

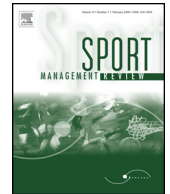


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## Sport Management Review

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/smr](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/smr)



# The development of female Muslim life-savers



Hazel Maxwell\*, Carmel Foley, Tracy Taylor, Christine Burton

Business Faculty, University of Technology, Sydney, Australia

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 18 September 2013  
Received in revised form 17 May 2014  
Accepted 9 July 2014  
Available online 26 September 2014

#### Keywords:

Community development  
Inclusion  
Cultural change  
Muslim women  
Stereotypes  
Community champions

### ABSTRACT

This teaching case illustrates the use of community development strategies to increase and enhance community sport participation of a targeted minority group. Royal Life Saving Society of Australia is presented here as an example of an organisation that embraced cultural change and developed a strategic approach to inclusive provision for individuals from marginalised population groups. The case is based on a community development framework that includes multiple facets: a shared concern about a social problem requiring action; encouraging the active participation of a marginalised group; forming public sector partnerships to pool resources and build political support; adopting collaborative principles of organising; collectively developing and implementing action plans; and re-conceptualising traditional ideas around accountability. The case facilitates the examination of the theoretical and practical considerations of adopting a community development approach in sport management.

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## Teaching note

### 1. The development of female Muslim life-savers teaching note and overview for use in class

This teaching case addresses the issue of how to best engage Muslim women as life-savers in public aquatic recreation settings. The case is presented within a community development framework espoused by [Frisby and Millar \(2002\)](#) and revolves around the Swim for Life (SFL) project, established and implemented through the Royal Life Saving Society of Australia (RLSSA). The data presented have been generated through interviews with managers, stakeholders and participants, and associated programme management documents. Students are asked to consider management strategies that can be used by sport and recreation organisations to involve marginalised citizens and/or minority groups in sporting activities within their local communities. Many community organisations have mandates to build capacity and empower the diverse communities in which they are located. This teaching case outlines the way in which one community sport body strategically approached the issue of improving social inclusion within its constituent communities.

The SFL project is located within a multi-dimensional community development framework which provides a useful perspective for examining the social inclusion of Muslim women in aquatic activities. The [Frisby and Millar \(2002\)](#) participatory community development approach has been challenged, modified and extended by others over the last 10 years, but it still provides a good starting point for students to discuss and debate sport as a contested arena. Other

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [hazel@wellsmaxwell.com](mailto:hazel@wellsmaxwell.com), [hazel.maxwell@uts.edu.au](mailto:hazel.maxwell@uts.edu.au) (H. Maxwell).

interpretations of community development which focus on empowerment (Lawson, 2005), the use of community champions, partners and sporting pathways (Vail, 2007), and long-term change (Coalter, 2002) could be referred to for further reading, noting that there are many different conceptualisations of community development. Students are asked to consider the appropriateness of the framework outlined in the SFL case study and highlight any other issues arising from the use of this specific multi-dimensional community development approach, and to think about creative ways to facilitate inclusion by applying this management framework to other community sport settings. Although the specific setting for this case involves an aquatic recreation organisation and the Muslim community, the issues faced by RLSSA may be applied to other sport and related organisations wishing to engage with diverse or minority community groups. Additionally, students are encouraged to use the internet and sources listed at the end of this teaching note to explore the application of community development methods to better understand the sport and population group of their interest.

### 1.1. Community development

It has been suggested that dominant managerial strategies in sport management involve a 'top down approach' which is underpinned by the assumption that those in managerial positions in sport contexts have the expertise and experience to make sound decisions (Frisby & Millar, 2002). A community development approach, on the other hand, challenges the use of a top down approach by sport managers and instead suggests that decisions about sport management are best made with direct input from citizens (Hylton & Totten, 2008). Community development is built on the understanding that members of the general public know what their interests and needs are and the ways that these can be met (Pedlar, 1996). A community development approach advocates that the general public and community sport providers who control local resources, service provision and policy, work together to deliver the best outcomes for the constituent community.

Community development "challenges passive consumer culture. It is about community consultation, empowerment and involvement in sustainable transformative change" (Hylton & Totten, 2008, p. 81). According to Ledwith (2005), community development promotes a participatory democracy. However, participatory democracy is not always fully achieved; in practice, a wide spectrum of community development approaches are found in sport development contexts. These can be located on a spectrum between a manipulative 'top-down' style and a 'bottom up' or self-help methodology (Hylton & Totten, 2008; Torkildsen, 2005). It has been posited that good practice in community sport development is about developing partnerships and agreed transparent aims with the local community, staff who are conversant with the underpinning development philosophy, serious recognition of community development as a process, long-term commitment, innovation, empowerment and ownership (Coalter, 2002). Goals of community development approaches include social inclusion, capacity building of skills and knowledge at the individual and the community level, increased public ownership of decision making, empowerment of those who do not usually have an input into public policy, enhanced social capital through the formation of new networks, and an increased relevancy of policies and programmes for targeted populations (Frisby & Millar, 2002).

A community development framework identified by Frisby and Millar (2002) based on six inter-relating dimensions forms the basis of this teaching case. The six dimensions include: a shared concern about a social problem requiring action; encouraging the active participation of a marginalised group; forming public sector partnerships to pool resources and build political support; adopting collaborative principles of organising; collectively developing and implementing action plans; and re-conceptualising traditional ideas around accountability.

### 1.2. Case setting

The teaching case presented is of an aquatic sport and recreation provider. However, the framework employed here could be applied to any sport or related organisation endeavouring to facilitate the social inclusion of marginalised individuals and groups using a community development approach. The case selection was based on the identification of a sport and recreation provider which explicitly aimed to improve the social inclusion of its community members using a community development approach. The selection criteria were designed to optimise the scope for capturing data on the dynamics of a community development approach at an organisational level. Sport and recreation providers with a mandate to cater to the community at large and those that had an interest in and commitment to engaging Muslim women were considered. Further criteria included the active participation of Muslim women in the activities of the organisation, not just as participants, but also as instructors and administrators.

Sport and recreation providers which met the selection criteria were identified through consultations with the New South Wales (NSW) Department of Sport and Recreation's multi-cultural unit personnel, and informal discussions with Muslim women's organisations nominated by the community research and advocacy centre 'Shopfront'. Shopfront is an organisation which links community groups to the University of Technology, Sydney, so that the knowledge, skills, resources and professional expertise found within the university can be deployed in community-engaged research. Groups consulted as part of these discussions included the United Muslim Women Association, the Lebanese Community Council of NSW, the Al Zahra Muslim Women's Association, the Islamic Council of NSW, and the Islamic Women's Welfare Association. The sport and recreation provider that emerged as the focal point for further investigation was the RLSSA and its SFL project in which Muslim women were represented as participants, instructors and administrators.

The RLSSA provides an instructive context to examine the issue of inclusive sport development practice because of its proactive efforts to engage with diverse communities. Specifically, the SFL case study examines the RLSSA's strategy to

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