

# MORE THAN A GAME EVALUATION REPORT

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*Kevin McDonald, Michele Grossman and Amelia Johns  
Victoria University, October 2012*

## Executive Summary

**The Program:** 'More than a Game' is a sport-based youth mentoring program developed and implemented by Western Bulldogs in partnership with Newport Islamic Society (NIS), the Australian Federal Police, Victoria Police and Hobsons Bay City Council, with funding from the Attorney General's Department *Building Community Resilience* (BCR) grant scheme. The program aimed to develop a community-based resilience model that would use team-based sports to address issues of identity, sense of belonging and cultural isolation amongst young men of Islamic faith, all of which are identified as factors that may promote forms of violent extremism. The program involved 60 young men, aged 15-25, from the Newport Islamic Society in Melbourne's Western suburbs. The boys were engaged in numerous activities where they were mentored by staff from Western Bulldogs, Victoria Police and Australian Federal Police, who worked in conjunction with community leaders from the Newport Islamic Society.

Through sports-based training, mentoring programs, and community dialogue, 'More Than a Game' aimed to develop participants' leadership, communication, and cross-cultural engagement skills; to identify and facilitate the development of young role models in the community; to enhance greater understanding of the Muslim community in Melbourne's West, and to foster greater intercultural contact and understanding between participants and other cultural groups. A number of activities were developed and implemented as a part of the program (see pages 6-7).

**The Evaluation:** The purpose of the evaluation was to measure the impact and effectiveness of 'More Than a Game' by exploring participant and stakeholder views on their experiences of participants' personal development through the program. This information was collected using a mixed method approach which included participant surveys, interviews and focus groups as well as stakeholder interviews. The data was then measured against the aims and expected outcomes of the project to assess the program's success and identify potential improvements.

**Key findings:**

- Participants experienced strong personal transformation through their involvement in the program, particularly in relation to building self-confidence and leadership skills.
- The debilitating effects of racial and religious stereotypes were raised by participants as a significant barrier to feelings of confidence, well-being and belonging to the community. More than a Game, and particularly the MUJU peace team, helped participants break down such stereotypes.
- Relationships between young people and police were strengthened through program mentoring activities, allowing sensitive issues such as violence and terrorism to be discussed directly.
- The program generated strong media interest with strong impacts in projecting positive role models and messages about young Muslim men in the community and countering negative media stereotypes.
- Participants experienced team sport as a level playing field where people of all cultural backgrounds were bound by the same rules and expectations. This was experienced as a model of 'lived justice'.
- Participants provided evidence that attitudes towards different cultural groups, particularly Jewish people, significantly improved over the course of the program.
- The program developed open and trusting relationships not only between participants and stakeholders but also between local communities, government and non-government agencies. This produced new opportunities for knowledge sharing, breaking down stereotypes and engaging young people at-risk.

**Key Recommendations:**

- Ensure that cross cultural program sensitivities are well-balanced and inclusive;
- Engage parents and families as fully as possible through one or more ancillary activities aligned with the overall program;
- Explore appropriate programs that involve young women from the community
- Select family friendly venues for key program activities;
- Consider adding social events and channels to the repertoire of program activities; and
- Consider involving mixed cultural groups from the outset in future programs.

## Background

**Project aims:** The project began with an initial consultation phase and establishment of a formal Project Steering Committee consisting of representatives from the Newport Islamic Society (NIS), local Victoria Police, Hobsons Bay City Council and Australian Federal Police. Project participants were then identified by the NIS youth leaders to participate in a “Peace Dialogue” and “Football for Harmony” clinic with multi-faith schoolchildren from across the Western and Eastern suburbs of Melbourne. These two events were organised through the Western Bulldogs’ role as multicultural partner of the Peace Team (joint Israeli-Palestinian team) who visited Melbourne to participate in the triennial AFL International Cup.

The Peace Dialogue was a cross cultural dialogue between members of the Peace Team, Western Bulldogs Development Squad players, young people and leaders from the NIS as well as youth from a Jewish school in Melbourne’s Eastern suburbs, Bialik College. The aim of the Dialogue was for participants to gain awareness and understanding of issues affecting harmony overseas and its application and relevance in Australia.

The Football for Harmony Clinic was attended by over 400 primary school children from across the Western and Eastern suburbs. The Clinic was conducted by members of the Western Bulldogs squad and the Peace Team with young people from the NIS and Bialik College assisting the players and thus demonstrating their first leadership activity of the Project.

Following the Peace Dialogue and Football for Harmony Clinic, an unexpected outcome occurred with the young people from NIS and Bialik College initiating the establishment of their own Peace Team equivalent in Melbourne. The young people called their Club, the “MUJU Peace Club”, drawing on from inspiration from the AFL Peace Team and their experiences in the early stages of the Project.

MUJU (a name derived from uniting Muslim and Jewish players) organised an exhibition football match at Whitten Oval involving 50 young people from their circle of family, friends and places of worship. The young people formed mixed Muslim and Jewish teams called “Unity” and “Harmony” and the event attracted significant mainstream media coverage.

A further 6 workshops and a 3-day youth leadership camp were conducted with project participants from the NIS. The workshops and camp included a combination of practical engagement activities as well as professional development sessions which covered topics such as Media and Communications, Police and the Law, Cyber Safety and Cyber-bullying, and Conflict Resolution.

The project culminated with a community celebration and public acknowledgement of the youth’s achievements through the annual AFL Unity Cup as well as a Graduation Ceremony held at Whitten Oval (home of the Western Bulldogs Football Club).

The outputs of the project can be summarised as follows:

- 14 Steering Committee meetings held involving representatives from SWS, NIS, Victoria Police, Australian Federal Police, Hobsons Bay City Council and Victoria University.
- 3-day leadership camp involving 30 young people, 4 NIS youth leaders / mentors and members of Victoria Police, the AFP and the Western Bulldogs.
- 6 workshops conducted over 8 months with over 60 young people from the NIS participating in at least one workshop or activity. Workshops included: Peace Team dialogue, multi-sport day, preview screening of “Boundless Plains: The Australian Muslim History”, horse riding, T20 cricket match and Unity Cup.
- Three football carnivals held over 8 months including the Football for Harmony clinic, MUJU Peace Match and Unity Cup. 8 culturally diverse teams participated in the 2012 Unity Cup including groups from Aboriginal, South East Asian,



African, Muslim and Jewish descent. Western Bulldogs were represented by two teams (NIS and MUJU).

- 10 participants from the NIS played in a 'curtain raiser' match at Etihad Stadium before an AFL match.
- 4 presentations and/or activities were conducted by participants to five local primary schools as well as 2 secondary schools.
- A Graduation Ceremony was the last activity conducted as part of the More than a Game project. The Ceremony provided a platform to publicly acknowledge the young men who were involved in the Project and recognised outstanding contributions and achievements from the young people as well as the stakeholders. The Ceremony was attended by the Attorney General, as well as over 100 people from the NIS (including Mosque leaders and parents of the participants), Victoria Police, Department of Immigration and Citizenship, Hobsons Bay City Council and the Australian Federal Police.

## Method

**Approach:** This is a mixed-methods evaluation using both quantitative (survey) and qualitative (interview and focus group) data collection methods. It is informed by best-practice evaluation methods in working with cross-cultural communities and multiple stakeholders (e.g. R Hopson, 2003; K Lee, 2007). The study design uses a concentric approach to program evaluation that seeks to locate program participants, their families, stakeholders and the evaluators themselves in relation to the underlying cultural values and principles that shape understanding of what effective practices and approaches to program interventions might mean. It also draws on research in effective community engagement in cross-cultural contexts to assess the transformative impacts for all elements of the program, including flow-on effects for both indirect as well as direct program participants. The research team conducting the evaluation comprised Professor Kevin McDonald (Director), Associate Professor Michele Grossman (Deputy Director) and Dr Amelia Johns (Research Officer) of the Centre for Cultural Diversity and Wellbeing at Victoria University.

Because the evaluation was commissioned mid-way through the program, the study design did not employ a traditional pre- and post-evaluation framework. Instead, it uses a mixed-methods post-program approach that is intended to facilitate reflection and analysis by participants about their experiences of the program, its perceived effectiveness, and the extent to which personal and group change may have occurred.

The three main target participant groups for the evaluation were:

- *Youth participant group*: young men who have participated in 'More than a Game' for 12 months (n=60)
- *Program facilitators group*: 'More than a Game' stakeholders (Western Bulldogs, Newport Islamic Society, Victoria Police, Australian Federal Police) (n=8)
- *Indirect participants group*: parents, school principals, local community leaders, young men from Bialik College who participated in the Peace Team dialogue and the Unity Cup (n=10).

**Evaluation design:** The evaluation was designed to elicit information on how involvement in the project may have changed participant/stakeholder/parent attitudes and behaviours in relation to sense of belonging, cross-cultural engagement, and beliefs about violence as a means of solving problems or addressing grievances. The results provide a basis for measuring the program's effectiveness in terms of whether and how significant change in attitude toward self and others in line with key measures of community resilience relating to sense of belonging, tolerance for those from different cultures, and the rejection of violence as a means of problem-solving has occurred. There was a strong focus on the role of team sports in achieving these goals throughout the evaluation. A key focus in the Evaluation Design also elicited ways in which participants believed the program could be improved or strengthened for future cohorts of participants.

The first phase of the evaluation involved the survey of a sample of young people from the Newport Islamic Society who participated in the program (n= 21) as well as a smaller cohort of boys from Bialik college (n=2) whose indirect involvement with program through the formation of the MUJU Peace team was formative to some positive and unexpected outcomes of the program. The survey instrument was designed to collect qualitative and quantitative data based on key demographic information (i.e. country of birth, place of residence, religion etc.), participants' views on their community and their participation in the community, experiences of personal development and changes in attitude or behaviour as a result of being involved in 'More Than a Game' and suggestions for how the program could be improved.

The surveys were distributed to participants in several ways: through person to person contact at information evenings convened for youth participants and their parents or guardians at community locations; through the post, and via email as an attachment. Participants returned the surveys to the researchers in one of several ways: via pre-paid envelopes addressed to the researchers. Participants also had the option of choosing to leave a sealed envelope addressed to the researchers with their community leader at the NIS Mosque or at Bialik College. For participants under the age of 18, parental consent forms were returned separately to the survey and a pre-paid envelope for the return of the parental/guardian consent form was provided. Consent for the survey of those aged 18 or over was implied by the completion of the survey.

The second phase of the evaluation included participant focus groups and interviews. The purpose of the focus group/interviews was to explore the participants' attitudes, ideas and experiences both before and following their involvement in the program, in more detail. The focus groups were also designed to address language difficulties that may have been a barrier to full participation in the survey. There were two focus groups. The first was conducted at the Newport Islamic society with Muslim-based participants (n=11). The second focus group was conducted at Bialik College with Jewish representatives of the MUJU Peace team (n=4). The focus groups were conducted by at least one of the

principal investigators (Kevin McDonald and/or Michele Grossman) accompanied by the Associate Investigator (Amelia Johns).

The evaluation team also observed selected program activities as participant-observers and through the evaluation of video recordings taken at the community Camp and the Unity Cup, as required to triangulate the data. This included observed interaction between youth from different cultural groups; interaction as part of a team; formal and informal communication skills; evidence of leadership capacity through team sport; body language; cultural expression of identity; and management of conflict or disagreement should any arise during the observations. These observations were conducted by all members of the research team.

The third, and final, phase of the research involved interviews with stakeholders/parents to gauge their views on both their children's /student's /members' participation and also any personal benefits or other changes they may have experienced as indirect participants from the program in relation to its impact for their family/organisation/community. The interviews with stakeholders took place at a nominated location of the interviewees' choice within Melbourne. Interviews with parents and other stakeholders were scheduled at a location of their choice. All interviews were conducted by one or both of the principal investigators.

## **Key Findings**

### **1. Project Relevance**

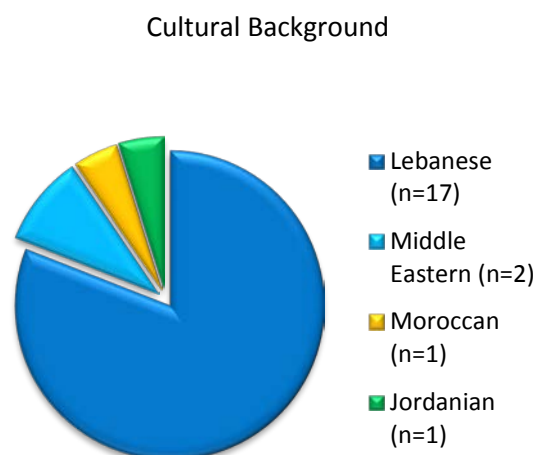
#### ***1.1 How did the program address the needs of young people at risk and/or living in vulnerable communities?***

Evidence regarding paths into extremism points to the ways such paths can be associated with an experience of disconnection from local communities, in particular mosques, and this project addressed young men at a key transition point where this disconnection may take place (O Roy, *Globalized Islam*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004). There is significant evidence suggesting that economic disadvantage, migration, and connection with countries

experiencing strife or conflict are also risk factors associated with vulnerability to extremism (F Devji, *Landscapes of the Jihad*, New York: Cornell University Press, 2005).

The mean age of program participants surveyed was 17.9 years, the youngest being 15, the oldest 22 years old. All participants were male and born in Australia, with the majority of Lebanese background. In the light of known risk factors associated with vulnerability to extremism, *More than a Game* addressed the needs of an appropriate group of young people with the support of their community.

The sample surveyed indicates the following cultural backgrounds of participants:



While 38% of participants describe themselves as 'strongly belonging' to their local community, 38% describe themselves as 'somewhat belonging', while 24% consider themselves as 'not belonging'. In terms of belonging to wider Australian society, 24% felt that they strongly belonged (n=5), 43% felt that they somewhat belonged (n=9), 24% were not sure (n=5) and 10% felt that they sometimes didn't belong (n=2). Thus while the program built on a strong basis of community involvement, it succeeded in engaging with young people who were less certain of their relationship to their local community and wider Australian society.

## **1.2 Creating a safe and supportive environment**

The project succeeded in creating an environment where participants felt free to explore issues that may otherwise not have been addressed. A key issue to emerge was the *relationship to authority*. This focused on relationships between young people and police that emerged as a key area in the three-day camp, and took the form of enthusiastic and wide-ranging debates, together with role-play to explore the relationship between young people and police. It is also important to highlight the importance of the team experience built up through sport that played a key role in creating the environment that characterised this project.

As one stakeholder commented:

*“Trust would probably be a big outcome. They can have trust in the instruments of our society being supportive of them as young people, regardless of their faith or cultural heritage. I think it's probably been that feeling of being safe, that I can trust the police and trust the local football club, I can trust the council. That's probably a pretty big mind shift for the community itself.”*

## **1.3 Enhancing trust and respect between police and young people**

Stakeholders in particular emphasised the emergence and strengthening of trust and respect between young people from different communities and also between young people and police across the different program activities. A significant theme emerging from the data revolved around the indirect or implicit ways in which developing these relationships can strengthen young people's capacity to rely on others and feel less alone in dealing with issues or problems both on- and off-field.

Stakeholder:

*“And you only really get the opportunities to do this in a team environment, especially with sport where you have to rely on other people. You kick them the ball, you trust that they're going to mark it; you trust that they're going to kick it back to you. It's about communicating with them. You start talking about teamwork and having a shared goal, a shared purpose. Now, all these other*

*things like having a broader view and opportunity, the vehicle for that is actually doing things together that give you an outcome.”*

#### ***1.4 Promoting an understanding amongst young people of the negative impacts of violent extremist views***

A key theme highlighted by participants throughout the program has been the debilitating impact of stereotypes, often associated with accounts where the young people involved in the program have been victim of such stereotypes. A key theme to emerge in the evaluation has been that such stereotypes are also applied to other people, and one of the values highlighted by participants has been to recognise the other as a person, or to view the world through the eyes of the other. Reduction of the other to a dehumanised stereotype is a key dimension of violent extremist views, and clear evidence emerged in the evaluation that involvement in the program played a role in countering such processes.

#### ***1.5 Encouraging and facilitating opportunities including the provision of training and the development of mentoring skills***

The program had a significant skills development dimension. Its primary impact has been the leadership opportunities afforded to program participants, from the challenges to be overcome as part of the camp and other activities/workshops (focusing on team building, leadership and accountability), developing the ability to express oneself in discussions, debates and public speaking, and the leadership and accountability associated with team sport. The program had a strong focus on linking communication with leadership, and this is of significant importance as a way that the program's benefits extend beyond the participants to the broader community and society. The program also afforded important mentoring and leadership opportunities within the Newport Islamic Society itself, with NIS mentors and community leaders playing an active role in shaping the program, and extending their relationships among wider networks of stakeholders.

### ***1.6 Providing positive role models for the broader community***

The program developed a significant media presence, being covered in the local and state-wide press, television and Internet. The high visibility of the program was a specific objective, and the program clearly projected positive role models and messages about young Muslim men in the community. Section 2.7.2 'Media data', below, provides a full list of media coverage attracted by the program as it was conducted.

### ***1.7 Promoting linkages between local communities, government and non-government entities***

Through its steering committee and the events organised, the program linked Commonwealth, State and local agencies together with a range of community groups. The culture of the program has been entrepreneurial and outward-looking, and it succeeded in creating a network of stakeholders committed to the program and its success. Stakeholders especially stressed the fact that, unlike shorter-term programs that developed momentary relations of trust and communication that could then not be sustained once a program of engagement concluded, this program – conducted over a longer period of time and with multiple points of contact and dialogue amongst local communities, government and non-government entities – enabled the development of sustainable ongoing relationships between communities and government entities in particular that would survive the formal conclusion of the program itself.

### ***1.8 Consulting with the community***

The success of this program depended entirely on the support of the Newport Islamic Society. Interviews with leaders of the NIS highlight wide support for the program, in particular in terms of the opportunities it afforded to young people. It is important to recognise that Countering Violent Extremism programs have the potential to inadvertently stigmatise a community who may feel 'targeted' through such programs. This dimension of the program has been handled well – all participants have been aware of the source of the program, but it has been experienced as a mentoring program.



One aspect that emerged in the evaluation relates to the timing of the consultation. Initial consultation occurred after funding had been secured, and several respondents suggested that an earlier involvement would have been desirable. However, the NIS was central to the program's development and its leaders highlighted the openness of its partners to its involvement in shaping the program's development, together with the importance and relevance of the program to the needs of Muslim young people in western Melbourne.

### ***1.9 Changes made as the program developed***

A significant development that was supported by the program was the creation of a Jewish-Muslim football team that, while not initially an objective of the program, came to take on a great significance for all involved. This change produced unanticipated outcomes that strengthened considerably the overall achievement of the program's objectives and goals. The program was adapted to a certain extent to include a focus on cross-cultural engagement and the breaking down of stereotypes between Muslim and Jewish young men, and this was evident in the data dealing with the experiences of young men from both groups as well as that of stakeholders.

#### ***1.9.1 The creation of MUJU***

The MUJU Peace Club was an initiative which began with the development of a relationship between Western Bulldogs, Ajax Football Club, Bialik College and Newport Islamic Society in the lead up to the Western Bulldog-hosted event, the AFL Peace Team dialogue. The event, which took place in August 2011, and involved the screening of the video 'Tackling Peace', was designed to promote inter-faith dialogue between Muslim and Jewish communities. Muslim participants in the 'More Than a Game' program were invited to take part. In addition, Western Bulldogs contacted Ajax Football Club President Brian Goldberg, who invited Joseph Gerassi (Principal, Bialik College) and three Bialik college students to attend the event.

At the Peace Team Dialogue Joel Kuperholz (Bialik College) and Oussama Abouzied (Newport Islamic Society) met and discussed getting together a mixed team of Jewish and Muslim players to have a match. This led to the formation of the 'MUJU' Peace Club, a name derived from uniting Muslim and Jewish players. It was created as an initiative which would represent the values of respect, harmony and tolerance promoted by the Peace Team. Western Bulldogs supported the initiative and planned and publicised an exhibition match at Whitten oval on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2012, where the MUJU Peace club would have two mixed teams of Muslim and Jewish players compete. The teams were called 'Unity' and 'Harmony'.

The inter-faith match was a huge success, being attended by 100 spectators and attracting a lot of media interest by networks Ten, Nine and ABC who covered the event in their nightly news segment. Following the exhibition match, the Western Bulldogs and the 'More than a Game' steering committee decided to field a MUJU team along with two other teams from Newport Islamic Society in the 2012 Unity Cup. With the support of the Western Bulldogs, Newport Islamic Society, Australian Federal Police, Victoria Police and also the considerable efforts of Sharon Kuperholz (mother of MUJU founding member Joel Kuperholz), the MUJU Peace Team went on to win the Unity Cup of 2012.

## **2. Project Effectiveness**

*More Than a Game* focused on building teamwork, leadership and communication, through team sport (Australian football) and parallel activities (a detailed report on activities undertaken has been submitted). The team was coached by a member of the local Victoria Police. The evaluation set out to identify outcomes through a participant survey and extensive interviews with participants and stakeholders, combined with a media analysis.

The program was embedded in networks of friends, families and the community focused on the Newport mosque. The value of this choice is highlighted in the survey data identifying whom the participants would turn to when confronted with a problem.

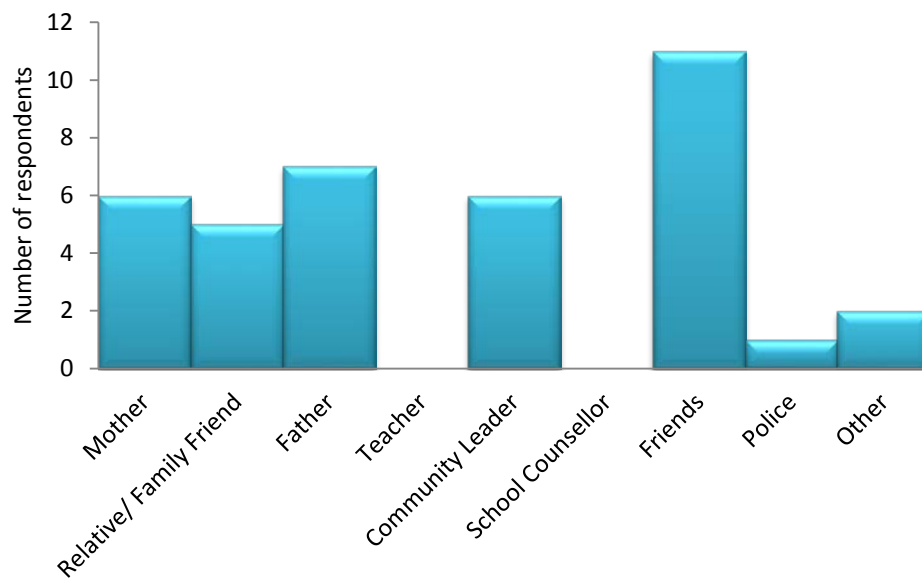


Figure 2. Sources of help for respondents

The high score associated with friends underlines the importance of interventions engaging groups as opposed to isolated individuals, while the survey also highlights the role of parents in the lives of these young people – both of whom were central to the program. It is significant that when asked whom they would turn to for support, none of the respondents referred to teachers or school counsellors. At least for this group, this suggests that community-based activities may be a more appropriate form of intervention, rather than a school-based intervention centred on the classroom.

The importance of friends and parents in involvement in this program is also evident in the why the young people got involved:



Figure 3. Reasons for joining More Than A Game

## 2.1 Personal transformations

Through interviews and the focus groups, program participants highlighted personal transformation and the ways they have changed and grown through the project. While it is possible that this may be a product of wanting to please interviewers (an effect generated by the research process itself), however the positive responses are echoed in the anonymous survey data. The themes identified suggest that the program has had real impact.

### 2.1.1 Building confidence and character

Participant One:

*“It allows you to develop different skills like working with teammates, and it just builds up your character. And then when you get to the stage of becoming a leader as well, it just helps you to develop values and character that you can spread among the team, and it helps you develop skills not only in the game, but also externally to become a better person in broader things.”*

Participant Six:

*“I know I used to be a shy kid... after I played soccer it allowed me to be more confident in myself and my ability. It allows me to be free, to be myself.”*

The themes of confidence and capability are at the centre of the interviews and survey data. When speaking of sport and their involvement in the program, participants highlight personal transformation brought about by the experience of playing sport, insisting that these translate into other areas of life. The appreciation of these dimensions of playing sport is clearly not only a product of *More than a Game*, but the mentoring and associated activities (often involving a physical challenge) have focused the participants on themselves, what they have to offer others, and what they have to do to turn this into a reality. Values such as loyalty, courage and honesty are highlighted.

This is of relevance for the Countering Violence Extremism objectives of this program. Extensive evidence demonstrates that one of the attractions of violent extremist ideologies is they offer a powerful purpose in life, they appeal to values of sacrifice, and in so doing offer a form of coherence that responds to experiences of personal fragmentation and lack of purpose (F Devji, *The Terrorist in Search of Humanity*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2008). The themes that emerge in the evaluation highlight the role that sport has to play in offering other models of character, one that allows a young man to say that he can be free, he can be himself.

### ***2.1.2 Seeing beyond community: the rules of the game***

Participant Three:

*“Last year we played at Whitten Oval footy ground, and it’s not a Jewish ground, it’s not a Muslim ground, it’s a footy ground that has its own rules and regulations. It was neutral.”*

A key theme highlighted by participants is that football is an activity based on rules, and that these rules apply to everybody. This is a practical, and powerful, experience of lived justice.

The theme of rules also emerges in relation to discipline and the structure afforded by sport. One participant described this in the following way: *“It teaches*

*discipline because you have to go by the rules. And there are consequences if you break the rules.”*

This is linked by the same participant with a kind of freedom that comes from being part of something beyond the community:

*“It’s like you’re doing something just for the sake of the game and that’s a good thing. It cuts down all cultures and allows you to focus on sport, to enjoy yourself and to be yourself. That’s it.”*

### **2.1.3 Understanding practices of respect: the coach**

The rules of the game are embodied in the person of the coach, highlighted by one participant who describes an experience where the coach fails to live up to these rules:

Participant: *“In one club that I played at... I was there for a year and I wasn’t respected by the coach or the players so I had to leave mid-year.”*

Interviewer: *“Do you know why you weren’t respected?”*

Participant: *“I don’t know. I just know that I didn’t like it. Every week, week in, week out, you could sense the tension. It was going to explode sooner or later so I left. The first team I played in was ok. Maybe it was just the culture of the second team.... The coach wasn’t exactly best friends.... He used to pick on people himself, so that set the tone.”*

By contrast, good coaching creates a sense of trust and rapport that can extend to providing a confidant and mentor for dealing with problems by providing alternatives to physical confrontation in resolving conflicts:

Stakeholder:

*“You go and see the coach, someone who can verbalise [your concerns] for you [rather than using physical means to resolve conflicts], a third party who can de-escalate for you. In a team sport that’s your coach, or your runner.”*

Another participant highlights the model that the group embraces:

*“My coach wouldn’t let anything, any sort of racism interfere with the game. He says that when you’re playing it’s just the game. All you focus on is soccer and that’s the only thing that matters. And if he would hear or see anything that’s not appropriate he would tell the players to sit on the bench. That way he made us just focus on the game. Get all the stereotypes broken down and just focus on the game. That was a good thing.”*

Such practical understandings and capacities for conflict resolution are clearly evidenced through the evaluation.

#### **2.1.4 Linking discipline and conflict resolution**

The discipline learnt through training allows the boys to respond to conflicts that emerge during the game. The regularity and discipline of attending training is a kind of structure that is welcomed, one that has positive consequences:

Participant One:

*“It’s a routine and routine develops discipline... Like the fact that you have to go to training twice a week and if you miss out on one training session you miss out on the match. Things like that, you have to keep your word and keep to the game develop all of these qualities that are not useful on the pitch but also outside in society.”*

Participant Seven:

*“During the game if you’re disciplined and there is violence going to happen either you walk off or you stop them. Or if your teammate for instance gets into a fight, you would try to stop them both”*

This translates into life off the pitch:

Participant One:

*“If in a game you do a wrong act and are violent then you’ll get sent off and suspended for a couple of weeks. I know someone that happened to. And then,*

*if something comes up in society where you are going to get violent, then you can think to yourself there are going to be consequences so I might as well not do it. Just learning from mistakes you made on the pitch and being able to refrain yourself and not become violent. Because you know there are consequences for your actions.”*

Discipline is described not only as an external constraint; it is something that allows the person to deal with conflicts. This is an important dimension of the lives of these young men, all of whom recount experiences where they are called ‘terrorist’ or experience some other form of verbal insult.

Participant Two:

*“The more disciplined you are... the easier it is to control yourself. Because you’re always going to get things thrown at you, so the more you can let go, the easier it is to control... instead of taking insults to heart, you get used to it that you just brush them off.”*

This capacity is of real significance for strategies to develop resilient communities as well as counter violent extremism.

### **2.1.5 Understanding barriers and stigmatisation**

Part of the experience of the game involves stepping out of community. It is an encounter with others, and not just other players:

Participant:

*“When you play in a team you don’t just meet people on your team, but you meet other coaches, other parents.”*

One of the key developments associated with *More Than a Game* was the creation of the MUJU team, noted above. Here again, the game goes beyond the constraints of community:



Participant:

*“To be honest, I think there is no such thing as Jewish footballers. You start playing with them and form good relationships and the team was like a big family. I’ll shepherd you, you block for me ... (pause)... We broke down barriers like that, as well as communicating before the game, after the game. The Western Bulldogs hosted lots of events where we would actually just converse with each other. We broke our fast together. I think it’s been really positive.”*

The participants underline the role of the Muslim-Jewish football team as a way of going beyond stereotypes that they constantly encounter. When asked what the Jewish boys may have thought of their encounter with the boys from NIS:

Participant Four:

*“That we’re very nice people!”*

Participant Three:

*“And that we’re not terrorists! Because usually they generalise. We tend to all generalise in our communities.”*

When Participant Three suggests that the Jewish boys may have initially approached them negatively, he immediately adds, to the agreement of the group, that this is something that ‘we’ do as well.

The group then turns to explore why young Muslims may generalise about Jewish people:

Participant Three:

*“They will say, ‘Oh, he’s Jewish and back in his country he’s killing Muslims’ or whatever it is. So we generalise, but once you meet them personally, one-on-one, you actually find that they’re actually really nice people. And they talk the same way about us. Because if they didn’t they wouldn’t socialise with us on Facebook.”*

Participant Eleven:

*“Obviously if we see each other outside, like in the streets, or a footy game or whatever, we actually walk up to each other and greet each other. Whereas before it was like, ‘hi...bye’. Now we can actually feel that connection. So if I see him and he doesn’t see me, I would go up to him and say ‘how you doing? How is everything?’”*

The creation of a Muslim-Jewish team confronted the young men with a dilemma: should they play for the combined team, or should they stay in the Newport team. One participant describes the dilemma, and the experience once it is resolved:

Participant Four:

*“One thing I noticed in splitting up the teams in the Unity Cup into the Muslim and Jewish team some people were sad because they wanted to be in the Jewish team and some people didn’t want to be in the Jewish team. They didn’t want to let down their community and lose to a Jewish-Muslim team.... Basically loyalty to the community meant that some people didn’t want to play in the Jewish (mixed) team. Because they wanted to stay with the full Lebanese team.”*

Interviewer: *“Who did you think you were letting down?”*

Participant Three: *“My mates, people from the town, community, family.”*

Participant One: *“But they still did a good job of being loyal when they played on the MUJU team. They backed up each other. Like they didn’t say we’re Lebanese and we’ll just stick with each other. They played as a whole team. And they actually won! Being different cultures and different races, and all that, it just builds a bond. If you get to understand each other the bonds are going to be even stronger than it would be if you were all the same. The chemistry would just be... too strong to be broken.”*

Interviewer: *“When you say chemistry, what do you mean there?”*

Participant One: *“Just like the bond of being a team, being united, not letting differences get ahead of you.”*

### **2.1.6 Attitudes to different cultural groups: the survey data**

The evaluation did not include a pre- and post-intervention survey. The survey did, however, ask respondents to consider the extent that their involvement in More Than a Game had changed their attitudes towards different cultural groups. The positive transformations that emerged in the focus groups and interviews are echoed in the survey data as well.

Respondents were asked to rate their initial attitude towards a number of cultural groups and their attitudes following More Than a Game. The attitudes to all cultural groups either stayed the same or improved following the program. The initial, post and change values are shown in Table 2. Higher scores indicate more positive attitudes (score range 1-5).

**Table 1: Attitudes to Different Cultural Groups**

Cultural Group	Average Initial Response	Average Post Response	Average Degree of Change	% of respondents who improved in attitudes	% of respondents who worsened in attitudes	% of respondents who did not change attitudes	Missing (n)
Jewish-Australian	3.33	4.24	0.91	67%	0	33%	0
Christian-Australian	3.90	4.35	0.45	43%	0	38%	4
African-Australian	3.67	4.35	0.68	43%	0	38%	4
Anglo-Australian	3.24	4.35	1.11	57%	0	23%	4
Asian-Australian	3.57	4.41	0.84	57%	0	24%	4
Aboriginal-Australian	4.14	4.47	0.33	43%	0	38%	4

Respondents were asked to reflect on their reasons for their attitudes before and after the program. Ten respondents provided reasons for their initial attitudes which mainly included a lack of contact with other groups (“Some cultures I knew nothing about because I was never in contact with them”) and misconceptions/ignorance. In general, the attitudes were initially quite positive, so other reasons included “they are good friends” and “we’re all human, we all deserve equal rights appreciation and acceptance.”

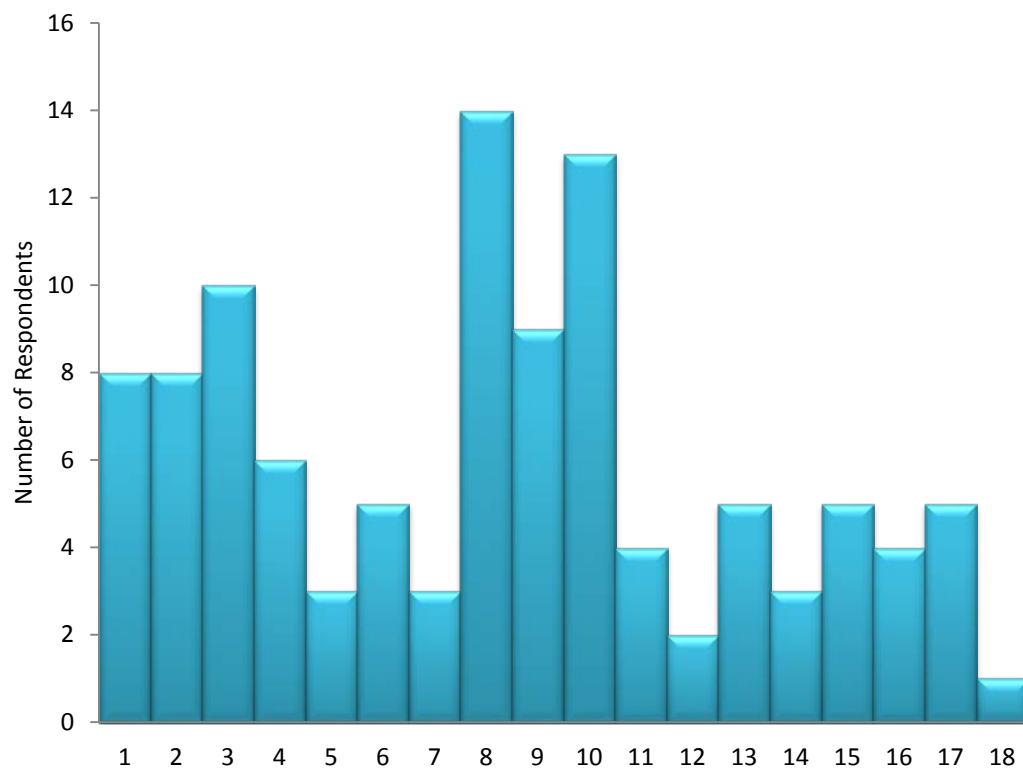
After the program, respondents indicated several reasons for their attitudes to different cultures. Many spoke of making friends and getting to know the people from other cultures. For example, “I met more people from these backgrounds”, “I got to know the other cultures in better way”, “better, stronger friendships” and “I believe that all cultures are good once you approach them in a good way.”

Two participants mentioned that they noticed similarities between their own culture and others: “I found out that we have many of the same perspective and deal with critical situations in the same way” and “they’re the same.”

### ***2.1.7 What participants liked most about the program***

These themes emerge in the survey data exploring what participants ‘liked’ most. From the point of view of the young participants, these were the dimensions that they enjoyed most and meant most to them. This is highlighted in Figure 6.

As expected, the two dimensions that meant most to the participants were the camping trip and being with friends. As testimony to the quality of the experience of coaching and interaction at workshops, the third most appreciated dimension of the program was ‘spending time with police’.



#### Key

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. Making friends who are from a different cultural background | 9. Unity Cup   |
| 2. Spending time with friends from same background             | 10. Being with friends   |
| 3. Spending time with police                                   | 11. Learning about the police                                      |
| 4. Finding positive role models                                | 12. Sharing information about interests and background with others |
| 5. Learning about Islam and Jewish cultures                    | 13. Spending time with police in social settings                   |
| 6. Improving footy skills                                      | 14. Chance to become role model                                    |
| 7. Learning skills to resolve conflict                         | 15. Develop leadership skills                                      |
| 8. Camping trip  | 16. Learning about other cultures                                  |
| 9. Unity Cup   | 17. Teaching others about own culture                              |
|  | 18. Other  |

Figure 6. Reasons for liking More Than A Game

## 2.2 Strengthening personal and community resilience

### 2.2.1 Experiencing perspectives other than one's own

For stakeholders, there was a strong emphasis on the different kinds and levels of resilience building for both individuals and groups that emerged from their observation of and involvement with team sports and their impact for participants. This was seen as particularly the case when using team sports as a vehicle to promote broadening of relationships and understanding of other groups and

cultures as a by-product of playing together on a team through both on-field and off-field dialogue and shared experience.

Stakeholder:

*“Going back to 'the team' itself, it allows you to work with other people who you don't often work with. ... The resilience that's built is that you start to understand that there are other perspectives beyond your own. You start thinking that there is more to my plight and situation than what I have seen before. And potentially, hopefully, you start exploring other opportunities. I think that is one way to really build resilience, is to give people [new] opportunities.”*

### **2.2.2 Broadening horizons**

Several stakeholders noted that, while for vulnerable young people aspects of team-building through sport shared certain characteristics with building group identity with an extremist focus, there was a central difference. Team-building for extremist purposes was seen to be focused on narrowing, isolating and contracting social relationships with others in the community, whereas team-building through sport, particularly when it brought different groups together, was perceived to enhance, expand and broaden social relationships, exposing participants to new ways of thinking, feelings and being that promoted greater tolerance and understanding across cultures as a result.

Stakeholder:

*“You usually have a small group of probably no more than half a dozen who are serious in [an extremist] cell, and they feed off each other and become insular and isolated from others. (Footy) teams are playing on the weekend, they're interacting with the community and with Aussie Rules, and they've at least got 22 players. That's the main difference.”*

Stakeholder:

*“Single-mindedly ignoring your other obligations or your other activities in life just to focus on this one thing - that in itself is an issue, and sport alone can lead to that, just like terrorist training or radicalisation. But the combination, in this case,*

*is of a broader idea and set of activities and interactions that is about integration and communication.”*

### **2.2.3 Promoting resilience through belonging and interdependence**

Sport was seen by stakeholders to develop resilience through helping participants understand that there is a place and a role for everyone within a team, and that it is okay to rely on others and not feel that one has to shoulder a task or responsibility alone. Stakeholders felt that this experience promotes a sense of belonging and community, and also a sense of responsibility to the team as a whole, that is integral to building resilience.

Stakeholder:

*“It teaches you teamwork, it teaches you that you're not alone and you can rely on other people. You don't have to do everything yourself. And someone will watch your back. Team sports are about society. While you may work individually you are also part of a team.”*

Stakeholder:

*“Some of the young people took on leadership roles and co-ordinated their fellow teammates to be at a certain place at a certain time. I think the other important thing is being able to contribute to the team regardless of your ability. So if you've got a role in the team you don't have to be the best player. You've got to change their mindset to say 'Well, not everyone can be in the forward line and kick all the goals. If we're going to have any success we need to play together as a team and not as individual players, and that might mean that some of our good players will play in the backline.' You might have to play in a position that you're not used to playing, and also that means that everyone has to take their turn in coming off and giving other people a turn.”*

### **2.2.4 Developing resilience as an intuitive attribute**

On the whole, the experience of *More than a Game* was perceived by stakeholders to help strengthen resilience through implicit and intuitive as much as direct skills development and social interaction across cultures:

Stakeholder:

*“[The participants] obtained skills that they won’t realise, about how to talk to Jewish kids, for instance, and how to interact with them. So when something comes up they won’t even think about it, they’ll just go, ‘No, that’s not right.’ They won’t even think about where that came from – you can’t beat it.”*

## **2.3 Creating new platforms for dialogue among stakeholders**

### **2.3.1. Creating a new context for dialogue and trust**

An important outcome of *More than a Game* from stakeholder’s perspectives involved the increased opportunities the program created for dialogue about conflict, violence and terrorism. The relationships of trust and openness developed between police and community leaders, between police and participants through coaching and team development, and between the Western Bulldogs, Hobsons Bay Council, police and community leaders through the steering committee over a sustained period of time, meant that while the focus remained primarily on sport and skills development in leadership, communication and conflict resolution, sensitive issues such as violence and terrorism were able to be directly discussed with participants. This led to open dialogue with the NIS community about these issues at their request, a strong positive outcome of the program as a whole.

Stakeholder:

*“We did the football, we did the camp and we did the horse-riding. We attended most of the meetings with the community leaders, discussing the program. Very importantly, in one of those meetings [the NIS community leaders] actually asked for a lecture on counter-terrorism. It was driven by them and we delivered it at the*



*camp, and it was a very good session. They called it the ‘white elephant’ in the room. And we wouldn’t have been able to do that at the start.”*

Stakeholder:

*“You had the kids engaged through the football but once they were there then we did some conflict resolution stuff with them while we were on the camp. We had a police member who is a multicultural officer he came on the camp and gave a specific lecture on conflict resolution and then he gave some examples and put them in a role-play situation. You know, it does need to be followed up and reinforced: If this happens then these are the actions that I can take, or if I take that action then there might be a consequence.”*

### **2.3.2 Interagency dialogue**

Another feature of the program’s outcomes was its capacity to facilitate dialogue between communities and stakeholders across different agencies, producing new opportunities for knowledge-sharing, the breaking down of stereotypes and the experience of engaging young people at risk of disengagement from the broader community. This was seen as a productive dimension of the program’s focus on inclusive steering committee meetings and also the cooperative work across agencies for larger-scale initiatives such as the Unity Cup:

Stakeholder:

*“The other value of course is that you bring all of those services together – AFP, Victoria Police, the fireys, City West Water – all of these people come together and we talk about programs and the stereotypes get broken down.”*

### **2.3.3. Improved dialogue between police and young people**

Stakeholders observed that dialogue between police and young people was significantly enhanced through participation in the program and its activities, in part as a result of relationship building and in part through developing new skills and confidence for participants. Open dialogue was seen to emerge from the trust and comfort developed through building relationships over time within an environment of structured activity focused initially on sport that ultimately leads

beyond sport itself.

Stakeholder:

*“To actually have these kids in this program in particular be confident enough to go up and report something to police, knowing that they’re not going to be in trouble. Or having a contact they can talk to about something that has happened to them.”*

Stakeholder:

*“People who lean towards extremism and things like that might be a bit isolated in their community and a bit vulnerable. I felt that being in a program like this, specifically for males and revolving around AFL football, it gave everybody a chance to belong and feel like they were a part of this group. I think it also helped form important relationships with Australia Federal Police, Victoria Police and Western Bulldogs so that young people within that group, if they had leaders in the community that they could turn to if they felt they needed to speak to somebody or saw that something wasn't right, it opens up channels of communication that way at an official capacity. Because you do start to develop that trust and understanding where they're willing to confide in you and know that you'll do something about it.”*

The young participants equally highlight this change:

Participant Twelve:

*“I actually had some mates who went into an incident with police, yelling and abusing the police... Before MTAG I didn't really know, or talk to, the police. It was negative. But now I've met police I take them as actually doing their job. They're trying to protect us. Like before, it was 'they arrested my mate or they did this'... but now it like 'they are just trying to protect the community and make everybody safe.’”*

Another participant describes the Victoria Police member who coached the team:  
*“He really got into it. Like providing a proper structure for our footy game. Other*

*teams would just run out but Scotty got on board and showed us, 'you here, and you there'. We had jumper presentations from the start... that was Scotty's initiative. He really got into it. It was really good."*

A changed relationship with the police was also highlighted as a product of the camp:

Participant Ten: *"On camp there was a role play where a police officer played a young person and we played police officers and he gave us a scenario to see how we would act as a police officer. And that gave us a good opportunity to see what police officers do... I think this was the most important thing from the camp."*

Interviewer: *"So do you think it will have a lasting effect on you?"*

Participant Ten: *"Of course!"*

## **2.4 The involvement of parents**

### **2.4.1. Parental involvement and models of community**

One important dimension of resilience in confronting the attractions of violent extremism is the involvement of parents. Extensive evidence underlines that the path into extremism involves disengagement not only from local community, but also from parents.

Australia has a strong involvement of parental involvement in the lives and activities of its young people, through sport, local and religious associations, and school life and governance, and this is a key dimension of resilient communities. It is important to be aware that not all countries share this tradition, in particular those based on authoritarian rule where school, for example, is an affair of the state, with community largely excluded. In Australia we may regard parental involvement in children's sport as coaches or supporters as natural, but this is in fact part of a model of community.

### **2.4.2 Building a culture of parental participation**

One of the objectives of the project was to promote a model where parents were involved as supporters of the activities the young people undertook. While a number of parents attended games and came to the graduation ceremony, these numbers were less than organisers had hoped for.

The awareness of the need to increase parental participation was highlighted by a NIS community leader:

*“The problem with the participation of parents is a problem that we had before the project, way before. We do a lot of activities for them, even before More Than A Game, and we have limited cooperation from the parents. They come to us pleased whenever something is happening – they say ‘take my boy, take my girl, and let them participate’. But when we tell them ‘we need your support, you need to come here and show you son or daughter that you support what they’ve done’... Most of the parents of these kids are first generation, so they look at something good that fills up the time for their kids but they don’t see the potential as we see it and as the kids see it. So it’s uncommon that they will participate in these things.”*

As noted below in 2.4.4, barriers to participation extend beyond cultural unfamiliarity. What may be regarded as failure to take up opportunities may also represent withdrawal when confronted with negative attitudes or racism.

### **2.4.3. ‘Sometimes we just back off’**

Lack of involvement of parents cannot be regarded simply as a result of the absence of a tradition of community involvement. It also reflects a response to experiences of racism.

Mother: *“I was more afraid of the racial remarks. Because I have heard quite a bit. Being brought up here, and a Muslim, and with everything going on back in Israel, you hear a lot of remarks. I was afraid the kids were going to get that.”*

Interviewer: *“When you say you hear remarks what do you mean, from people in the street?”*

Mother: *“From people in the street... ‘Go back to your own country’, we get a lot of that. Especially as Muslim women – scarved – we get a lot of racial discrimination against us. And sometimes we just back off and sometimes you have to defend yourself.”*

Interviewer: *“Would that happen very often or occasionally?”*

Mother: *“Honestly, since September 11, quite a bit. But in the past year it has mellowed down. So I was really afraid that my son was going to be amongst that and I didn’t want that, but when he finished the meeting with the Peace Team he came home with his dad and he said ‘this is what happened, this is what happened’. And we really enjoyed their company. It opened our eyes and we’re all the same.”*

This mother highlights the importance of her trust that the organisers of the program would not place her son in a situation where he could get caught up in wider conflicts or racism. She underlines that her initial response to the program was a degree of fear and apprehension. Her comments also underline the extent that closed and defensive communities develop negative perceptions of ‘the other’. She is delighted with the program, and also surprised: *“It opened our eyes and we’re all the same.”*

#### **2.4.4. An eye opener and a heart opener**

The parents who were involved highlight the major impact the program had on their sons:

Mother: *“For myself and my son, I thought it was an eye opener and a heart opener, especially with the Jewish, when they were involved. As parents, when they said a Jewish and Muslim team together, I thought ‘oh no’, are they going to be together or separate. And when they were mixed I was happy.... I enjoyed every minute and my son enjoyed the experience. And he takes the experience for a lifetime.”*

Interviewer: *“Really? Is it that important?”*

Mother: *“Yes!”*

This mother argues that the leadership and responsibility opportunities extended beyond the football team, and encompass the camp experience as well:

Mother: *“This experience showed them that...(pause)...I reckon that it has made my son more mature. He can take on more responsibility, take on leadership, he had taken on quite a few aspects of this program.”*

Interviewer: *“What has been the main thing that has brought about this change?”*

Mother: *“Being given responsibilities that he never had at home.... At the camp he was the leader of his cabin room. So he had to make sure that they all went to a certain place at a certain time. He was given the responsibility of getting a group together to work with the police officers and work with whoever to get everything on time.”*

## **2.5 Transforming stakeholder perceptions of cultural difference**

One important dimension of the program was not simply mentoring of young people, but changes among stakeholders themselves. One stakeholder noted this, observing that the work of questioning or dismantling cultural stereotypes between young participants had led them to modify their own assumptions about different cultures. This was seen as fostering increased organisational resilience for various stakeholder groups involved in the program, who could feed back the knowledge they gained for future program and strategy development around community engagement and youth mentoring.

One stakeholder spoke about the importance of using ritual and ceremony to help foster sense of belonging by drawing on the symbolic elements of team sports to build a sense of shared group identity that transcended cultural differences.

Stakeholder:

*“We’d trained together as a team but prior to the Unity Cup starting that was our*

*first chance to be together as our 15 [member side] and the coach. And from my own point of view I wanted to make it a significant moment when we got the jumpers. So we spoke about how as soon as you put this jumper on you become one of us and we're all together and we're part of the team. And Joel [Bialik] and Oussama [NIS] presented the jumpers. It was kind of like a little ceremony I suppose, just to talk about being as one."*

But the spontaneous introduction of a culturally shared musical element at the Unity Cup during half time also taught him something new about the underlying commonalities between Muslim and Jewish cultures:

Stakeholder:

*"Joel [Bialik] also brought that drum and one of the boys from the mosque got the drum and he was playing the drum. And we had a song for the team if we won - it was Jewish and Muslim words. Well, it raised my awareness of it, too. I didn't realise the similarities between the two [cultures]."*

Other stakeholders spoke of the benefits of transforming their own level of cultural awareness and increasing organisational capacity through what they learned by involvement in the program, which in turn helped them promote cultural inclusivity and sense of belonging and being welcomed at the institutional level:

Stakeholder:

*"I think that engaging with these communities; certainly engaging with the Islamic community has been very empowering for everyone. Certainly that's what struck me. I've grown up in a very multicultural community and I feel in tune to cultural diversity, yet when some of the young men who would be involved in the [program] and a couple of the leaders [came over], my [female] colleague was there with me that day and she went to shake hands and they basically said, 'We don't want to shake your hand'. Just something as small as that helps us to make our organisation more culturally aware as well, to realise where the boundaries are and also the opportunities - fantastic things like spaces for prayer, it's not something that you would normally acknowledge as being part of an Australian*

*Rules football club yet these things are being accommodated, and I think that says a lot about resilience.”*

Other organisational benefits identified by stakeholders were focused on being able to educate and involve more front-line service providers and sporting groups about the importance of developing local relationships with disengaged young people through sport and the dialogue and practice around belonging and social inclusion that this can open up.

### **2.5.1. Sustainable change through grassroots involvement**

The final key theme from the stakeholder data concentrated on the relevance of localised, grassroots initiatives and programs to deal with sensitive issues around violence, disengagement and extremism. *More than a Game* was experienced by stakeholders as a model of how grassroots initiatives can foster the kind of local relationships that are the bedrock of developing stronger ties and communication that lead to more formal levels of institutional and organisational cooperation.

As one stakeholder puts it:

*“I think it has taught us that we need to invest in grassroots initiatives that provide vehicles for people to participate and see themselves in a positive light, to be able to achieve success and be heard. And that this is important to be facilitated by a broad range of stakeholders who are committed to working with these communities and understanding their needs in order to move away from negative stereotypes that marginalise people and create the risk. It's that simple.”*

### **2.6 Contribution of the program to preventing violent conflict**

Stakeholders were united in seeing three main benefits emerging from *More than a Game* in relation to helping prevent violent conflict. The first was through providing avenues for people who may feel marginalised in other respects within the broader community to be heard and validated through being treated as equals in a team sport environment. The second lies in strengthening self-esteem by focusing on what young people can achieve through sport, which can mitigate



negative feelings related to lack of achievement or recognition in other areas of their lives, such as education or mainstream community acceptance. The third is based on countering negative stereotypes and breaking down myths and barriers about cultural difference that, if left unchallenged or untransformed, can lead vulnerable young people to exploring violence as a means of restoring self-respect or countering the lack of respect they experience in the community at large. The role of positive media coverage of novel sporting activities such as MUJU was seen as an essential element in helping to build positive images of young Muslim men in particular that helped counterbalance the often negative mainstream media coverage of this group.

Overall, the program was seen by stakeholders to promote and embed for participants a sense of achievement and success; the experience of belonging; the values of discipline, reliability, trust, tolerance and respect; the freedom to be heard and to express yourself; the skills and attributes of leadership, self-confidence, resilience and self-knowledge; and an environment conducive to safe and frank communication and dialogue with others from different cultures and different social backgrounds. A number of stakeholders noted that one of the key differences between the NIS and Bialik boys was not related to culture or religion but to social and economic class; they commented on the way in which the bridging influence of the program was as much about bringing together boys from the Eastern and Western suburbs of Melbourne as it was about facilitating greater understanding between Muslim and Jewish young men. All of these issues were felt to be critical elements of and contributions to promoting resilience and forestalling reliance on violence and extremism as an expression of social disengagement or as an alternative social identity.

As one stakeholder observed:

*“The funny thing about preventing violence is that you can't measure what hasn't happened, so you have to work back to find out what a program like More than a Game can contribute to something not happening.”*

## **2.7 More than a Game *in the media***

One of the major impacts of *More Than A Game* has been its ability to capture the imagination of journalists and the public. While the scope of the evaluation did not allow an attempt to measure this community impact, the extent of media and the number of 'hits' on YouTube and other websites indicates the resonance of this project in the wider community. It is clear that the impact of the project extended beyond its immediate participants.

### **2.7.1 Media narrative**

The *More Than a Game* project generated substantial publicity through the Western Bulldogs AFL website and mainstream media interest from the moment the program was announced in July 2011 through to the conclusion of the program at the Graduation Ceremony at Whitten Oval on Friday 8<sup>th</sup> June 2012. Coverage of the *More Than a Game* activities themselves were publicised through the Western Bulldogs website. At the commencement of the program the Bulldogs publicised the aims of the program with a meeting between NIS participants and Callan Ward (a Western Bulldogs leading player at the time). The Anglesea youth camp and the cricket game held at Williamstown were also publicised as program activities that used sport to enhance leadership and decision-making skills (Feb and March 2012).

The main focus for mainstream media coverage has been the highly successful MUJU peace team. On 16<sup>th</sup> September 2011 the Western Bulldogs hosted an exhibition match between two mixed teams of Jewish and Muslim players who had met one another at the Peace Team visit to Whitten Oval in October. The game was publicised through the Western Bulldogs website and the announcement of a new club called MUJU emerging from the match was announced. The interest in MUJU led to the major networks publicising the match on the evening news, where a number of the Jewish and Muslim participants in MUJU were interviewed (September 19, 2011). This led to further views on YouTube (1076 views in total). Martin Flanagan also reported on the match with an article in *The Age* which generated 7 tweets and 278 recommendations on

Facebook. This led some other smaller news outlets (Jewish News TV and Leader TV) to cover the Unity Cup (March 25, 2012) and Graduation ceremony (June 8, 2012), both of which also had a number of views on You Tube (831 in total). The news coverage culminated in an article written in *The Age* by Martin Flanagan (June 16, 2012), which outlined the achievements of the participants in *More Than a Game* and the MUJU Peace Club in promoting messages of harmony and social inclusion through sport (the article was tweeted 15 times and recommended on Facebook by 54 people).

### 2.7.2 Media data

Media type, title, date uploaded to You Tube or published, URL	Views (You Tube)	Description
<b>Video: 8 items</b>		
News coverage by <b>Channel 9</b> Title: 'Beyond the Boundary' Date uploaded to You Tube: Sept 19 2011 <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0M-xoUrXDdE&amp;feature=relmfu">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0M-xoUrXDdE&amp;feature=relmfu</a>	39 1	MUJU peace club match at Whitten Oval
Evening News coverage, <b>Channel 10</b> Title: 'Game Effort' Date of upload: Sept 19 2011 <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M0SAWyALfbl">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M0SAWyALfbl</a>	45 0	As above
Evening News coverage by <b>ABC</b> Title: 'MUJU Peace Club match' Date uploaded: Sept 19 2011 <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k0zZ-JVioYq&amp;feature=relmfu">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k0zZ-JVioYq&amp;feature=relmfu</a>	23 5	As above
<b>Jewish News TV</b> Title: 'Cultures Come Together for Unity Cup' Date uploaded: March 6 2012 <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=re5Vt32AngQ&amp;feature=related">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=re5Vt32AngQ&amp;feature=related</a>	28 7	Unity Cup 2012
<b>Leader TV</b> Title: 'Unity Cup in Kensington' Date uploaded: March 27 2012 <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fjw24H3y69I&amp;feature=related">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fjw24H3y69I&amp;feature=related</a>	31 4	Unity Cup 2012
<b>Jewish News TV</b> Title: 'MUJU Triumph at Unity Cup' Date uploaded: March 26 2012	24 7	Unity Cup 2012

<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gyP5p18sPfw&amp;feature=relmfu">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gyP5p18sPfw&amp;feature=relmfu</a>		
<b>Leader TV</b> Title: 'More Than a Game Graduation' Date uploaded: June 25 2012 <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l3JOOkWBqoA&amp;feature=related">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l3JOOkWBqoA&amp;feature=related</a>	7	29 More Than a Game Graduation ceremony
Segment on "The Game Plan" football show, <b>Channel 10</b> First aired, July 2012 No video uploads available		The video was taken at one of the training sessions at Whitten Oval in the lead up to the Unity Cup.
<b>Print: 4 items</b>		
<b>The Age</b> Newspaper (Martin Flanagan) Title: 'Young Muslim and Jewish Footballers Proving They're All of a Peace' Date: 19 September 2011 <a href="http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/muslim-and-jewish-footballers-proving-theyre-all-of-a-peace-20110918-1kg2o.html">http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/muslim-and-jewish-footballers-proving-theyre-all-of-a-peace-20110918-1kg2o.html</a>	7 tweet 27 8 FB	Harmony Football Match at Whitten Oval
<b>The Age</b> Newspaper (Martin Flanagan) Title: 'A Band of Brothers Give Peace a Chant' Date: June 16 2012 <a href="http://www.theage.com.au/afl/afl-news/a-band-of-brothers-give-peace-a-chant-20120615-20fmj.html">http://www.theage.com.au/afl/afl-news/a-band-of-brothers-give-peace-a-chant-20120615-20fmj.html</a>	15 tweet 54 FB	Unity Cup 2012
<b>Star</b> Newspaper Title: 'Clash of Nations' Date: 20 March 2012 <a href="http://www.starnewsgroup.com.au/star/stalban-s-deer-park-caroline-springs/340/story/150106.html">http://www.starnewsgroup.com.au/star/stalban-s-deer-park-caroline-springs/340/story/150106.html</a>		Unity Cup 2012
<b>The Herald Sun</b> Title: 'Mark of Friendship for Muslim and Jewish Leader' Date: June 25 2012 <a href="http://www.heraldsun.com.au/afl/localfooty/mark-of-friendship-for-muslim-and-jewish-team-leader/story-fn53khk2-1226407632324">http://www.heraldsun.com.au/afl/localfooty/mark-of-friendship-for-muslim-and-jewish-team-leader/story-fn53khk2-1226407632324</a>		'More Than a Game' Graduation Ceremony 2012
<b>Website: 5 items</b>		
<b>Western Bulldogs- AFL website</b> Title: 'Kicking Goals for Harmony' Date: 5 July 2011 <a href="http://www.westernbulldogs.com.au/tabid/4112/default.aspx?newsid=117823">http://www.westernbulldogs.com.au/tabid/4112/default.aspx?newsid=117823</a>		News on the funding received for <i>More Than a Game</i> project. Photo opp with NIS boys and Callan Ward (Western Bulldogs)

		player)
<p><b>Western Bulldogs- AFL website</b>  Title: 'Bulldogs to Host Harmony Football Match'  Date: 16 September 2011  <a href="http://www.westernbulldogs.com.au/westernbulldogsnewsfeatures/newsarticle/tabid/4112/newsid/123572/default.aspx">http://www.westernbulldogs.com.au/westernbulldogsnewsfeatures/newsarticle/tabid/4112/newsid/123572/default.aspx</a></p>		<p>Publicity for the 'Harmony Football Match' where the MUJU Peace Club plays an exhibition match, The team is publicised as one that derived from the AFL Peace Team visit to Whitten oval in August 2011</p>
<p><b>Western Bulldogs- AFL website</b>  Title: 'More Than a Game'  Date: Fri 03 Feb 2012  <a href="http://www.westernbulldogs.com.au/westernbulldogsnewsfeatures/newsarticle/tabid/4112/newsid/128525/default.aspx">http://www.westernbulldogs.com.au/westernbulldogsnewsfeatures/newsarticle/tabid/4112/newsid/128525/default.aspx</a></p>		<p>News on cricket match at Williamstown as part of <i>More Than a Game</i> project</p>
<p><b>Western Bulldogs- AFL website</b>  Title: 'Leading the Pack'  Date: Fri 2 March 2012  <a href="http://www.westernbulldogs.com.au/westernbulldogsnewsfeatures/newsarticle/tabid/4112/newsid/129898/default.aspx">http://www.westernbulldogs.com.au/westernbulldogsnewsfeatures/newsarticle/tabid/4112/newsid/129898/default.aspx</a></p>		<p>News on the <i>More Than a Game</i> Youth Leadership Camp at Anglesea</p>
<p><b>Western Bulldogs- AFL website</b>  Title: 'Communities Unite at Whitten Oval'  Date: 14 March 2012  <a href="http://www.westernbulldogs.com.au/westernbulldogsnewsfeatures/newsarticle/tabid/4112/newsid/130690/default.aspx">http://www.westernbulldogs.com.au/westernbulldogsnewsfeatures/newsarticle/tabid/4112/newsid/130690/default.aspx</a></p>		<p>Unity Cup training session, MUJU meeting Liam Picken (Western Bulldogs player) and promotion for the event</p>

### 3. Project Implementation

#### 3.1 Implementation efficiency: project governance

The project was governed by a Steering Committee consisting of key stakeholders including representatives from the Newport Islamic Society, the Western Bulldogs, Victoria Police, Australian Federal Police and Hobsons Bay City Council. The evaluation team from Victoria University participated as observers at several steering committee meetings, and found these to be important points where feedback was shared, experiences learnt from and future steps planned. These

meetings were conducted in a very collegial way and have been central to building and strengthening relationships between stakeholders.

### **3.2 Staffing**

The project activities were coordinated by staff working in the Community Department of the Western Bulldogs (Spirit West Services). They were clearly very committed to the project and to the young people who participated. Their role received constant positive feedback from both stakeholders and the young people. When interviewed by the evaluation team, the staff working on the project demonstrated a highly detailed knowledge of the project's goals, and clearly valued that close relationships they had formed with the young people participating. Project staff demonstrated a clear clarity of purpose, understanding key objectives that *More than a Game* was seeking to achieve, while at the same time understanding that many of the young participants were experiencing such a program for the first time.

### **3.3 Flexibility**

The project demonstrated a high degree of flexibility, in particular through its capacity to support the creation of the Jewish-Muslim football team, a proposal that initially came from two of the boys who met at the Unity Cup. Rather than only focusing on predetermined activities, the organisers demonstrated a real sensitivity and openness in their response to this initiative, to the point where this became one of the key dimensions of the program.

### **3.4 Timelines**

All the major activities identified in the initial project application were successfully carried out, and all were carried out within the timeframe initially indicated.

## Recommendations

A number of lessons for future program development have emerged from the experience of conducting *More than a Game* and evaluating its effectiveness and impacts. These comprise useful knowledge to take into consideration when planning for the future directions of this and similar programs.

### **Lesson 1: Ensure cross-cultural program sensitivities and needs are well-balanced**

The program was carefully designed and implemented to accommodate the cultural needs and sensitivities of the target Muslim community participants. The flexibility of the program design and the commitment of the program organisers accommodated the unexpected involvement of another cultural group (Jewish boys from Bialik College) in the original program to produce the MUJU Peace Club. However, there was insufficient time, resources and knowledge to be able to fully capitalise on this opportunity. The result was that some of the Jewish participants felt excluded from some elements of the program in which they became involved, e.g. the Graduation Ceremony held on a Friday night was inappropriate for practicing Jewish community members and their families.

### **Lesson 2: Engage parents and families as fully as possible through one or more ancillary activities aligned with the overall program.**

Some parents and families attended various elements of the program such as the Unity Cup and the Graduation Ceremony. However, while the evaluators' observations and dialogue with families at these events revealed important perspectives relevant to the program's overall goals and objectives, there was no formal process for ensuring the inclusion of parents and families. Consequently, observations about generational change in attitudes or understandings could not be captured and built upon systematically through the program design. Future programs could consider one or more activities specifically focused to involve

parents and families in order to extend the sense of community belonging and involvement through sport beyond the boys themselves.

### **Lesson 3: Explore appropriate programs that involve young women from the community**

A number of male participants from the NIS group spoke of the desire of young women in their community to have similar involvement in a program such as *More than a Game*. While mixed-gender activities may be inappropriate for cultural reasons, parallel program opportunities could be considered to maximise impact and involvement. Young women are also susceptible to social exclusion, grievances and radicalisation yet their sense of lack of belonging to the broader community can often be less visible compared to that of young men. Moreover, Australian-born young women are often keenly interested in becoming involved in sporting activities but can lack appropriate avenues to do so at community level. Using sport to engage young people of both genders should be explored.

### **Lesson 4: Select family-friendly venues for key program activities**

A number of parents present at the Unity Cup event, held in 2012 at JJ Holland Park in Kensington, spoke to evaluators of their clear preference for this venue compared to previous Unity Cup events at the Windy Hill ground at Essendon Football Club. They cited the open nature of the Park, opportunity to mix with other families and community members, and the ease of public transport as factors in this preference. They did not like the Windy Hill ground because they felt the seating arrangements precluded ease of movement around the ground or clustering in groups for conversation and exchange, which they could achieve much more easily at the Kensington facility.

### **Lesson 5: Consider adding social events and channels to the repertoire of program activities**

Program participants, while citing significantly increased levels of cross-cultural friendship and understanding through involvement in *More than a Game*, also



spoke of their lack of ability to maintain friendships off the field outside the program. Part of this was the lack of informal social activities designed to foster such relationship building. This is in part explained by the program design of activities such as the overnight camp for the NIS community, which could not accommodate the Jewish boys as well. However, in future program design involving more than one cultural group, care should be taken to facilitate informal as well as formal opportunities for social contact and the breaking down of barriers between young people. Social media activities and contact can be explored as a component of this.

### **Lesson 6: New skills and new experiences are critical to the success of such programs**

While the focus on football and other team-based sporting events such as cricket was a key element in the success of *More than a Game*, the horse-riding activity at Uncle Nev's Trails and the Anglesea overnight camp, which involved the opportunity to try surfing, were the most popular non-team sport focused activities for participants to emerge from the survey data, topping the Football for Harmony Clinic or the cricketing match at Williamstown. This suggests that for these participants, exposure to new, untried experiences that help expand their sense of interest and accomplishment are critical elements of building resilience, and these opportunities should be expanded on where possible in future programs.

### **Lesson 7: Consider involving mixed cultural groups from the outset in future programs**

The data suggests that while a single-community focus has had clear benefits, mixed cultural groups also yield positive outcomes, particularly when there are indirect learning opportunities for social contact and exchange that allow organic models of cross-cultural knowledge and resilience to be facilitated, as through sport. Planning for such cross-cultural engagement can also involve a focus on learning new kinds of leadership skills that will significantly extend the capacity to provide role models with positive influence beyond the life of a structured program.

## Project Sustainability

We believe the outcomes of this project can be sustained. One of the most important outcomes of this program was the enhanced leadership skills developed by young male participants in the program, as well as the identification of slightly older young community leaders who play a key role in fostering community identity and contact with mainstream local communities. This is a key outcome that can be sustained through ongoing opportunities for the development and consolidation of community leadership skills through involvement with sport, with local police initiatives and with local community activities.

More Than a Game has allowed the Western Bulldogs to develop a meaningful engagement program with a target group that historically have had little to no contact with the club prior. The power of sport as a vehicle to engage with this traditionally hard-to-reach group and develop relationships with young men in particular was exemplified by this project and exceeded the organisation's expectations. The project has enabled the Western Bulldogs to collaborate with a number of stakeholders with a view to achieving their own goals as well as that of the project objectives and other stakeholders.

Some of the key findings and subsequent sustainability outcomes include:

- (a) Sport (when appropriately facilitated and conducted in a positive environment) is a powerful engagement tool particularly for this group of young men and cannot be underestimated.
- (b) Building trust with participants takes time and MUST be established before any significant outcomes can be achieved. Using sport as a mechanism to develop trust is very effective.
- (c) Meaningful community engagement can only be built upon through trust with leaders – either officially or unofficially appointed – and over a period of time. The Western Bulldogs was fortunate to be in a position to commence the project

pretty much straight away rather than having to wait 1 or 2 months to appoint a committee, hire a project worker, etc.

- (d) Having the buy-in from key stakeholders and project partners, especially the target community group was critical to the success of the project.
- (e) Young people's motivation to make a difference in their community was strong if they can be supported and have the opportunity to do so (through a medium such as sport and having the support of a 'brand' like the Western Bulldogs).
- (f) The media's interest in this area is strong. The project was able to bring some positive news around our target group which traditionally has received negative news. However, there is still a great need to educate the broader community about cultural diversity especially in regards to the Muslim community and their contribution to the local community.
- (g) The importance of social media in connecting with the young people and for them to connect with each other – MUJU was formed through social media.

**What follow-up actions are required to implement the lessons learned from this project or to ensure the project's sustainability?**

The Western Bulldogs is committed to developing and delivering programs that educate, engage and meet the diverse needs of multicultural communities, including the local Muslim community. The organisation will seek to continue key elements and learnings of the project to further provide social participation and integration opportunities between multi-faith groups, youth leadership training, cultural awareness/diversity education and community celebration and advocacy of the target community group.

The Project has built social capital through the extensive networks created not just within the partner organisations but beyond. By focusing on building community resilience and capacity building at the individual and community levels, project participants and stakeholders are better equipped with resources

and transferable skills from sport to life, social and community participation. Furthermore, through acquiring these skills participants are able to pass on their knowledge and/or mentor other community members so that they too may participate positively in the community beyond the More than a Game project.

However, for sustainability to be achieved, a whole-of-organisation approach is required by all stakeholder organisations including the NIS through engagement of senior members / employees, unofficial and official leaders / managers, and input and buy-in from all members of the organisations (eg. parents from the Mosque, uniformed members of Police and playing group of the Western Bulldogs) as well as providing opportunities to engage the broader community wherever possible.

The success of the project has fostered a commitment from the partner organisations to see these initiatives become mainstreamed and embedded within the community.