Published on Reclink Australia (https://reclink.org)

The Pope's link to Australian sport [1]

7 December 2016

Words by Jeremy Dover

Pope Francis recently hosted the inaugural 'Sport at the Service of Humanity' Conference at the Vatican. The Pontiff explained in his welcoming address, "Sport is a human activity of great value, able to enrich people's lives." This is the second of a series of sport articles exploring the impact of sport on our society.

One of the few Australian organisations invited to this special conference was Reclink Australia. Reclink is a non-profit organisation whose mission is to provide and promote sport and art programs for people experiencing disadvantage.

Established by Peter Cullen in Victoria in 1990, Reclink Australia operates nationally, providing over 4500 activities and 80,000 participation opportunities for disadvantaged Australians annually. Their model is based on participation, partnership and pathways.

The Pope and Reclink

Peter shared with the Pope how Reclink has turned the lives of thousands of vulnerable and isolated people experiencing homelessness, substance abuse, economic hardship and mental illness. From wheelchair basketball in Alice Springs for the local drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre to Perth's Australian Rules Football "Community Cup", Reclink uses sport as a vehicle to impact the lives of people that need it.

It was this focus on using sport to help those on the edges of our society that drew the Pope's attention to this Australian non-profit organisation and the invitation to the Vatican for this conference.

The Pope explained, "But in this moment I am also thinking about those many children and the youth who live at the edges of society. Everybody is aware of the enthusiasm with which children will play with a rugged old deflated ball in the suburbs of some great cities or the streets of small towns. I wish to encourage all of you ? institutions, sporting societies, educational and social organisations, religious communities ? to work together to ensure these children can take up sport in circumstances of dignity, especially those who are excluded due to poverty."

Reclink

For Reclink this means assisting some of the community's most vulnerable and isolated people, including

people experiencing significant mental health challenges, disability, homelessness, substance abuse and economic hardship.

For example, in Alice Springs, the wheelchair basketball gives these able-bodied clients an opportunity to enjoy fun and fitness. Most would never get any exercise or socially interact in a positive way within their community. Through Reclink's program this provides a way to build self-esteem, fitness and positive social interaction of some of our society's most vulnerable. Reclink's wheelchair basketball shows that sport can bring hope and joy.

As the Pope summarised, "As far as the Catholic Church is concerned, she is working in the world of sport to bring the joy of the Gospel, the inclusive and unconditional love of God for all human beings."

In the next article we will explore a new Australian life-skills program, LifeMatters that uses games to teach mental skills for disadvantaged youth. LifeMatters has already had an amazing impact in South American orphanages, with former gang members in U.S. cities and Botswanan youth programs and it is now being run in Australia.

This article first appeared on Christian Today [2]

Tags

Reclink Australia [3]
Pope Francis [4]
Vatican [5]
sport [6]
football [7]
Peter Cullen [8]
Community Cup [9]

Source URL: https://reclink.org/news/popes-link-australian-sport

Links
[1] https://reclink.org/news/popes-link-australian-sport
[2] http://www.christiantoday.com.au/article/the.popes.link.to.australian.sport/23219.htm
[3] https://reclink.org/tags/reclink-australia
[4] https://reclink.org/tags/pope-francis
[5] https://reclink.org/tags/vatican
[6] https://reclink.org/tags/sport
[7] https://reclink.org/tags/football
[8] https://reclink.org/tags/peter-cullen
[9] https://reclink.org/tags/community-cup