stakeholders for each team, and the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League overall, were identified through interviews with agency representatives from each participating team.

All stakeholders identified by Reclink Australia were contacted via email or telephone in August 2016 and invited to participate in the study. In total, twenty-six stakeholders participated in an interview between August and November 2016. Of the 13 Reclink teams (the Collingwood Knights fielded two teams in the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League in 2016), one was represented by three interviewees, five were represented by two interviewees,

five were represented by one interviewee and one team was not represented. In-depth semi-structured interviews were then conducted with participating stakeholders to elicit data pertaining to the:

- Resources required to sustain the team;
- Football, social and community activities of the team; and
- Individual participant and agency benefits generated by being involved with the team;

Twenty-three interviews were conducted over the telephone and three were conducted face-to-face.

Table 1 lists the categories of stakeholders interviewed and the number of interviewees in each category.

Table 1

Stakeholders	
Lead agency representatives	8
Supporting agency representatives	6
Volunteers	8
Reclink Australia representatives	2
Community club representatives	2
Total	26

Note: Interviewees may have crossed over several categories. For example, team representatives were also support agency representatives or Reclink Australia representatives, and therefore were able to provide multiple perspectives on the Reclink Football program. Table 1 represents each individual's current primary role in relation to the Reclink football team they were associated with.

In addition to 26 interviews with stakeholders in the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League, telephone interviews were conducted with 30 participants from 11 of the 13 teams in the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League. This cohort of active players was recruited primarily from players who attended the 2016 Peter Cullen Medal lunch in September 2016 and agreed to be interviewed about their experience of participating in the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League. Twenty-nine of the 30 participant interviewees had been active Reclink football players in 2016 while one was a sports-trainer for a team. Six players reported having dual roles with their respective teams in 2016 including as umpire, coach, vice president, water runner and spectator. Twenty-five interviewees were male and five were female, while the interviewees ranged in age from 18 to 66 years with most being in the 18–30 (16 interviewees) and 31–40 (8 interviewees) age ranges.

Phase two: Map outcomes

Phase two consisted of identifying the resources, activities and outcomes of the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League within the research scope period. This was done by analysing the interview data and additional information provided by Reclink Australia and the lead agency representatives for some teams, then developing an initial map or logic model (Table 1). This logic model was the crucial step to establishing that the outcomes identified during the interviews can be logically attributed to the activities of the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League teams, and not the result of some other source or activity. Upon completion of this map, the SROI analysis commenced.



Phase three: Calculating the SROI

The SROI calculation table was built through three stages (this appears in a commercial in confidence document, available by negotiation with Reclink Australia – reference to the ‘columns’ in this document are made below).

Stage 1: Stakeholders: All stakeholders of the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League identified are listed in the first column.

Stage 2: Input Map: The next two columns of the SROI table list the type and value of all inputs or resources that each stakeholder/s contributed to the activities of the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League. The total value of this column is used as the final “input” value in the SROI calculation.

Stage 3: Outcome values: Stage 3 of the table contains six columns. The first column describes the outcomes attributed to the teams’ activities; the second column lists an “indicator of change” for each outcome, which is the actual change that has occurred. The third column provides the evidence that supports the assumption that the outcome listed can be satisfactorily attributed to the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League teams’ activities. For example, an outcome of the teams’ activity was that participants had improved mental health, which is clearly evidenced by the presence of the mental health agencies and the support available to players through the football teams, and the multiple positive mental health outcomes reported by football participants, non-participating members of the teams, and of lead and supporting agency representatives involved with teams. The indicator of change is the estimated number of team members per team with improved mental wellbeing due to their involvement in the activities of a Reclink Australia Victorian Football League team.

The next three columns explicitly state the “quantity or extent of change”, the actual impact that the team activities have had on the football participants, the “financial proxy used” as the value for that impact, and the “total value” attributed to that outcome.

The total value of the outcomes in the SROI analysis table are then divided by the total inputs, to calculate the SROI ratio.

Phase four: Reporting the findings

The reporting of findings is an important phase in ensuring the SROI calculation and the associated research is communicated effectively. In this case particularly, communicating to stakeholders and the wider community the types of benefits the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League provides is potentially more valuable than focusing on the SROI ratio. The CSSI team therefore encourages Reclink Australia to present this information back to stakeholders in the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League and to the wider community in 2017.



3. Key findings

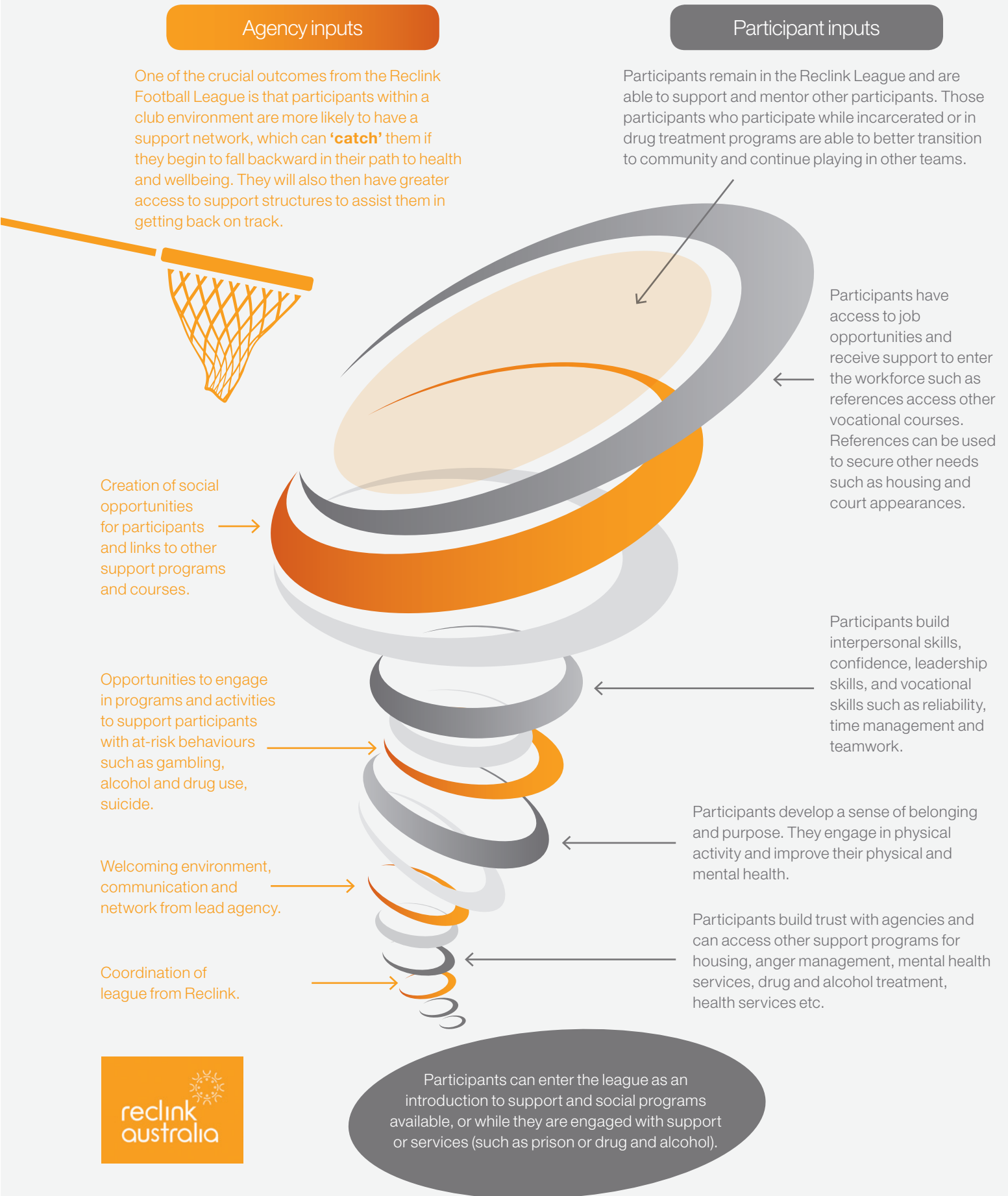
The Reclink Football League targets a population in the community who are less likely to join a 'typical' community sporting club. They are the sub-populations in the community who are experiencing hardship, such as homelessness, unemployment, physical or mental health issues, drug or alcohol addiction or in prison, and in this way the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League is able to deliver social value to people in the community who may not otherwise be able to reach the benefits of sport and recreation through traditional activities. Peter Cullen describes the league as a 'social league dealing with social issues'.

By focusing on disadvantaged and vulnerable people within the community, the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League is not just about playing footy, but a support mechanism and pathway that connects them to the community, support services and other networks as they continue their journey to life improvement. A participant's journey with Reclink toward a more positive and healthy lifestyle can be long, indirect and go through several stages of development and transition. These can be illustrated as an upward spiral which begins at the point they connect with someone who can facilitate their engagement with the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League and leads to the point at which they reach independence and can become a supporter for other participants as illustrated in Figure 1.

The key findings from this report are:

1. The Reclink Australia hub and spoke model provides a unique way to develop multi-agency collaborative partnerships and activate latent community resources and infrastructure (such as ovals, buses, second hand football equipment) to achieve positive outcomes for disadvantaged and disengaged individuals, community service agencies and the broader community;
2. The most important 'value add' of the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League is that it provides community service agencies with an avenue to work collaboratively, in order to reach and engage with disadvantaged members of the community with an interest in Australian football. This is particularly valuable for agencies with a remit or mandate to work with hard to reach individuals and sub populations;
3. The Reclink Australia Victorian Football League provides a unique opportunity for individuals who are already engaged in support, treatment or programs to improve their recovery and life circumstances. For participants who are not already engaged with formal support services, the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League provides a pathway to access treatment and/or support services;
4. The nature of Australian football as an activity (a team game, a contact sport, part of the Victorian culture), means that it has the potential to attract a hard to reach population who can receive a range of benefits that would perhaps not be available through other sport or physical activity-based programs;
5. The Reclink Australia Victorian Football League provides ongoing, flexible levels of support for disadvantaged, disengaged and disconnected participants (Figure 1);
6. Our calculation, based on the social value received by the participants and the wider Victorian community, is a \$1 input for a \$8.94 social return.

Figure 1: Pathway to life improvement



4. Reclink Australia and the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League

Reclink Australia is well placed to engage some of the most isolated and disadvantaged people in our community. By bringing many parts of the community together to create participation opportunities and pool collective resources to deliver an activity, Reclink Australia has the potential to break the downward spiral of self-destructive behaviours by including the participants who are currently excluded and disengaged from their community.

The Reclink Australia Victorian Football League

The genesis of the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League was Peter Cullen's street outreach work in St Kilda in the late 1980s. He recognised the need to respond to people living destructive lives in a way that assisted these people to have purpose and structure in their daily activities. What started as an irregular, unstructured 'kick-to-kick' session and social games of Australian football organised by Peter in 1989, quickly grew to four teams playing in an organised football competition in 1991. Through the 1990s the Reclink Australia 'hub and spoke network' model, facilitating cooperative partnerships with local partners to deliver programs specifically targeted at the needs of local communities, was promoted across Australia.

The Reclink model, as it applies to the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League, is based on facilitating partnerships between multiple community services providers in a bid to unlock the potential for each organisation to collaborate and combine efforts. Football is used as a vehicle to create pathways for those most disadvantaged to be re-engaged into their local communities.

In 2003, Reclink Australia partnered with the Victorian Government, employed its first staff member and recruited South Yarra Football Club as the first community football club to accept Reclink Australia participants. In 2004, 10 teams competed in the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League.

In 2016, the year in which this study was conducted, the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League had grown to 13 teams competing in 60 games of football over an 18-week season. This culminated in participants and supporters celebrating 25 years of community football at the Reclink Grand Final at Peanut Farm, St Kilda on September 7th and 8th, 2016.

The Reclink football teams

The 13 teams participating in the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League in 2016 and therefore included in the scope of this study were the:

- Bendigo Victory
- Collingwood Knights A
- Collingwood Knights B
- Kardinia Cats
- Malmsbury Tigers
- Casey Cobras
- Sacred Heart Mission
- Salvo Hawks
- Southern Peninsula Swans
- Cohealth Kangaroos
- Wynbay Bulldogs
- Frankston Dolphins
- Sunbury Phoenix

Eleven of these teams had a designated 'lead agency' responsible for managing and organising the team. Each lead agency generally appointed a staff member to manage the day-to-day operations of the team. Additional staff members from each lead agency frequently

assisted by performing a range of duties—including on-field playing mentors, client management and support, food preparation, bus driving—on match days and at practice/training sessions. The day-to-day management and operation of Sunbury Phoenix and the Frankston Dolphin teams were coordinated by ‘coaches’ with considerable experience within the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League, appointed and funded directly by Reclink Australia.

Most teams were supported to varying degrees by various other ‘supporting agencies’ that provided staff to assist with range of duties on match days and at practice/training sessions. Teams were also generally supported at games and training by numerous community volunteers, including non-playing vulnerable and isolated people.

Every team was open to participants from all sectors of the community including males, females and people with a disability. However, some teams were established to meet the needs of specific ‘sub-populations’ within their communities including: unemployed youth; people tackling alcohol and other drug issues; people experiencing homelessness or mental illness; and youth engaged with the criminal justice system.

Although different for each team, the typical 2016 season for a Reclink Australia Victorian Football League football team involved:

- Some form of pre-season training, incorporating physical preparation and team building activities, beginning in March;
- Round 1 of the Reclink Football League on Wednesday April 6;
- Football training every second Wednesday (for approximately 90 mins) between March and September;
- A game of football every second Wednesday between April and August, with total of 9 games alternating between ‘home’ and ‘away’ games. Each team had one ‘bye’ round in which they did not have a game;
- Participating in a Grand Final at the Peanut Farm, St Kilda on September 7 or 8;

- A team presentation event to wrap up the season in September 2016; and
- Several members of the team attending the Peter Cullen Medal count to recognise the league’s best and fairest player, at the Mooney Valley Legends Bistro on September 20.

Scope of this research

This report provides a snapshot of the activities of the 13 Reclink Australia Victorian Football League teams and the social value they have delivered during the 2016 football season. Activities included in the research were limited to those that the teams reported they were directly involved with. The social impact of the activities of the teams are considered primarily from the perspective of their direct impact on the participants (both playing and non-playing) in the football team. The impact on the agency representatives and individual volunteers involved in running the team, the impact on the agencies supporting the team, and the impact on the wider community is also considered.

Through the research, the core components of a football team that participates in the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League were identified. Although each Reclink football team is unique and has its own variation of each component, the reported outcomes are based on a general ‘average’ for a typical team. For example, all teams reported providing food and beverages at the end of all home games for members of both participating teams. For some teams, this was done by a voluntary supporting agency (e.g. Rotary or Lions Clubs) supplying a barbeque as well as providing and cooking all the food (sausage, bread, onions, condiments etc.) and drinks. Other teams relied on the catering arm of their lead agency to purchase and prepare the food and drinks, or accessed food from food rescue and redistribution agencies (e.g. FareShare and Foodbank Victoria).

5. Resources

Resources for the football program provided by Reclink Australia

Reclink Australia, primarily through their Victorian State Manager and the Founder & National Development Manager, are the central body responsible for coordinating and administering the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League. Reclink Australia allocates an annual budget for the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League. This is made up of direct funding provided by the Victorian State Government, funds raised through activities conducted by Reclink Australia (e.g. Charity games etc.), and donations from individuals and organisations. In 2016, the Reclink Australia budget for the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League, was \$63,227.00.

Resources from team Lead Agencies

Through the application of its unique hub and spoke model of collaborative partnerships with service providers and key stakeholders, Reclink Australia has used football as a vehicle to draw together numerous agencies and individuals focused on supporting and engaging with people experiencing disadvantage in the community. As a result, 11 of the 13 Reclink Australia Victorian Football League teams have a designated lead agency with major responsibility for organising and managing the team. These agencies included not-for-profit charitable social welfare organisations (e.g. the Salvation Army, St Lawrence and Sacred Heart Mission), community health organisations (e.g. Ermha Ltd, CoHealth and Mental Illness Fellowship Australia), a youth homelessness support agency (Latitude Directions for Young People), the Victorian Police, and Parkville College/ Malmsbury Youth Justice Centre. The other two teams in the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League were managed by individuals who were appointed and funded directly by Reclink Australia.

DIRECT FUNDING FOR FOOTBALL TEAMS

Several lead agency representatives reported that their organisation directly funded the activities of the Reclink football team that they were involved in. For example, agency representatives for two teams indicated that a budget of approximately \$8,000 (excluding any staff salaries) was required each year to cover the full cost of running a team in the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League. Another agency representative reported that they had calculated a cost of \$650 per participant per season when applying for funding for the football team they support.

HUMAN RESOURCES

As a generalisation, each lead agency had a dedicated person who was responsible for managing the football team. This person usually spent about one day per week (8–10 hours) for approximately 6 months, managing the team.

In addition to the lead agency staff member who coordinated the team, four to eight agency (either lead agency or supporting agency) staff were usually involved in supporting each team every game-day. This was reported to be for approximately four hours including pre-game preparation, game time and post-game activities, but varied according to whether the game was played at 'home' or 'away'. Two to four agency staff usually attended training for about two hours per training session.

Each team also reported having the support of a varying number (between four and eleven) of volunteers to help manage the team and perform football-specific tasks each week. Volunteers were identified as contributing four to six hours each per week in roles including coaching, team management, on and off field mentoring, goal and boundary umpiring, bus driving, and food preparation.

OPERATIONAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE RESOURCES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Lead and support agency representatives reported that any operational and administrative resources and infrastructure required to effectively manage the football team (cars, computers, office space and equipment, telephones etc) were provided by their agency as a matter of course. No agency representatives reported that managing the football team required any additional operational and administrative resources or infrastructure above and beyond what is usually provided by their agency to someone in their position.

FOOTBALL EQUIPMENT

Every team reported that they provided every participant with a full set of playing equipment—including playing jumper, shorts, socks and boots—at no cost to individual participants. In addition, teams also provided all the other equipment necessary for football matches and training (footballs, training cones, first aid equipment, water bottles, coaching whiteboards, etc.). Teams obtained these resources either directly from Reclink Australia, as donations from a supporting agency (e.g. AFL or VFL club) or purchased them directly. Every team also had access to either a storage facility at the club room that they used, or a trailer that they used to both store and transport the football equipment.

FACILITIES

All teams used football grounds and facilities (changes rooms, toilets, etc.) provided free of charge by a local council. Games and training were held mid-week so these facilities were not used by other sporting groups at the time that the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League teams used them. The grounds varied in standard and quality from very high standard facilities used by VFL clubs (e.g. Victoria Park used by Collingwood Knights and the Collingwood VFL team) to suburban football ovals used by community football clubs on weekends (e.g. Victoria Road Oval in Hawthorn used by the Salvo Hawks). These grounds were maintained by council and there was generally no additional work or maintenance provided for Reclink Australia Victorian Football League games or training. The Reclink teams often have a relationship with the local community football club that also used the ground; this enabled the Reclink teams to use equipment that belonged to the community football club such as goal post padding and coach benches. Again, these resources were not otherwise being used mid-week.

TRANSPORT

All Reclink teams accessed some form of transport, usually a bus, to transport players to away games once every four weeks (i.e. 5 or 6 times a season). This was usually done through one of three different arrangements:

1. used a bus that belonged to one of the agencies supporting the team;
2. hired a bus from a commercial bus hire company, usually at discount rates;
3. used a private vehicle.

FOOD AND BEVERAGES

All teams provided food and drinks for members of their own team, visiting teams, game officials (umpires), volunteers and spectators at each home game (5 or 6 times a season). This usually involved a barbeque with the associated consumables (sausages, onions, bread, fruit, condiments). This was a very tangible and practical example of the Reclink Australia model in action, as all teams reported that these resources were either donated by a partner agency (e.g. Rotary and Lions), obtained from a local not-for profit organisation (e.g. FareShare and Foodbank Victoria) or supplied by the lead agency.

In addition to providing food and drinks, all Reclink teams had access to equipment to store and prepare food and beverages (i.e. BBQs, cooking implements and gas, fridges, kitchens at venues). This was usually provided at no cost by one of the supporting agencies (e.g. Rotary Club) or the kitchen facilities at the venue were used (e.g. Malmsbury and Victoria Park).

OTHER SUPPORT

In addition to a lead agency, most Reclink Australia Victorian Football League teams had several other agencies that supported and assisted them in a variety of ways to run the team. This included staff to manage, support and provide services to participants or to act as playing and non-playing mentors. Supporting agency staff also performed various tasks on game days and at training—umpiring, providing first aid, driving buses, preparing and cooking

food etc.—to ensure the smooth operation of the team. Examples of support provided to individual teams by supporting agencies reported during the interviews conducted for this project included:

- Organisations such as Kangan Institute, Holmesglen TAFE and SEDA provided people who were undertaking sports-related courses and required a certain number of hours of practical experience to fulfil their course requirements;
- Victoria Police provided police officers to drive buses and supervise teams using police buses;
- AFL Victoria provided coach training courses and development days for Reclink Australia Victorian Football League coaches and participants. An AFL Victoria trainee also acted as team manager/coach for one team;
- AFL and VFL clubs provided resources to Reclink Australia for distribution to individual teams (this included boots, jumpers and auction items for fundraising);
- AFL and VFL clubs supported individual teams with football equipment and jumpers, use of facilities, personnel to attend training and talk to players, and community development officers to work with the teams;
- Past and current AFL players and media personalities volunteered their time to attend and participate in Reclink Australia (e.g. attend Grand Final Day) and individual team activities (e.g. run training sessions for teams);
- Local football clubs supported Reclink Australia Victorian Football League teams by allowing them to use their facilities (club rooms and change rooms) and equipment (coaching benches, goal post padding, etc.), encouraging their players to attend or lead Reclink team training, and supporting Reclink players to play within local football club teams; and
- Corporate organisations provided volunteers for Reclink Australia organised events (e.g. Reclink Grand Final) and sponsored individual teams.

6. Activities

The following section lists and describes the activities undertaken by Reclink Australia and the 13 individual Reclink Australia Victorian Football League teams during the 2016 season.

Reclink Australia activity

As identified earlier in this report, Reclink Australia, primarily through their Victorian State Manager and the Founder & National Development Manager, coordinate and administer the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League. The activities undertaken by Reclink Australia to facilitate the operation of the 2016 Reclink Australia Victorian Football League season included:

- Directly employing an administrator/coach for each of two Reclink football teams—the Sunbury Phoenix and the Frankston Dolphins;
- Organising and conducting one pre-season and one post-season meeting of representatives of all Reclink Australia Victorian Football League teams;
- Coordinating and covering the costs associated with two field umpires officiating in 60 Reclink Australia Victorian Football League football games;
- Developing and administering the fixture for 10 rounds of 6 football games per round between April and August;
- Organising and running three Development days, incorporating sessions on addiction issues and anger management and violence, each with approximately 40 participants;
- Coordinating the Reclink Grand Final (a two-day event in which 12 of the 13 teams participate in 6 games);
- Coordinating (collecting votes and organising the presentation event) the Peter Cullen Medal for the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League best and fairest award, attended by 150 people;
- Organising and running a Level one coach training course for 20 participants;
- Generating media publicity for the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League and supporting individual teams to generate local media publicity—6 local newspaper articles and one Herald Sun newspaper article in 2016;
- Providing managerial and administrative support for the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League (e.g. dispute resolution, tribunal, etc.);
- Providing policies and guidelines on issues including player registration, codes of conduct etc.; and
- Providing public liability insurance for the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League.

RECLINK AUSTRALIA VICTORIAN FOOTBALL LEAGUE GRAND FINAL

The Reclink Australia Victorian Football League Grand Final—a two-day event involving 6 games between 12 of the 13 Reclink teams—was coordinated and managed by Reclink Australia. This event involved significant activity, including:

- Promotion and media;
- Medal and trophy presentations;
- Personal trainers conducting a warm-up boot camp for spectators;
- National anthem signing;
- Live music from a bagpipe band;
- Community radio broadcasting (by Casey Radio);
- Past AFL player and celebrity visits;
- Food and beverage provision;
- Boots for All distribution;
- School volunteers performing a range of tasks including boundary umpiring and litter collection; and
- Coordinating two field umpires for each game.

PETER CULLEN MEDAL

The other major event that Reclink Australia organise in their role as coordinators and administrators of the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League, is the Peter Cullen Medal. This is an annual activity in which the field umpires at each game vote for the league's 'best and fairest' players. The final official Reclink Australia event for the season is a formal sit-down lunch attended by approximately 150 players, agency representatives, corporate sponsors and support staff. A presentation is compiled each year of the videos and photos from the preceding season.

Football-specific activities

LEAD AGENCY TEAM MANAGEMENT

The lead agency representatives who participated in interviews for this project reported that they undertook a wide range of administrative and team management activities to facilitate the efficient running of their team. The range of activities they reported included:

- Recruiting and registering players;
- Recording who plays each game;
- Organising social and educational events;
- Managing and reporting incidents;
- Managing client and agency-based risks;
- Managing finances and payments to umpires and other providers;
- Managing relationships and communicating with Reclink Australia;
- Identifying and applying for grants—a considerable workload for some lead agencies that relied on external funding to operate their team;
- Identifying, securing and managing sponsorship opportunities and relationships;
- Using social media, mainly Facebook, to communicate with players about the football activities and to share football experiences and stories;

- Communicating with facility managers (local councils, etc.);
- Generating local media, mainly in local newspapers, to promote the team and recruit players;
- Producing videos for team sharing and promotion—one team had a volunteer who videoed three games per season for promotion and team coaching purposes; and
- Organising and conducting fund raising activities such as cleaning up at the Melbourne Show, raffles, barbecues, Bunnings Sausage Sizzles and a Dinner Dance.

LEADERSHIP GROUP

Most teams reported having some form of leadership group of 4–6 representatives. This group was usually made up of players (often the captain and vice-captain), the coach, a lead agency representative, and a supporting agency representative (such as Rotary Clubs). These leadership groups often met both formally and informally to plan activities, allocate key tasks to individuals to ensure the efficient and smooth running of the team, and to manage and discuss specific incidents and issues as they arose during the season.

EQUIPMENT AND UNIFORM MANAGEMENT

All team administrators reported undertaking numerous activities related to obtaining and maintaining the equipment and uniforms necessary for the team to train for, and participate in, the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League. The range of activities they reported related to managing equipment and uniforms included:

- Securing equipment and uniforms from sponsors, community organisations, and the AFL, VFL or community football clubs;
- Distributing uniforms to, and retrieving uniforms back from, team participants;
- Transporting equipment to and from training and games; and

- Maintaining and storing the equipment (e.g. laundering uniforms and pumping up footballs);

GAME DAY ACTIVITIES

All teams were scheduled to participate in nine games during the 2016 Reclink Australia Victorian Football League home-and-away season and one Reclink Grand Final Day game. Some games were cancelled or abandoned during the 2016 season, usually due to one of the competing teams not having enough players to field a team, or incidents of on-field aggression. Based on the information gathered during this project, it is estimated that a 'typical' home game for a Reclink football team involved approximately 25 players while an away game involved 18–20 players.

Most lead agency representatives indicated that a Reclink football game day required a full day of their time including pre-game preparation, travel to and returning from away games, and post-game activities.

Through the course of the interviews with the team administrators, it became apparent that a 'typical' Reclink Australia Victorian Football League game-day involved a wide range of activities and roles including:

- Team management—setting up the oval (coaching benches, goal post padding, etc.), communicating with players, organising and distributing equipment and uniforms, accessing facilities, arranging transport, completing match-related paperwork, liaising with field umpires, identifying and supporting volunteers to perform a range of duties (first aid, scoreboard, goal and boundary umpiring) etc.;
- Coaching (often done by more than one person)—organising team positions, communicating with players, running pre-game warm up, inter-changing players during the game, etc.;
- Off-field mentoring—particularly if participants have specific issues that need to be addressed or incidents occurred during the course of the game;

- Goal and boundary umpiring;
- Providing first aid;
- Running water and messages to players;
- On-field mentoring—to support players to participate or manage on-field incidents;
- Maintaining the score board and time-keeping;
- Transporting players to and from the game venue—some participants also require transport to home games or to get to the meeting point to be then able to travel on the bus to away games; and
- Obtaining and preparing food and drinks for pre- and post-match consumption by participants, volunteers, spectators and officials.

TRAINING DAY ACTIVITIES

Each team indicated they organised a training session every alternate Wednesday during the season and pre-season. One team reported organising two training sessions on non-game weeks and one training session on game weeks. Each training session lasted between 1 to 1.5 hours. During this time, players received coaching instruction and participated in physical activity. This also provided an opportunity to connect with players and identify support needs. For some teams, food was provided before and after training, and some participants were transported to and from training.

PRE-SEASON ACTIVITIES

Most teams reported organising some form of training prior to the start of the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League season. This may not have been football focused but based on general fitness, individual capacity building, and team building such as bushwalking or running.

END OF YEAR PRESENTATIONS AND CELEBRATIONS

All teams reported holding a celebration at the end of the football season, usually involving awarding trophies and awards to participants who had made a significant contribution or achievement during the season.

Social support and personal development for players

Most teams reported organising and undertaking a range of activities to support and encourage group and individual personal development with a focus on developing skills to enhance and improve their daily lives. Although football was the primary activity of interest to participants, it also provided a platform to raise and discuss a wider range of social, physical and mental wellness topics. Examples these types of activities undertaken by teams included:

- Speakers from supporting and external agencies talking at football training about issues such as anger management, smoking, gambling and addictions;
- An external agency conducting a 'mental health check-up' with participants before the start of a football game;
- Taking players to a supermarket to educate them about healthy eating options.

"We did responsible gambling, we did the drink drive program, the good sport program....we deliver them in the context of football. So they're not sitting in a classroom or something like that. They're sitting in the training room..... They have some amazing insight and knowledge that gets shared amongst themselves. It's a great learning environment that they will actively engage in." (013A, Lead agency representative, Team manager).

"I've taken kids to the supermarket and bought them food for what they need to eat because they don't know. One kid didn't know what tuna was you know? You just try and re-educate them in other areas of their lives. Mentoring, domestic violence." (019A, Reclink representative, Coach).

"We've done a mental health check-up day before a game once. We had a mob come They are a sort of footy orientated mental health sort of awareness which is really good." (019A, Reclink representative, Coach).

LINKING TO SERVICES AND AGENCIES

Many agency representatives spoke about working closely with football participants to identify health and social needs, and to link them to services and agencies that could appropriately support them. In addition to supporting participants to access services, several agency representatives directly supported participants in their interactions with other aspects of the social welfare and justice systems.

"We always try to hide the vegies under the meat. Our 'more than just football' motto, is just that. You know, football brings them. The services that we have, all the ones that we've mentioned, are all called upon to bring their expertise. Their expertise isn't football. You know, that's just to get them there. Loosely, some of them are footballers and so on, which is great, but it's what they can offer through their service. You know, Headspace and YSAS are based at the Vic Park where we are, so it takes out that whole, oh, 'here's a card, and you've got to go three blocks, and take two trains and a bus to get there'. It's here. You're turning up on Wednesday, you've been dragged off the track and going up to that service. It works best potentially." (014A, Lead agency representative, Coach).

SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

In addition to organising football-specific and educational or personal development activities for participants, most teams provided a safe environment for players to socialise in. Lead agencies organised social and teambuilding activities such as boxing, horse riding, ten pin bowling, film nights, and museum trips, etc.

7. Outputs

Based on the data collected during the Reclink Australia and individual team stakeholder interviews conducted during this study, it is estimated that, by undertaking the activity outlined in Section 6 above, a 'typical' Reclink Australia Victorian Football League team produced the following outputs:

- 4 weeks of pre-season training consisting of one training or team building session of approximately 90 minutes per week;
- 19 weeks (6 April–10 August) of regular season football activity involving:
 - one 90-minute training session each fortnight and one training session during the 'bye' week in which they did not have a game;
 - one game each fortnight, alternating between 'home' and 'away' matches with one bye week;
- 4 weeks of preparation for the Reclink Grand Final involving one training session of approximately 90 minutes per week;

Based on the data collected during the interviews and subsequent data provided by lead agency representatives from each team, it is estimated that a 'typical' Reclink Australia Victorian Football League team had:

- 45 players participate in the season;
- 23 players participate in 5 or more games in the season;
- 45 players participate in the team's Grand Final game;
- 12 players attend each training session;
- 3 participants attend each of 3 Reclink Development Days;
- 1 participant attend a Reclink Level One coaching course;
- 12 participants attend the Reclink Peter Cullen Medal event;
- 1 lead agency representative who worked for 8 hours per week, each week for 26 weeks to coordinate and manage team activity;
- 2 lead or supporting agency staff who attended each of 9 games for 4 hours per game;
- 2 lead agency or supporting agency staff who attend each of 16 training sessions for 2 hours per session;
- 2 lead agency or supporting agency staff who attended Grand Final day for 8 hours;
- 3 volunteers attend each of 9 games for 4 hours per game;
- 2 volunteers attend each of 16 training sessions for 2 hours per session; and
- 3 volunteers attend Grand Final day for 8 hours
- 6 spectators (family, friends, members of the community) attend each of 9 games for 2 hours per game
- 3 spectators (family, friends, members of the community) attend each of 16 training session for 1.5 hours per session.

8. Why football?

The data from the interviews with 26 stakeholders and 30 Reclink Australia Victorian Football League participants suggests that there is something unique about football as an activity, such that it provides opportunities and outcomes not possible through other activities. Football, in the context of the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League, is like an incubator or microcosm of real life. It focuses on developing and displaying life skills such as being part of a team, commitment, and controlling aggression. All of this is concentrated in a controlled and supported environment.

“You’re not there to just talk about your problem, you’re there to play footy ostensibly but what happens by osmosis is the guys see “oh hang on, he’s done something, he’s moved on”. And the thing is, if you’re playing footy you’ve got a reason to band together. It’s like going to war together in a way and you come out and there’s a bond that you just can’t artificially create in a therapeutic environment except with a long period of time. So football does it very quickly.” (016A, Agency representative, Coach/team manager).

“The football stuff is really powerful..... I mean it really changes lives. There’s a spiritual component to us, to it for us and I think the guys get that and I’ve seen some remarkable stuff happen to participants. And if it wasn’t for the football maybe it might’ve happened somewhere down the track, but what I can say is I saw them come in to an environment as damaged people and I’ve seen them leave as members of the community, happy, healthy.” (016A, Lead agency representative, Coach/team manager)

“Football is the platform for the interaction. There’s no need for them to communicate over anything except for what’s happening in terms of around the football. If that’s how they relate, then that’s a great way to relate because there’s no challenge to be

anything other than yourself. Yet if you’re an introverted person that breaks down so many barriers just to allow the conversation around the football.” (018P, Reclink player/coach, Male 48 years old).

Football as an activity, and the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League specifically, provides two types of opportunities which are perhaps not available from other activities or through football as it is organised in other contexts. First, clients who were already engaged in support programs (e.g. drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs, mental health programs) could be directed into an appropriate team participating in the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League. This provided a positive and supportive environment with the potential to ‘amplify’ the therapeutic outcomes of the programs they were already engaged with.

“The footy has provided a fantastic add-on to the program that I think we underestimated. We underestimated the therapeutic dimension of it. We thought it would just be good for activity but it’s been equal to all the other therapeutic components of the program.” (022A, Supporting agency representative, Counsellor).

“I ended up saying to myself, “I want to overcome the fear.” Because I was in defence, so I said to myself, “I’m going to tackle the ball like I’m going to tackle my recovery.” Just put my body on the line. I ended up with (laughs) a few bumps and bruises. I actually looked at it like, “Okay, when I was using, I got my own bumps, bruises, scars. But they were from using.” Whereas this time, it was a positive one. It was overcoming my fears. I sort of relate it to life. If I’m going to go for something, take the risk. Sometimes it works out, sometimes it doesn’t. Sometimes I’ll get hurt but it’s okay. I’m doing something positive.....At least I actually gave it a go.” (005P, Reclink player, Male, 44 years old).

Second, some Reclink Australia Victorian Football League participants, having been initially attracted to join a team because of their interest in playing football, developed a trusting relationship with agency workers and were subsequently more likely to become aware of, and access, support services to address their social and health needs.

"I didn't realise myself, and so many people I've seen go through ups and downs, they had no idea that kind of support was out there until they got involved with Reclink and spoke with the coaches and other players and learned what was actually available for them in their problems. How Reclink could actually help them." (019P, Reclink player, Female, 46 years old).

"We're more than just footy, we're not just a footy club. We're there to help people throughout their problems, to help people like with housing and stuff like that. They help people get off drugs, help people with alcohol problems, help people with accommodation for homeless people and stuff like that. So it's a lot more than people think it actually is." (013P, Reclink player, Male, 23 years old).







9. Outcomes (Benefits)

Benefits to participants in the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League

"If it hadn't been for Reclink I probably would have been still sleeping in the streets today mate, that's serious. They are actually one of my life savers, gave me purpose, reason, something to do and develop me as a person." (005A, Volunteer, Assistant coach).

SOCIAL HEALTH BENEFITS

For many of the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League participants who were experiencing disadvantage, mental illness, disability, homelessness, substance abuse issues, addictions, and social and economic hardship, participating in a Reclink football team was one of very few opportunities in their lives to build and access social networks within the community. It helped reduced social isolation and provided opportunities for social interaction in a supportive and welcoming environment. For others it was more simply an opportunity to have fun in an otherwise chaotic and stressful life.

"And social health—well to be honest mate, before this I wasn't a very social person and I got into this and I've basically made another family other than my own." (013P, Reclink player, Male, 23 years old).

"The social so that's probably more beneficial to me...It just means social connection." (016P, Reclink player, Male, 34 years old).

"They've given us the opportunity for people that haven't really had that much opportunity in their life, to actually go out for the day and have fun." (08P, Reclink player, Male, 24 years old).

Participants in the interviews conducted during this study identified clear and powerful social

benefits for participants in the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League by:

- Providing a meaningful connection to their community;
- Building a family environment where participants felt that they were not only welcome but that they belonged and were needed;

"Because it gives...for me it also gives a sense of belonging somewhere." (027P, Reclink player, Male, 35 years old).
- Creating an opportunity to connect or re-connect with family members and friends;
- Providing an opportunity to meet peers facing similar challenges and grow a friendship group to socialise with at the football and beyond;
- Providing roles models, real life examples and networks of people in a supportive environment who may have been in a similar situation and have improved their lives, offering motivation and understanding;

"As I said, it's all networking, you know. Someone might have a drug addiction and someone may have had one, and they can talk to each other and they can go "okay, this is what I did... this is how I got through it" and that might give them that avenue that they've been looking for, to help them recover." (028P, Player/umpire, Male, 36 years old).
- Generating opportunities for participants to support others, giving them a sense of empowerment and being needed.
- Providing an opportunity for participants to be part of a team.

"I felt like I was needed for the team...we have like a good connection with that you know? It makes us, like, sort stuff out too with each other." (020P, Reclink player, Male, 20 years old).

"I feel like it's just the team support. On the field, you can't do it on your own. Life in general. You need supports and same as in recovery. You really need that support and that connection." (002P, Reclink player, Male, 32 years old).

- Creating connections and opportunities to engage with the community

"In the community, addicts are pretty frowned upon because we steal, most of us don't work, we're always taking. We're not part of the community. So being in Reclink, it's like that first initial step. Afterwards people can go off and do other things. So that's actually a stepping stone to get us back into the community. If you want people to be in the community more and help out, be community-minded, well this is one good way to do it. Because you're introducing people that, really, they don't have a lot of community-minded experience." (005P, Reclink player, Male, 44 years old)

PHYSICAL HEALTH BENEFITS

The Reclink Australia Victorian Football League created opportunities for participants to take part in football training, play regular games of football and participate in a range of other physical activities (e.g. boxing, horse riding, bush walking and triathlons). For many participants, it may have been their only physical activity for the week, and without they may not have participated in any physical activity at all.

"Absolutely, absolutely it certainly does. Especially the ones where they come to training, you see that in their capacity for endurance throughout the game... (without Reclink footy) the majority of them would just drop out (of physical activity)." (004A, Lead agency representative, Team manager).

"..with physical health it actually got me to go out and exercise and do things. Like I never really did and I should've because I was always self.... like you know about my body and stuff. So getting out there and having that fitness and even when we're not training, we still go and do boxing and stuff

like that so the fitness is definitely in there. So that's good for the physical". (015P, Reclink player, Female, 25 years old).

For some participants, the opportunity to play in the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League football provided a motivation to get fitter and do more physical activity.

"...because when I heard I'd be playing, started going to the gym, and I'm like, oh, I got to get fit again. I've got a game coming up. After that, it was like, well, why did I only do it for now? Why can't I just keep doing it? Yeah, since the footy started, that's when my motivation got up, and then even after it, I kept going to the gym regularly." (008P, Reclink player/water runner, Male, 24 years old).

"That's what it's done for me. I think it kept me engaged in physical activity. So like I'd go down, I live in St Kilda, I use the Sea Baths every day. When I finished my football games, I'd go down and do stretches and cool downs in the steam room and sauna. So for me, that's maintained a healthy lifestyle activity" (026P, Reclink player, Male, 36 years old).

In addition to the direct benefits associated with being more physically active, analysis of the interview data collected in this study identified a range of other physical health benefits for participants in the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League including:

- Increased interest in healthy eating and access to a regular and secure source of food.

"So it's interesting that the ones that are doing the football and then going to the food security program, engage a lot more because it's based around nutrition, and they link the nutrition to, "Oh, wow, I might actually be able to play better footy". (013P, Lead agency representative, Team manager).

"I just went up to him and said "you've had three pies that's enough", and he just said "I haven't had anything to eat for four days".

That sort of brought me down to earth, and I've watched him since and we make sure he's involved, and if he doesn't feel well he runs water instead of playing. So as long as he comes and we make sure he has a feed for sure." (012P, Volunteer, Team manager/secretary/treasurer).

- Motivation to change unhealthy or social undesirable behaviours to healthier or more socially acceptable alternatives including reduced drug and alcohol use, addressing problem gambling and providing an alternative to being involved in criminal activity.

"Okay, if I weren't with Reclink I'd still be on heroin now. I stopped the speed because of Reclink, so the using it anyway. I stopped gambling. I had a good eight years there where I spent \$400 bucks every bloody fortnight mate and I tell you, every ad I've ever seen is true. You come out feeling like a dickhead, you beat yourself up all week and then you go out and you do it again. Well Reclink stopped that." (001P, Reclink player, Male, 54 years old).

"I was just in and out of jail.and like I was constantly getting charged with one thing or another and the time that I've been playing footy, three years, I haven't been charged once." (016P, Reclink player, Male, 34 years old).

"I saw it as a way of using sport as a way to engage young people, to try and steer them away from coming under the attention of the Police or getting into trouble as well as reducing their drug and alcohol use." (015A, Supporting agency representative, Coach).

Importantly, several of the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League participants interviewed in this study highlighted that it provided an important avenue for people with drug and alcohol problems to participate in sport in an environment that is free of alcohol and drugs.

"Just having general fun without drugs involved... it's no alcohol involved. When I was growing up, a lot of my mates played footy and if I wanted to watch a game there'd

be people drinking everywhere. That's not the culture I want to be a part of anymore, because it's not going to be safe for me to be around that environment. I've found everyone in the Reclink organisation to be very supportive of what we're doing. I've found it something that I'm interested in just because I know I'm safe doing it. It's an organisation I can be a part of, meet people, make friends, without having to worry about drugs and alcohol around me." (004, Reclink player, Male 28 years old).

"... if I'm to start playing footy again, it won't be for a district league or anything like that. I'd probably end up hooking up with a Reclink just to avoid... Because in football, for me, there was a lot of alcohol, and alcohol come with the drugs, and I just want to be able to actually go and play for a team, that don't... They can sit around and talk without a can in their hand." (008P, Reclink player/water runner, Male, 24 years old),

MENTAL HEALTH BENEFITS

It was clear from nearly every interview conducted with agency representatives and individual participants that everyone involved in the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League experiences a positive impact on their mental wellbeing that they strongly associate with what they described as 'Reclink football'. This benefit was sometimes associated with addressing a specific mental illness but also often interpreted as participants being generally happy, less stressed, more self-confident and more socially engaged.

"For us, it's people recovering from you know, mental illness from that and we have seen that people are connected to community, they're volunteering, they're getting work and they're just, in general, they're happier and healthier people." (029P, Reclink player/coach, Male, 36 years old).

"In terms of just their sense of self, their mental health, their wellbeing in that way, it does improve greatly during the course of the season." (013A, Lead agency representative, Team manager).

In addition to, and inseparable from, the social and physical health benefits, team stakeholders and individual participants who were interviewed for this study identified a broad range of mental health benefits from involvement in the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League including:

- Providing a positive experience and a break from everyday concerns.

"I get away from everything else. Like when it comes to Collingwood Knights like that's basically where I go to forget about everything else and just focus on the footy because that's the kind of environment that they bring....Yeah it gets me away from just everything in general because once I'm on that football field, that's all I think about, is football." (009P, Reclink player, Male, 22 years old).

- Reducing symptoms of depression and assisting in management of mental health.

"I've had feedback from some of the players who suffer from depression or mental health issues.... they said they can definitely feel the difference about coming down to training and running around. It sort of helps them with that depression." (015A, Supporting agency representative, Coach).

"Absolutely 100%, it keeps me from having depression through the winter. If it weren't for the fact that I was running around out every Wednesday for training or every game, well I would have a lull through winter. I have no doubt whatsoever that that activity.. the endorphins, the comradery, yeah just boost you." (018, Reclink player/coach, Male, 48 years old).

- The football, and other activities related to football, offered opportunities to face fears and reduce anxiety.

"For me it would be the starting off point to push myself to overcome fears about making connection. The thing I talked about, the violence, and just going out there and giving it a go and being part of something... I ended up saying to myself, 'I want to overcome the fear.' (005P, Reclink player, Male, 44 years old)."

- Building a positive identity, self-respect and self-esteem.

"I know I've got the experience to go up and talk to people and help them...that helps self-confidence which picks up the self-esteem." (001P, Reclink player, Male, 54 years old).

"...it's not only needed, it's like they want you to play, they want—they give you the opportunity and like you don't....coming from where we come from, sometimes we don't get that ... and getting that from the staff and Reclink was pretty....made me feel good about myself." (020P, Reclink player, Male, 20 years old)

"I suppose just gaining confidence, I never had any confidence. I always thought people would judge me going out in shorts and a t-shirt and I just.... yeah I've always lacked self-confident so I've just got that up to not... so I don't care anymore if people judge me. I'm out there having a good time so that's all that matters." (015P, Reclink player, Female, 25 years old, O52)

- Experiencing success, and an opportunity to create and achieve goals generating a sense of pride in their performance.

"Because we find a lot of the participants who come there, they've had that feeling resonating through them probably a fair percentage of their life. You know, 'you're not a winner, you don't fit anywhere, you'll never make it', all that sort of stuff. And a lot of this mindset trying to actually eliminate a lot of that by creating that environment of providing the right gear, so that when they come there they're actually playing the game... and they feel proud." (005A, Volunteer, Assistant coach).

"To be recognised because of the hard work that I'm putting into myself. Reclink's given me the opportunity to excel at something I'm really good at. It's allowed me to acknowledge all the good traits about me and that acceptance stuff for who I am. It's given me a lot. It's given me a lot of hope" (007, Reclink player, Male, 28 years old).

- Generating a sense of ownership and contributing to a team.

“What Reclink provides is... it is a community, and it does give the people a sense of ownership, and they're very engaged with it. It's really, that aspect is really beneficial for the client group we service because often they're disenfranchised from everything else.” (004A, Lead agency representative, Team manager).

“It means that I mean something to the club and that if I can't play personally, at least that I have something and some involvement with the club.” (014P, Reclink sports trainer, Female, 25 years old).

- Providing an opportunity to be a leader and to support others.

“Everyone looks up to me like I'm the leader down there and it makes me feel very good. Everyone comes.... they don't go up to the coaches and stuff and ask them for advice, they come up to me and like it feels good to know that like, other than the coaches, they come to you and they ask you for advice and stuff like that. It's good that you get recognition from your peers that you play footy with.” (013P, Reclink player, Male, 23 Years old).

“It helps build my confidence talking to people and stuff and being a leader and all that.” (025P, Reclink player, Male, 25 years old).

“I'm just going down there to help, you know, those guys. I've got full time employment so I don't really need to play. It's not like the organisation is for me, I'm there to support the other guys you know, that way they get a game, and they're all good..... I'm not doing it for myself. I'm doing it for these guys here.” (028P, Reclink player/umpire, Male, 36 years old).

- Creating an environment in which participants can learn and develop self-discipline and anger management.

“Like I said before, I wouldn't be the person I am today if it wasn't for Reclink and honestly it's changed my life a lot. Like I was a fucking angry little turd back in the day mate, like, you know and so now.... I've changed my attitude towards everything in life.” (013P, Reclink player, Male, 23 years old).

“The guys actually... because they achieved something, they achieved self-control after an incident, it actually gave them a sense of achievement. That was good, we actually pulled ourselves back together and finished the game well.... So I've seen some really positive things come out of working through what is anger and to some more self-control that I think is a teaching part of the... it's a life skill thing that they can learn.” (021A, Supporting agency representative, Team chaplain).

LIFE IMPROVEMENT

It was clear from the data collected in the stakeholder and participant interviews that the sum of all the social, physical and mental health benefits produced by being involved in the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League, was an opportunity for life improvement.

“It's not just about playing sport. It's actually about providing opportunities for people to progress.”

“This is where my life was at then and this is where I'm at now. Now I couldn't have done this without active sport and I couldn't go without help and comradery... You know for a young Aboriginal man, and this is where I am at now... and my life is better.” (027P, Reclink player, Male, 35 years old).

Involvement in a football team offered an opportunity for participants to connect with an advocate (within or outside their support agency) who cared for them as a person, built trust and connected them to services when needed in a less confronting environment than traditional agency or service providers.

“For example at the beginning of this year we had a new female player and then I think

she played a couple of games and then at a training session one day she told me that she was pregnant so she's stopped playing football now but she's been up to speak to me about her pregnancy and then I've asked her if she's got all the support that she needs and I suggested some things to her. So yes we are there for that reason but I would say it's those concrete referral pathways that we're providing people and they feel like they've got someone to go to if they need." (020A, Lead agency representative, Team manager).

"Well I'm more like a mentor for a lot of them. Some of them will ring me in the middle of the night. Some of them may be having a rough time in their life, and they'll ring me up for a bit of a chat, and I'll try to talk to them as much as I can and try and make them realise what life's all about." (009A, Volunteer, Coach).

Many participants reported that being a member of a Reclink Australia Victorian Football League team provided their life with meaning, an opportunity for life improvement and hope.

"It steers us on a different path. It gives us hope. It allows us to have opportunities to live a fulfilling life rather than, you know a destructive life, yeah. It's really important. It's important for us to have Reclink as a support service." (007, Reclink player, Male, 28 years old).

"Yeah, definitely. (Reclink provides).. Opportunity to change and hope" (005P, Reclink player, Male 44 years old).

"Well if I didn't have Reclink and footy – I don't know, like a lot is – footy gets me through life so if I didn't have footy then I don't think I'd have a life..... (I'd miss out on..) A lot of friends, a lot of fitness, exercise, a lot of support...I would spend that time just at home...Yes I'm going to stay with Reclink football until I'm 88" (009, Reclink player, Male, 22 years old).

"(Without Reclink football) we wouldn't have that thing to say 'this is what we do'

and we wouldn't be able to say to everyone "this is the activities we do and this is what we look forward to every week." (014N, Reclink sports trainer, Female, 25 years old).

More concretely, participants reported that Reclink football provided them with:

- Something to look forward to each week.

"I wake up and I look forward to it, even if it's rain or it's what not, you know, I just look forward to it." (027P, Reclink Player, Male 35 years old).

"Yeah because I'm finding it hard to get a job so footy is basically all I've got that gets me out of the house." (010P, Reclink player/team vice president, Male, 23 years old).
- A routine to their week that otherwise might be chaotic and unstructured.

"... I know what's happening week after week." (016P, Reclink player, Male, 34 years old).

"Like on a Wednesday, worried about what I'm going to do. I get up, and I go, right, this is what I've got to do today. So I focus myself up....Yeah, I've found myself – it gives me something on that day. I'm focussed on that day." (027P, Reclink player, Male 35 years old).

"Well three years ago, I was virtually going day by day, not knowing what's going to happen the next, to stable living and having something to look forward to". (016P, Reclink player, Male, 34 years old).
- An opportunity to transition into community sport.
- An environment to develop and demonstrate their interpersonal skills relevant for employment such as: leadership; time management; teamwork; reliability; and being able to take direction.

"It's teaching them about being part of the team and following rules and having boundaries and skill building and all of those things. The same thing as you would have in a work environment or a volunteering

environment. It's just builds those life skills.” (003A, Lead agency representative, Team manager).

“I suppose time management and being reliable, being there before the game and training... especially with trainings I've been in. Make sure you do train so you do get a game. Like definitely reliable would come into it I think as mainly being more time efficient, getting there before we start, having a pre training and then go out and play your game. So just having time management and being reliable.” (015P, Reclink player, Female 25 years old).

- Networks to connect with employment opportunities.

“My son got a phone call one day from a lady who came out of nowhere and said “I work for so-and-so. I'm not going to mention names. But you might like to know that this young fellow is the fourth generation of a family that's never had a job. And now he's got a job, his brother's got a job, and his mother's got a job”.” (18A, Volunteer, General helper).

“I know a bloke that's playing for us that, because of the football, he's gotten a job.” (012P, Reclink player, male 38 years old).

“You know, like some people can offer jobs and that, you know, I've got some work coming up – any guys interested in getting some work. Yeah, no worries. Get you that way Brian as well, he's quite happy to help them if they approach him, and Brian's got some companies like – in construction and house building and all that stuff. He's got a few guys doing a bit of sponsorship there, and they're always looking for people to work, so, you know. He's sort of said, yeah, you know.” (028P, Reclink player/umpire, Male, 36 years old).

“We definitely see people that are unemployed become you know, employed. so you're seeing people volunteering and getting back into paid work as well.” (029P, Reclink player/coach, Male, 36 years old).

- Opportunities to leverage relationships with agency staff and volunteers to obtain employment, housing and legal references.

“Yeah my mate... that lives with me now he does that. Like when he applies for a job and stuff he puts the officers and that down as his references because they're the people closest to him.” (013P, Reclink player, Male, 23 years old).

“They'll come up to me, and they'll tell me they've got job interviews and that sort of stuff. If any of them need references, we're quite happy to write references for them. Like, we've had blokes go and move out, and try and get their own houses and that, and they will ring me up and ask if they can put me down as a reference to talk to... I've had quite a few phone calls over the years.” (009A, Volunteer, Coach).

Benefits to participating agencies

In addition to the benefits to individuals who participated in the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League described above, the interviews with stakeholders revealed that the lead and supporting agencies also experienced a wide range of benefits.

SERVICE PROVISION BENEFITS

Several agencies—both lead and supporting—highlighted that their involvement in the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League added value to the services their agency delivered and strengthened their capacity to undertake their primary activity. Many of the participating agencies had a remit to provide services to hard to reach sections of the population who do not usually engage with service providers (e.g. homeless young males, young indigenous people, young people with mental health or drug and alcohol addictions). They reported that involvement in the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League was a useful tool for them to reach and engage with these groups.

“But they’re probably getting more than they would, than if it was the standard support plan. They’re actually probably getting greater impacts through the football team.....So it’s a great platform, and really supports and enhances case management practice. There’s no doubt about that”. (013A, Lead agency representative, Team Manager).

“Our YSAS and Headspace, our partners.... They’d be working with them and they would use that as a tool in their back pocket to say, have you ever played footy. Are you interested in getting involved in footy? A lot of the time they’re saying yes.” (014A, Lead agency representative, Coach)

“Rotary obviously is a service... community service provider, that’s what we do. Service of our self, so in a sense it provides a local avenue for service and most of the Rotarians who help are really pleased to do that”. (021,

Supporting agency representative, Team chaplain).

The agencies represented in the interviews conducted for this study work with the community’s most vulnerable and isolated people—those who experience mental illness, disability, homelessness, substance abuse issues, addictions, and social and economic hardship. As such, their work is often challenging and emotionally draining. Several interviewed agency representatives highlighted that the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League enabled their agencies to be involved in program which built a positive organisational culture for both agency staff and clients.

“They love particularly the school teachers, they get along really well with everyone here and the DHS staff that come out on game day are fantastic too so I’m sure it does create a bit more of a stronger bond amongst everybody.” (008A, Lead agency representative, Coach).

The agencies that were involved in leading and supporting teams in the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League clearly felt that their involvement in the football program enhanced their capacity to both access and meet the support needs of their clients. Interestingly, the only agency that expressed any degree of concern or dissatisfaction with their involvement in the football program did so on the basis that they were unsure that it still met the needs of the majority of their clients who were getting older and including more females.

BENEFITS FOR AGENCY STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

Not only did involvement in the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League provide benefits to individual participants and the agencies that supported teams, it was consistently reported that it also provided benefits to agency staff and volunteers. Involvement in the football program was seen as a highlight for many staff as it provided a platform to interact with clients and engage with their communities in a positive way. It also created an environment that facilitated trust and positive relationships between agency

staff and clients, particularly hard to reach groups of clients (such as young males), and a unique opportunity for staff development.

"It's been probably the most enjoyable part of my job so far this year... so it's all positive from my end." (008A, Lead agency representative, Coach).

"I think I said to you before; if you have a little win occasionally, and someone pulls you up down the street... There's a young bloke that is now the Assistant Manager of cleaning services at the market place... He played football with us three years ago, and he always comes up to me when I go to the market place and he keeps saying to me "This is because of you, you know." And you get chuffed about that don't you? This kid's now got a permanent job." (008A, Volunteer, General Helper).

"Not only further my development as a trainee in the sporting field, but also give me more exposure, in a multitude of backgrounds." (002A, Supporting agency representative, Team Manager).

"Typically this demographic of young males, 20–30 odd don't look for authority figures or professional agencies or whatever. Football actually creates a therapy, or at least an avenue for those people to be able to ask for help eventually once they build trust." (21A, Supporting agency representative, Team Chaplain).





10. Logic map and calculation of the SROI of the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League

From identifying the resources (inputs), activities (outputs) and outcomes of the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League, a logic model has been developed in order to establish how value outputs can be attributed to the league's activities (Table 2). In addition to this, the pathway mechanism that the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League provides to participants to support them at each stage of their life recovery has been established and illustrated in Figure 1. This information has been used to form the basis of the Social Return on Investment (SROI) calculation for the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League.

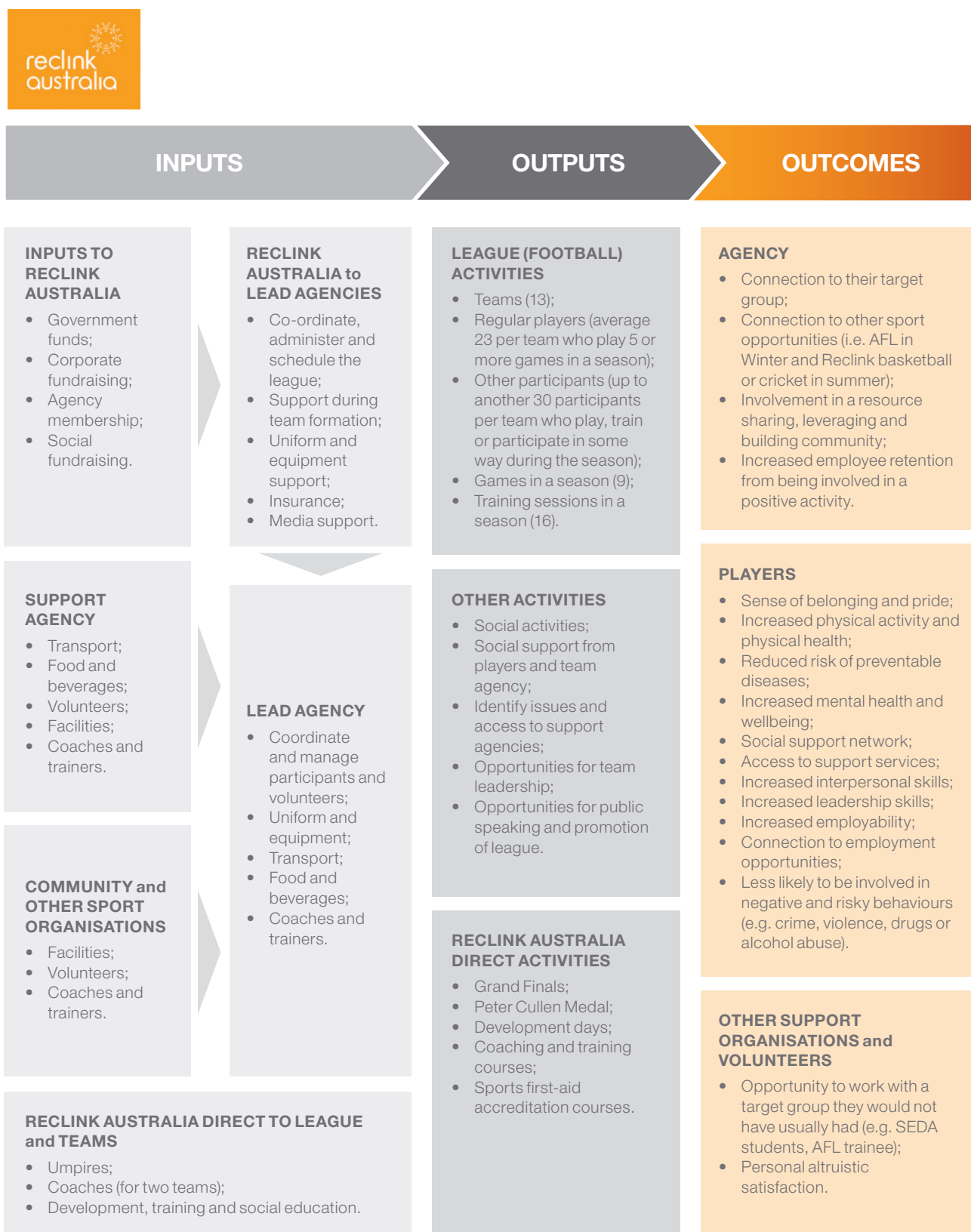
As explained in the method, to calculate the SROI of the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League, the outcomes received by each stakeholder from the league's activities are listed and the extent of this outcome, or change, is determined. A financial proxy is then attributed to this outcome and a final calculation is then compared to the resources required to operate the league.

From the case study conducted, the SROI for the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League has been calculated at a \$8.94 social value return for every \$1 invested into the league.



NOTE: The sources of funding (i.e. grants, donations, lead agency contributions) are not calculated as an input resource because this funding directly pays for the resources needed (i.e. bus, BBQ etc) and the SROI method calculates the cost of these resources as the input figure.

Table 2: Logic model of the Reclink Australia Victorian Football League inputs, outputs, and outcomes









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