



# PLAYING FOR CHANGE

Improving People's Lives Through Football

Football United® Research Report





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## How to read this report

This report includes Football United impacts measured through the Australian Research Council (ARC) funded study and other Football United monitoring and evaluation (M & E) results.

- The study findings are organised in four sections that are differentiated by the colours below:



Section 1



Section 2



Section 3



Section 4

Within each section, there are three components:

- Football United impact (sourced from all data)
- ARC study
- Key facts (sourced from all data) with the following symbols:



- Quotes are identified by the following symbols:



Key Informant\*



Participant from  
Football United  
school



Participant from  
Comparison  
school

\* Key Informants include Football United staff, volunteers, teachers, family members and community organisation representatives. All identifying elements have been removed to protect respondents' confidentiality, and pictures used are from across the Football United programs, not those of interviewees quoted.

### Suggested citation (Authors list):

Bunde-Birouste A., Nathan S., McCarroll B., Kemp L., Shwe T., Grand Ortega M. (2012)  
Playing for Change, Football United, School of Public Health and Community Medicine, UNSW, Sydney.

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This study was funded by an Australian Research Council Linkage Grant (LP0989930).

Further details are available on the study approach at: <http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2458/10/587>

### Football United management team

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*And just about every kid that's been through the Football United program they've grown in confidence. It gives kids the ability to see themselves as a different person and to make really strong connections with other people around them especially positive ones that can make a difference to their lives.*

## Foreword

Australia accepts more than 13,000 refugee and humanitarian immigrants annually. Young people account for over a third of the refugee population in New South Wales (NSW).

There is evidence that refugee families are highly vulnerable to social isolation in their countries of resettlement. The difficulties of refugee settlement are well documented, including the need to learn new languages, negotiate differing cultural and societal values and address past emotional trauma.

Sport-for-development refers to the use of sporting activities to provide opportunities for personal and community development, with effects that go well beyond the sphere of physical activity and (elite) player and game development. There has been an increase in programs that use sport to foster social development and engagement. However, little robust research has evaluated these efforts.

Football United was developed from a vision that people's love for football (soccer) can be used to build opportunities for belonging, racial harmony and community cohesion.

Football United's six years of operations confirms the Federal Government's Crawford Report findings (see page 11 for further details), and highlights other effects of inequity in participation, specifically:

- Gaps in equity of participation in both community and public education sector sport which can contribute to general disaffection within society, including leaving school, aggressive behaviour and unemployment as examples.
- Lack of opportunity to interact across cultural groups which can translate to racism and the ensuing problems it provokes.

Football United addresses these issues basing its foundations on the premise that structural variables and social processes act at multiple levels to impact on health and social behaviour.

Results of the research in this report underline Football United's positive impact on participating young people's sense of self, and appreciation for and engagement with peers from diverse backgrounds. Interviews revealed unanticipated connections between participation in Football United and learning English, positive engagement with school, and building self-confidence.

## Key recommendations for practice and policy

This research shows that Football United can assist in overcoming the many challenges experienced by young people and their families by engaging them in a sport they love, and adapting the program to each unique situation. These research findings have implications for a range of Government Departments, Non-Government Organisations and the Sport Sector as they grapple with the challenges

of engaging children and young people from diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds. The authors of this report believe that a national strategy to address these issues cannot simply rely on the often over-burdened community sport sector, or on slow systemic change within the education system. This requires cross-sectoral approaches from the Health, Community Services, Education, Youth, Sport and Social Inclusion sectors.

**On the basis of the evidence in this report, we make the following specific recommendations to inform policy, process and action:**

1. **Create partnership with local communities in design and delivery.**
2. Run **weekly programs for at least two terms (20 weeks)** and offer multiple opportunities to **participate at different levels**, from being a playing participant through to coaching and coordinating at low or no cost to participants and build on and support existing school curricula objectives.
3. Engage with the full **diversity of participants** by providing a **safe, supported and structured environment** underpinned by a focus on **building local capacity, linkages and relationships within and across school**, geographic, cultural and organisational boundaries.
4. **Tailor the approach to meet the needs of each local community** with particular attention to participation by girls and young people who are learning English, and to maximise the building of cross cultural relationships.
5. Go **beyond just playing opportunities**, to ensure the impacts we have found on peer, social and cross cultural relationships. These include **active mentoring, building life skills and leadership opportunities** and a **values base that promotes respect, team work, and fair play.**
6. Utilise a **school-based platform** to offer a convenient, supportive and trusted location, familiar to young people and their families.



# About Football United



Football United began in 2006 with the goal of supporting refugee and newly arrived young people and families in their transition into Australian society. The vision has evolved to become a program which combines a number of effective mechanisms for engaging and re-engaging young people with refugee experiences and disadvantaged youth into their communities, fostering their educational engagement and promoting cross cultural harmony.

Since its beginnings, Football United has been working in Australia to deliver positive outcomes for over 4000 participants. Working with over 50 community based organisations including migrant resource centres, community groups and charities, councils, schools, Intensive English Centres (IECs), TAFE, universities, and football organisations, Football United has involved hundreds of young people, teachers, volunteers, coaches, leaders and community workers within some of the country's most disadvantaged areas. Football United's localised programs align with social and educational outcomes sought by each respective region, school and their broader community.

### Football United's programs focus on improving and supporting:

- Cross cultural relationships for participants
- Personal, social and leadership skills
- Key life stage transitions for young people, within school and beyond
- Personal development, health and physical education curriculum; sport leisure and recreational goals; and media and technology studies
- Engagement with school and academic work
- Community-based leadership, mentoring and volunteering

## Football United Areas of Focus

The program is open to both genders, and has four key focus areas:

Football activities	Capacity building	Building linkages	Creating awareness
Including regular Saturday and after school programs, gala days and school holiday camps. In all activities, mentorship between coaches and players, between older and younger players, and between volunteers and participants is a focus.	Young people and their families in local communities can participate in courses and workshops and apply their learning in coaching and refereeing, mentoring and life-skills, leadership, first aid, project management and volunteering as part of Football United's operation.	Between schools and the community football system and between participants and partner agencies, including migrant support services, community organisations, councils, government agencies and the corporate sector.	Through advocacy, high profile partnerships, ambassadors and research to influence changes to government policy and public perceptions.

Further information is available at [www.footballunited.org.au](http://www.footballunited.org.au)



## About the research

The ARC study was funded by an Australian Research Council Linkage Grant (LP0989930), to investigate the implementation of Football United and its impacts, and was designed in consultation with partners.

The study provides critically needed guidance for governments and communities to develop and evaluate sports-based and related programs to strengthen Australia's social fabric and humanitarian refugee settlement. The results presented here are of national, as well as international, significance.

### The study design

The study involved a mixed methods design, following two Football United school-based programs ("Football United schools"), compared with two similar schools with no involvement in Football United ("Comparison schools"). The 'dose response' model used compared those with no involvement in the Football United program at a single point in time – enabling them to then participate in the program following measurement – with those who had lower or higher levels of participation. The study design reflected the reality that settlement is an ongoing process, and different young people access the Football United program at different times. The dynamic nature of program participation and settlement meant the study design chosen was the best approach to understand the effects of Football United.

### What we measured and how?

The study used a range of methods to find out about the impact of the Football United program. These methods included a self completed survey and face to face interviews with a sample of those who completed the survey as well as interviews with key informants in the schools and wider community.

The survey included established measures of emotional well being, other-group orientation, peer and prosocial behaviour and feelings of social inclusion/belonging – areas that the Football United program was designed to impact. Interviewees were asked open-ended questions ranging from their previous countries of residence and relocation to Australia; families and neighbourhoods; experiences meeting and making friends; as well as their experiences and feelings about sport and the Football United program. (See survey at: <http://footballunited.org.au/research/arc/research-questionnaire>)

Face to face interviews were also conducted with Football United staff and coaches, teachers, school counsellors, school support staff, and staff from local youth and migrant resource centres ("Key informants"). These participants were asked about the school environment, the experiences and challenges facing students from refugee backgrounds settling in Australia, their views on Football United's implementation and impact, as well as sport in general as a tool to support settlement and engagement in community.

### Other monitoring and evaluation results

The ARC study results are complemented in this report with Football United's ongoing monitoring and evaluation findings to provide a synthesis of the program's overall impact. This data highlights Football United's experience and expertise in implementing a far reaching and high impact model of football for social development.

### Who participated in the ARC study?

The survey sample included 142 young people from 31 different countries including Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Eritrea, Nepal, Burma and Thailand. The Football United group interview sample included 48 young people from 20 different countries of

birth and included nine girls. The Comparison school sample included 31 young people from 12 different countries of birth and included nine girls. Football United school response rates to the survey were 76% (site 1) and 54% (site 2) of all Football United participants in the survey year.





**Happy and healthy young people & their love of football**

*“ I didn't feel very good, but when I went to that program (Football United) I got all the information and everything and now I'm really very confident ”*

## Football United Impact

The impact, familiarity and comfort of football – and its association with hope – can support young people's wellbeing on their journey to settle in Australia. Football United provides much needed opportunities for recreational activities among many of the young people who participate in the program. Football United can impact on the personal and social health of participants. For example, there is evidence that Football United:

- **Increases and improves peer and friend networks and provides an inclusive, structured yet fun environment**
- **Offers an opportunity to play a familiar sport (football)**
- **Impacts positively on peer and social relationships**
- **Engages participants in regular and sustained weekly physical activity**

## ARC Study

Most of the young people at Football United schools said they “felt better” since participating in the program and that the program had helped them. This was significantly related to regularity of attendance and total participation in the program – coming regularly and for a longer time is important for the program to have a greater impact. During the study period, average attendance was the equivalent of full attendance for over one and a half school terms. Many others reported that the major positive aspect of Football United was that it was ‘fun’. A number of young people involved in Football United emphasised that the program had taught them to both give and earn respect.

Many students said that they participated in Football United out of a passion or love for the game. Often young people have had significant change in their lives, and the familiarity of football was seen as comforting. Both participants and teachers supported the use of a football program as a tool to engage. In fact, one of the major changes requested by program participants was for the program to run more frequently. Many also wanted more opportunity to play in competitions against other teams.

The analysis of most outcomes in the study was conducted for boys only due to the small number of girls in the Football United study group. For boys, the Football United school group reported less peer problems compared to the comparison school group. This peer measure included questions about being bullied or picked on and questions about friendships and relationships with their peers.



*Sport is happiness for them because a lot of them that have come through refugee camps, they have played sport and sport has given them hope*



*When I play soccer, I'm feeling...so nice. I'm feeling so happy, everything*



*Well, it's giving them something that they can compete on a level playing field. It's a chance for them to get out there and be the same as anyone else. So it's building up their self-esteem, building up their confidence, giving them a sense of identity of something that they can do*



**84%** of young people surveyed said they **felt** a bit or **much better** since coming to **Football United** (ARC study)



**85%** of young people surveyed said **Football United** had helped in other ways (than football) (ARC study)



**Boys in Football United schools** had **significantly lower** scores on a measure of **peer-related problems** than boys in Comparison schools ( $p < 0.05$ , ARC study)

*When I came here, I had some friends but now I went to Football United I have many, many friends*



*They probably wouldn't be friends (with these other young people) if it wasn't for Football United*



*They explained to us how to find out your way in life. To know more about your skills and what you can do, so they gave us more confidence...and they give you a good opportunity for you to be a good leader in the community and you can change something*



*And it's fun like meeting new friends. People who we haven't met before*



*Teach how to respect your coach and your friends – when you're playing, discipline*



*Yeah, because got the confidence. They always speak with us and after the leadership camp in just 2 months, I found a job*







## Engaging young people in school & other opportunities

*“ Football United gave him a connection with the school and allowed him to build his own level of self esteem and confidence. You’d (now) go a long way to find a better student in our school with leadership capabilities than him ”*



### Football United Impact

Football United program offerings go far beyond football training. Some students participating at Football United programs said they remained in school so they could participate in the program. Football United can impact on the educational and personal development experiences of its participants. For example, there is evidence that Football United:

- Increases school engagement and retention for participants
- Improves the transition for participants between Intensive English Centres and mainstream high schools
- Educates students in curriculum relevant areas of coaching, community volunteering, and youth leadership
- Engages students, particularly the newly arrived with extra-curricular leadership, volunteering and coordinating activities
- Improves English language proficiency
- Addresses social issues in school through improving cross-cultural relationships

### ARC Study

Football United boys in the study had significantly better scores on a prosocial behaviour measure than boys surveyed at Comparison schools. This measure included attitudes and behaviours such as being nice to others and sharing with them, caring about others feelings, being helpful if someone is hurt or upset, being kind to younger children and volunteering to help others.

Young people who had been involved in additional leadership opportunities expressed a lot of confidence in themselves. Others suggested that participation in Football United had prompted them to respect people as individuals, irrespective of their backgrounds or their status in school. A number of participants reported enjoying helping and teaching others, and were able to engage in coaching roles.

One of Football United’s key attractions is the ability to participate without being able to speak English. At the same time, a prominent finding from the study indicated that participation in Football United helped improve young people’s English language skills. This is an aspect that shouldn’t be overlooked when assessing effects of programs like Football United.



*Before he used to be anti-authoritarian. (He) now has turned around 180 degrees. So a real success story*



*When I go to Football United, we improve lots of English, because when you're playing also, we need to talk. Without communication, we cannot play*



*It feels amazing. I look after people, then the people listen to me in the game and stuff*



*It's fun and when we learn good we can teach other people*



*We've had lots of students go through the program, both IEC High School and ex-IEC students. Lots of our ex-students are involved in the coaching and the leadership programs. I see it as a really valuable program. The kids get a lot out of it*



*I think it's also working with their communication skills – five of our boys became coaches, so (improved their) leadership skills and they were so proud and they're so happy and, they have been fabulous*



**Football United boys** in the study had **significantly higher scores on prosocial behaviour** than boys surveyed at the Comparison schools ( $p < 0.05$ , ARC study)

## Why schools?

- ✓ Schools have the facilities, including ovals, gymnasiums and classrooms
- ✓ Schools are seen by newly-arrived families as a safe environment
- ✓ Schools have the potential to re-engage or prevent disengagement from school
- ✓ Activities are accessible for everyone irrespective of ability, age or gender and allow mixed gender or gender specific teams where appropriate
- ✓ Schools are local to most students and do not require additional transport or long travelling times



**Appreciating cultural differences & their new country**

*“ We can have a good future in Australia, that’s the most important thing. I think there are many, many religions; it’s a multicultural place. They don’t care about your colour, you know, your religion and your belief or anything. That’s a good thing! ”*



**Football United Impact**

Football United participants are highly aware and appreciative of cultural differences. They celebrate and express gratitude for their new country and for belonging to Australian society. For example, there is evidence that Football United:

- Improves cross-cultural relationships and connections
- Provides a structured and safe environment through which multi-cultural relationships can flourish
- Enhances the appreciation of Australian society among newly arrived young people from refugee and migrant background

**ARC Study**

Football United participants had a significantly higher level of orientation to other ethnic groups than Comparison school participants. Participants at all the schools studied reported strong positive feelings about Australia, mentioning safety, multiculturalism and a feeling of opportunity. However, Football United participants were more likely to report wanting to get to know people from other ethnic groups, whereas students from schools without a Football United program often reported feeling more comfortable in their own cultural and language groups.

Participants suggested that Football United played an important role in neutralising cross-cultural tensions and that football had helped them adapt and change in response to new cultural norms.



*You need to respect each other's cultures and take that responsibility on yourself*



*Australia is a safe country, there we can find peace and love and when we go there we will have a good future, for if you want to study, everything that is available that we want if you try and if you work*



*Australia is a good country and the people are good people. Sometimes I go to school and I never know them but they say hello, good morning, how is your school going? It's a good place to live too*



*Soccer is one of the best ways to get people together, even if they have war against each other or they love each other*



*I like to have friends from different countries*



**Football United participants reported significantly better other-group orientation than Comparison school participants** ( $p < 0.05$ , ARC study)

## Core Values

Football United is a holistic, integrated and long term sports-based program which supports newly arrived groups, and plays a role in connecting across diverse communities offering opportunities to a wide range of young people in disadvantaged areas.

Football United promotes harmony through the global game of football. Our goals are to bring people together to have fun while learning and playing football. We believe in harmony and social justice for all.



## Overcoming barriers to participation in sport

*“ In school we do (play sport), but not outside (of school) ”*



### Football United Impact

Football United offers an alternative avenue for regular and sustained participation in sport, overcoming the difficulty for many in engaging with mainstream club sports reported by many Football United participants across all program sites. Football United can help overcome these barriers because the program:

- Develops partnerships with schools utilising their facilities, grounds and the influence of teachers and staff to encourage participation in a safe and structured environment
- Utilises youth coaches and program leaders from the local school and community who act as representatives of the cultures of participants and their extended peer and family networks
- Offers girls only programs to overcome cultural sensitivities for some groups associated with girls playing sport with boys
- Provides a significant, and sometimes the only opportunity, for young people to engage with their peers outside of school hours
- Translates promotional materials working jointly with schools, Intensive English Centres, and communicates with parents regarding the program values and objectives
- Offers a free well-structured, organised and professional program setting for young people who cannot access mainstream club and school sport

### ARC Study

Students and teachers identified significant barriers to young people’s participation in clubs or representative sport, despite their desire to play. These barriers included financial costs i.e. player’s uniform kit and registration, lack of transportation, and cultural and language differences. Barriers were most apparent for girls whose lower participation rates were also a result of the greater expectation on girls from some backgrounds to perform domestic work, such as cleaning, cooking and taking care of younger relatives.

Many young people interviewed in all schools reported limited engagement in other extra-curricular activities, with many saying that they went straight home after school. Some reported that their parents or guardians instructed them to do this out of concern for their safety, often in response to past exposure to violence in their home country.

A number of young people remarked on their limited ability to interact with others in their local neighbourhood. This was often different from their experience in other countries where community activity in the street and neighbourhood after school was common. Outside of school time, young people’s major contact was with family members and this was particularly prominent in the Comparison school interviews. Many reported spending time with friends at parks and libraries after school, but relatively few were engaged in organised extra-curricular activities.



*In school we do (sport), but not outside, because we can't. On weekend, we don't have time to go there. Normally on Saturday I'm looking after my niece*



*A lot of our students have no other links in the community so this (Football United) is a huge link for them to use to build their skills, to make friends, to be accepted in the community, it's filling a lot of gaps in the needs of the students*



*It's expensive to do weekend soccer with all of the costs. For some of them there's just issues of transportation*



*(You hear them say things like) "My wife's going to somewhere and we need somebody to look after the children." So, she'll stay at home and not go to school for five days*



**79 % of Football United participants indicated they were NOT able to participate in organised club football** (M & E findings)

*You generally find that the girls are really happy to be involved in sport, and a lot of them haven't had those chances. After school sport, it's much easier for the parents to let the boys come and stay back after school than the girls, so that's a little bit of a cultural issue*



*When we was in Afghanistan all the villagers come and sit say some joke or play something. But here in Australia, we are living in a street and I don't know my neighbour*



*And when you're in a new community that you don't know what's happening, you don't know the routines. It's much harder for them to let the children come home after school late, to be involved in things that they don't know much of.*



*Our grandma advise us plenty times, after school go home*



## Focus on Equity

The Federal Government has commissioned research and reviews into sport participation in Australia, including the 2009 Crawford Report into Australian Sport, which highlights:

- ✓ Very low participation rates of people from disadvantaged and multicultural backgrounds in sport and physical activity compared to the mainstream population
- ✓ The importance of developing neighbourhood programs, re-building schools systems, and training teachers in order to address inequity in opportunities to play sport
- ✓ The need for cross governmental, long-term funding approaches to address lack of equity in participation

# Football United's reach

Football United provides access to the global game of football and ignites a shared passion of many different nationalities irrespective of ability. All activities are underpinned by the values of respect, trust, teamwork, fair play, social justice, positive language and actions.

Football United delivery options include:

- School-based play/training opportunities carried out across the school calendar year, with youth leadership, engagement and mentoring opportunities
- Community-based, "drop-in" play/training opportunities (Football in the Park)
- Special events, workshops, camps, tournaments, collaboration and support to other-groups' activities
- Education and training for youth in leadership, life-skills, coaching and community coordination



33% of newly-arrived refugee youth in Football United catchment areas (between 12 and 17 years old) participate in Football United program activities

The choice of football as the vehicle in this program was purposeful, and is particularly significant. It is relatively inexpensive, enjoys worldwide enthusiasm, is played by both genders and is the sport of choice among many from migrant backgrounds.



Football United:

- Provides free training and playing opportunities to over 1000 children and youth per week in localised venues through 18 weekly football programs each running for over 30 weeks per year with an average of 45 children and young people per site. These programs are in South Western and Western Sydney, South Australia, Mt Gambier and Canberra
- Facilitates programs inclusive of 70+ nationalities and cultures of origin fostering connection and engagement among newly arrived, first, second and third generation Australians and indigenous young people
- Delivers coach education workshops for over 100 youth per year in partnership with Football Federation Australia and the Australian Sports Commission, and facilitates leadership and life-skills training programs for at least 40 young people per year
- Engages over 50 teachers, principals and community liaison officers in high schools and IECs, aligning Football United programs with curricular and extra-curricular outcomes for the school
- Provides more than 60 young people per year with practical leadership, coordination and work experience opportunities which foster their engagement with their communities and beyond
- Offers excursions and workshops with corporate and community partners, including workshops at Football Federation Australian and excursions to Sydney FC, Socceroos and Matilda matches
- Coordinates interschool and regional tournaments for each of its nine school based programs across all its sites





## Conclusions

The ARC study and ongoing program monitoring and evaluation has contributed to the evidence base for the effectiveness of holistic, integrated and long term sport-for-development programs, particularly for young males. Much has also been learned through our research about appropriate approaches to evaluation that can help researchers capture the complexity of sport-for-development programs. More detailed findings of the ARC study are being submitted for publication in a peer reviewed open access journal. For more information about availability of the findings please contact [admin@footballunited.org.au](mailto:admin@footballunited.org.au)

Most of the young people at Football United schools said they “felt better” since participating in Football United and that the program had helped them. The Football United participants reported being significantly more other-group orientated than Comparison school participants. Football United boys reported significantly less peer problems and higher prosocial behaviour than boys from Comparison schools. The positive effects found for Football United participants were significantly related to regularity of attendance and total participation in the program – coming regularly and for a longer time is important for the program to have a greater impact.

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Football United provides free training and playing opportunities to young people from **more than 70 nationalities** and cultures of origin



## Ethics

The research study was approved by the University of New South Wales Human Research Ethics Committee and the New South Wales Department of Education and Training. The consent process was designed with input from partner organisations and required the consent of both the young people involved, as well as of their parent or guardian.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the participants who gave generously of their time, especially the young people who shared their stories and experiences and the schools who assisted in the data collection. Thank you to those who supported the study as partners, both financial and in-kind, including the Community Relations Commission; Nepean Blue Mountains and Western Sydney Local Health Districts (formerly Sydney West Area Health Service), South Western Sydney & Sydney Local Health Districts (formerly Sydney South West Area Health Service), Transcultural Mental Health Centre, SydWest Multicultural Services Inc, Liverpool Migrant Resource Centre, Blacktown District Soccer Football Association, Sydney Football Club and participating Intensive English Centres, host high schools and their staff. Thanks to Tun Aung Shwe for his contributions to data organisation and administrative support, to David D'Silva and Paula Watkins for contributions to the field work component, Lisa Jackson-Pulver, Bob Henley and Craig Duncan who contributed to the Grant Application and Alison Schooling for the report design.



South Western Sydney & Sydney Local Health Districts

