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## THE SOCIAL VALUE OF AN AUSTRALIAN RULES COMMUNITY FOOTBALL CLUB

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Synopsis:

The aim of this study was to determine the value of a “typical” Australian Rules community football club in terms of its contribution to social, community and health impacts and to explore the merits and limitations of the Social Return on Investment (SROI) approach as a suitable method for this value assessment.

Abstract:

AIM OF PAPER

The aim of this study was to determine the value of a “typical” Australian Rules community football club in terms of its contribution to social, community and health impacts and to explore the merits and limitations of the Social Return on Investment (SROI) approach as a suitable method for this value assessment.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

There is often discussion about the social, health and economic value that football clubs brings to communities. Inherently we believe football does provide an important vehicle to achieving these outcomes, however there is little understanding or quantifiable evidence about how football actually contributes to these areas. The SROI is a potential method which can overcome this challenge. Developed in the United Kingdom, the SROI has been promoted by government and assessed within academic literature as a method for quantifying the social, environmental and economic value of the third sector, including sport organisations (King, 2014).

METHODOLOGY, RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA ANALYSIS

A mixed method approach was adopted collecting data over two stages. Firstly, case studies of nine clubs representing a range of geographical locations across Victoria, Australia were completed. Qualitative data pertaining to the activities, resources and impact of each club was collected through 110 in-depth interviews with various club members (administrators, players, sponsors and general supporters) and external community stakeholders (police,

government, schools and community groups).

The second stage surveyed members of AFL Victoria football clubs regarding their perceptions of their physical and mental health status, general wellbeing and their social connections. The survey was emailed to the club secretaries of the 1100 community football clubs in Victoria, who in turn, distributed the survey to their respective club members who had a valid email address. Quantitative survey data was entered into a PASW statistics v21.0 with a final sample of 1677 usable surveys providing an error margin of plus or minus 3% relative to the whole Victorian population. Analysis was then conducted on the final sample using Q Analytics v4.7.1.0.

Both sets of data were then used to calculate, on a summative basis, the SROI for a typical Victorian community football club based on the method outlined by the Cabinet Office of the Third Sector (Nicholls et al., 2012) by mapping the resources, activities, and outcomes of a community football club, assigning value to these outcomes and establishing their impact reach. One of the more challenging aspects of the study was determining appropriate financial proxy measures for the outcomes; these will be explored in detail during the conference presentation.

#### RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS/CONCLUSIONS

It was established that football clubs, whether they are in metropolitan, regional or rural areas of Victoria, were significant social, cultural and financial enterprises that were sustained by committed individuals and the communities in which they were located. They delivered social, health and community benefits to individual participants and to their collective communities by providing: an environment which facilitated and sustained social connectedness; business and social networks which generated employment and inter-personal skill development opportunities and support; an effective setting for delivering health and safety campaign messages; and opportunity for social and physical activity. Football club members reported greater social connectedness, wellbeing and self-reported physical and mental health than the general Victorian population.

The social return on investment calculated for an average community football club indicated that for every \$1 spent to run a club, there was at least \$4.40 return in social value. There are recognised limitations of the SROI approach, such as not being able to attribute a financial proxy to abstract outcomes such as an individual's sense of belonging (Maier et al., 2014). Despite this, this study found the SROI approach had merit as an effective approach to quantifying the social value of a community sport club. The ability to generate such information has implications for community-based sporting organisations and future government policy and resource allocation. Further to this, understanding the resources needed and activities which take place within a community sport club and how these create social value could assist in improving the efficacy of such systems and generate positive recognition for such clubs.

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