



Kicking goals for resettlement

Organisations across Australia are turning to soccer as a way to connect with young refugees and assist them with resettlement.

But how does 'the world game' help address the complex issues young refugees face? How can soccer help young men fit in at school, improve their English, and deal with grief and loss?

Following is an edited transcript of an interview between two STARTTS workers and Mick O'Reagan from ABC radio, discussing the therapeutic benefits of soccer and how it is being used at STARTTS.

Community services coordinator Jasmina Bajraktarevic-Hayward and boys and young men's worker Mohamed Baaruud spoke to Radio National's Sports Factor program on 22 June 2007.

Jasmina Bajraktarevic-Hayward (Jasmina): There's often a discussion about whether children are more vulnerable to trauma, or more resilient than adults, and in some way they have innate resilience and ability to deal with things. But children are also more vulnerable, because if trauma, displacement, deprivation, hunger, losing your family members

and witnessing traumatic events happen when you are still a child, it will impact on how you develop, who you become as a person, on your sense of safety and trust and on your ability to connect to other human beings and learn and cope with everyday needs and issues.

Some kids become too old too soon. Others behave like children of a younger age. And, then, once kids are here in Australia, they have to deal with the fact that they often become more familiar with the new environment the new country much faster than their parents, and so they act as a cultural bridge between the parents and the new society.

Mick O'Regan (Mick): And in making that bridge, is sport often a useful tool?

Jasmina: Sport is significant for both recovery and connection.

In terms of recovery from trauma sport offers children and young people

something that they might be really good at, and a possibility to meet new people and make friends. It encourages team work and harmony. It helps young people develop leadership skills, but it also helps them feel that there is a meaning to their lives. They call football 'the beautiful game' and it's a way of life for many people. So regaining your contact with an aspect of your life that's really important to you that you're good at gives new meaning to your life and new connections.

Mick: Well let's bring Mohamed in now. Mohamed, you've been very involved in actually setting up football camps, soccer camps, for children of refugees, as a way of doing some of the things that Jasmina has been talking about.

Mohamed Baaruud (Mohamed): We get about 30 young people from different communities, and most of these young people are either from a refugee background or are humanitarian entrants into Australia. So we work with schools,

we work with communities and we see those who are interested in sports and recreation and create for them a platform where they meet, play soccer and organise activities. And usually the camps are one of the best means to do this sort of thing, because they are away from home, concentrating more on the soccer than thinking about home, or school.

Mick: Tell me about when the camp comes together, what are they like at the beginning, before they've built up those connections and maybe established a bit of trust with each other.

Mohamed: At the beginning, when you're going to the camp, it's like you have all those baskets with different fruit in them and then suddenly it is rough and all the fruit are mixed, and that's how relationships start.

At the beginning everyone comes on their own. They don't know each other, and then after they have been to the camp and have had their first soccer clinic, it's as if the young people have known each other for a long time. Soccer creates a very good atmosphere. Some say, 'this is the best thing that I have done so far', because you see all the smiles on their faces, you hear all the conversations.

It also creates long-term friendships where they get their telephone numbers from each other, and say 'OK, what are you doing on the weekend?' or 'Where do you live?' or 'Can you come to our team and play with us?'

So for me, it's not only just the camp, it's all about those other things that are associated with it, whether it might be friendship, group participation, leadership style, confidence, or breaking the social isolation and creating interaction among young people.

Jasmina: We see young people who are more confident, who have more connec-

tions and relationships with others, who trust others a bit more. Because in order to play a team game, you do need to trust the other players. So we see the development of trust of confidence, and we see young people smiling once again after a long time.

Mick: Indeed, and there are enough players from specific locations, or nationalities, to actually form a team. Now I understand that Burundian refugees are fairly new to Australia; almost all of them have arrived in the last couple of years, but they've actually come together with the help of STARTTS to form the Western Sydney Burundian soccer team. Mohamed can you talk about that?

Mohamed: This team came to me via one of my colleagues, who is a community development worker who works with the [Burundian] community. And what they really wanted to do was to establish their own team. We took them to Newcastle so that they could meet with other Burundians and play a game.

One of the things that they really want to do is sort of promote their cultural identity as well as what they love most, which is to play soccer. So it was very successful in terms of the community getting together and meeting in Newcastle.

Soccer is also about trying to reach other communities and show them that they exist in Sydney and they have this team that can play in the African all-age tournament or other tournaments that are happening around the Sydney area.

Mick: Does being on the same football team mean that people who originally came from different sides of a dispute had a chance to work together?

Mohamed: When you're playing soccer, for instance if you're playing a team which has culturally diverse members from different countries, it's not about whether you like that country they come

from or whether you have a problem, it's all about teamwork, it's all about winning. And that makes people understand each other and they become more open-minded.

Mick: Among these young children, the children of refugees, is there an indication of how important football is back in Africa, to what we see in the kids?

Mohamed: Yes, it is. Because most of the young people play soccer in their village, where there are no parks, where there are no appropriate soccer fields. They play with hand-made balls, which are made by putting some papers in a sock. So coming here and having these beautiful parks, having the balls, the goals posts ready is just like a dream come true. All they have to do is kick the ball and shoot the goal. They have the other skills as well, because one of the things that I found with young African people is that they like to run a lot.

After you give them a few soccer skill sessions, they gain the skill necessary to play in a team. Soccer is not all about one man's game, running with the ball and going to the goal. It's also about passing the ball, trying to share the ball with your team-mates and trying to have a very good team that's ready to attack the other team.

Mick: How is sport a bridge back into the Australian community?

Jasmina: Just look at the importance of sport in Australian culture; it's a joint language, it's a shared universal language. Really it brings us to the realisation that while we are all very different, culturally, there are some things that we all share as human beings, and I think sport and music and many other things, but in this case, sport, is a universal language. ■



This is about my holiday

My holiday started really good. On the last day of school, after school, my cousin and I went to a soccer camp which was going to last for three days. We did a lot of things and played a lot of soccer. There were about 50 kids there and I stayed with my friends in the same room with bunk beds which takes two people for each bed. There were 10 of us in the same room.

After finishing settling down, all of us went to play soccer and had some good coach teaching us some techniques about soccer, which was really good for some of us that play soccer. We finished training and went back to our rooms and took a shower and then went to the hall to watch a movie.

The next day was the second day of camp. We woke up at six o'clock in the morning and went for a walk around. We did some activities like climbing ropes which was really fun. After that, we went to do canoeing and we had someone talking to us about the safety, but one thing the water was too cold and that didn't make it really fun. We did it for

about one and a half hours and I was so cold I couldn't even feel my feet on the ground.

The last day of the camp was the best. The leaders sent us to different groups of soccer teams. Everyone was in a group and they told us we are going to play a world cup and there will be trophies for the winners and for other things.

My team went well, we worked hard and beat all the teams and won the final. Everyone in my team was happy. They gave us our medals and another trophy which was the golden but for the highest goals soccer and the person that won it was in my team.

That was the last day of camp.

I think it was really good camp and I would like to go back to it because it was so good.

Augustine Mawein