

An evaluation of the impact of the Black Rhinos Junior Basketball program





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Acknowledgement of Country

RMIT University acknowledges the people of the Woiwurrung and Boonwurrung language groups of the eastern Kulin Nations on whose unceded lands we conduct the business of the University. RMIT University respectfully acknowledges their Ancestors and Elders, past and present.

RMIT also acknowledges the Traditional Custodians and their Ancestors of the lands and waters across Australia where we conduct our business.

Artwork: *Luwaytini* by Mark Cleaver, a proud Palawa person and RMIT Master of Human Resource Management student.



Contents

Acknowledgements	05		
Executive Summary	06		
Background	08		
Population Context			
Program Locale			
Using sport as a vehicle for psychosocial well-being and community connection			
UBUNTU			
Partnerships – Afri-Aus Care and RMIT			
Method	12		
Co-design of the expanded Program			
Findings of Co-design phase			
Mental and physical health education			
Life skills development			
Promoting a cohesive, safe, and inclusive community			
Developing linkages with the wider community			
Leadership			
Expansion of Existing Program: The Black Rhinos Basketball Program			
Implementation: The Black Rhinos Junior Basketball Program			
Schools Program			
Community Program			
Determining Impact			
Recruitment			
Impact Evaluation Data Collection			
School-based Program			
Community-based Program			
Data Analysis			
Findings	18		
Finding 1: Strengthened Relationships			
Youth Mentors and Students			
Youth Mentors and Teachers/School Community			
Youth Mentors and Families			
Finding 2: Enhanced Engagement in Learning			
Engagement in Learning and Academic Performance			
Leadership Development			
Goal Setting			
Finding 3: UBUNTU creates Belonging			
Youth Mentors			
Peers			
Family			
Community			
Discussions and recommendations	26		
Program Success			
Responding to Challenges			
The Importance of Mentor Retention			
Sustaining and Expanding the Program			
Future Research			
Recommendations			
Concluding remarks	28		
References	30		
Appendix 1:			
Co-Design Data Collection Methods	34		

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Executive Summary

As will be examined in this report, African-Australian young people face multiple social complexities that create exclusion within their socio-ecological environment. These experiences create a need for responses that understand the context and experiences of African-Australian young people, their families and communities. Afri-Aus Care and RMIT University's collaboration, made possible by a VicHealth Research Impact Grant is one such response.

This report describes the co-design, implementation, and evaluation of a sports-based youth development (SBYD) program for African-Australian young people and their families in southeast Melbourne. The co-design phase created opportunities for African-Australian community members in these local areas to lead the development and implementation of the Program.

This report demonstrates the Black Rhinos Junior Basketball Program has been a success, making a significant impact on the lives of young program participants, their families, teachers, and school communities. In particular, the Program strengthened connections among young people with their community, culture, and family, promoting health and wellbeing, reducing isolation, and offering comprehensive support and care. The Program also clearly demonstrated a capacity to enhance young participants' engagement in learning inside and outside of the school environment.

This report concludes with several recommendations including the need to sustain and expand the Black Rhinos Junior Basketball program. Sustaining the Program is important to ensure the positive impacts of the Program can continue for current and future young participants, their families, schools and community. Expansion of the Program to more locations across Victoria, where communities are facing similar challenges, should also be considered. Sustaining and expanding the Program will require the commitment and support of government, community, and philanthropic funders.

Recommendations

1. The Black Rhinos Junior Basketball Program is adequately resourced and funded to sustain and expand the current program.
2. The retention of Youth Mentors should be prioritised. This will be achieved by securing additional funding necessary to expand these roles, potentially offering full-time or permanent positions and professional development opportunities.
3. Afri-Aus Care and schools collaborate in addressing racism within the school environment.
4. Afri-Aus Care to explore ways to engage community and schools more effectively in discussion of Ubuntu principles.
5. Afri-Aus Care is supported to build their capabilities in research and evaluation methods to develop ongoing ownership and sustainability in future co-design initiatives, and in order to understand the impact of their services.
6. Future research is undertaken to examine school attendance and performance. Additionally, the longer-term impact of the program should also be examined.





"In year seven I used to get mad over small things, cause fights... portrayed as being bad and stuff... Helping me to focus on school, control my anger... (mentor name), he comes to my class, and talks about it and most of the time, he's usually around when stuff happens, so like, he's always trying to diffuse it, taking me for walks, control my anger... some people muck around and they do something that makes me mad, but (mentor name) says to come to him and go for walk and get some water to calm me down, come back to class and finish my work."

Junior Black Rhinos participant



Background

In July 2022, Afri-Aus Care and RMIT University were awarded a VicHealth Impact Research Grant to co-design, implement, and evaluate the impact of a sports-based youth development (SBYD) program for African-Australian young people and their families in southeast Melbourne. The initiative expanded Afri-Aus Care’s existing Black Rhinos Basketball Program, which focused on crime prevention for African Australians aged between 15–25. Rooted in the African philosophy of UBUNTU, the Black Rhinos Basketball Program fosters connections between the young people and their community, culture, and family, promoting health and wellbeing, reducing isolation, and offering comprehensive support and care. The objective of the VicHealth funded and expanded program (the Black Rhinos Junior Basketball Program) was also grounded in UBUNTU principles within a primary prevention model for ages 5-14 and co-designed and implemented in partnership with the Afri-Aus Care community.

This project was supported by an operational management group made up of Afri-Aus Care staff, the Black Rhinos Basketball coach, youth mentor and RMIT academics. This group was responsible for implementing and operating the Black Rhinos Junior Basketball Program. A research management group made up of RMIT academics and the Afri-Aus Care program manager was responsible for the co-design phase as well as measuring the impact of the program post implementation. A Reference Group made up of leaders from sport, community, local government, and academia provided strategic advice. Figure 1 illustrates these key stakeholders and their relationship to the project.

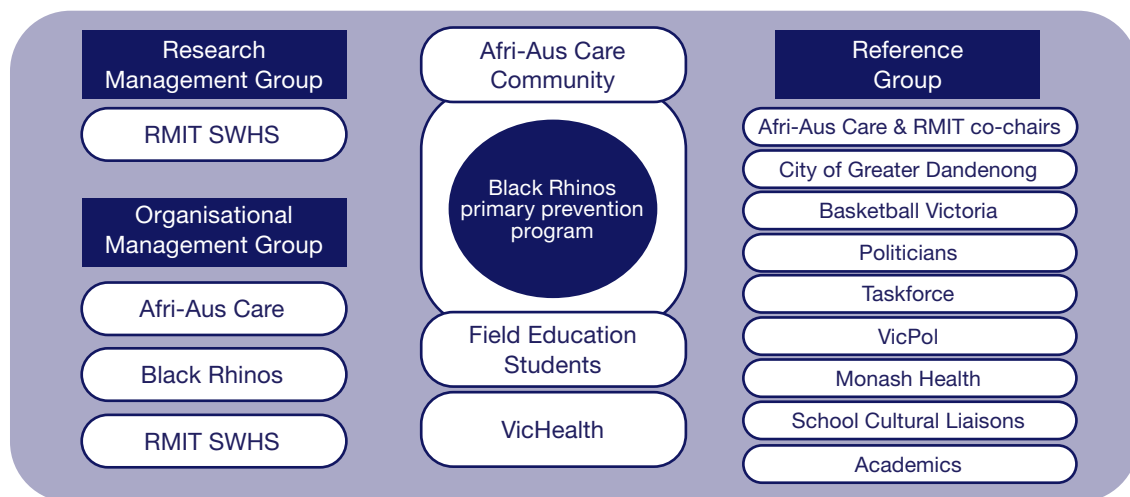


Figure 1: Research partnership and governance

Population Context

While this project has many participants from the broad African diaspora, there appears to be two noticeably identifiable cultural groups that predominate the Afri-Aus Care community, from East Africa –Somali (Muslim faith background) and South and North Sudanese (predominantly Christian and Muslim faith backgrounds). Commonly, these groups enter Australia through forced migration channels and have spent time living in transit countries such as North Sudan (in the capital Khartoum), in refugee camps in Kenya (Kakuma), Ethiopia and Egypt as displaced peoples (Cockett, 2016). This history is important when considering the intersectional identities, experiences and disadvantages of the participants of the Black Rhinos Basketball Program (Gentry, 2018; Williams, 2022). For example, participants who come from South Sudan may also identify as coming from rival inter-ethnic and tribal ancestry from the Bari (Equatorian), Dinka and Nuer tribal groups (ABS, 2016, p.1). Participants may be first or second-generation or forced migrants coming to Australia either on a #200 or #202 visa (former refugee or humanitarian Visa).

The recent wave in black African immigration to Australia is dominated by former refugees who have left war-torn countries (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2008). The arrival of Africans in the post-World War II period highlights that “increasing African immigration has been part of the post-war transformation of Australia from an overwhelmingly British-dominated population to a multicultural society” (Hugo, 2009, p. 17). Despite acculturative and social resettlement stressors, the vast majority of recently arrived young people of African descent express gratitude for the opportunity for a fresh start in Australia. In addition, they demonstrate that they are “proud of their contributions to Australian society and their desire to contribute to changing narratives of what it means to be African in a country like Australia” (Gatwiri & Anderson, 2022, p. 139) and in light of experiencing significant conflict in war-torn South Sudan or Somalia at their time of departure (Abur, 2019; Victorian Government, 2021). African-Australian young people are actively partaking in the complex activity of forming their identity, building their political voice, and contributing to Australian society (Gatwiri & Anderson, 2022; Gatwiri & Moran, 2022; Moran & Gatwiri, 2022; Moran & Robards, 2020; Moran, 2016).



African-Australian young people are located at the intersections of multiple vulnerable populations: they are young, they or their families usually come from a former refugee background, and they navigate social complexities which often cause exclusion in the Australian landscape. First or second-generation African-Australian young people may also have experienced trauma and they, or their immediate families, experienced tough economic, political, and social conditions resulting from civil war and tribal disputes spanning at least 50 years (Abur, 2019). Negative stereotypes, prejudice, racism, and discrimination are key factors undermining African-Australian young people's potential for equal rights as citizens in Australia (Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), 2010; Channel 9 Network, 2009; Milner & Khawaja, 2010; Retis & Tsagarousianou, 2019; Shepherd, Newton, & Farquharson, 2018; Williams et al., 2024). These experiences suggest the need for programs and responses that have a deep understanding of the context and experiences of African-Australian young people, their families and communities.

A study of the refugee experience of social cohesion in Australia found that “racism, intercultural contact, and the media had multiple and interrelated effects on aspects of social cohesion such as belonging, participation, and inclusion” (Dandy & Pe-Pua, 2015, p. 339). Adverse media coverage and stereotyping of young African-Australian communities has been relentless and somewhat unprecedented in terms of focusing on a specific cultural community for over a decade (Gatt, 2011; Macaulay & Deppeler, 2020; Majavu, 2020; Marjoribanks et al., 2010; Nolan et al., 2011; Run, 2013; Windle, 2008). This has resulted in significant negative effects on African-Australian young people's health (Abur, 2018; Abur & Mphande, 2020; AHRC, 2010; Land & Stovall, 2009; Mansouri, 2009; Nazroo et al., 2007; Rambaree & Knez, 2016; VicHealth 2005, 2008; Yasmeen, 2010). Unsurprisingly, newly arrived black African Australians report discrimination and economic disparity, which contributes to feeling socially excluded (AHRC, 2010; Williams et al., 2024; Zihabamwe, 2022). As a largely misunderstood population in Australian society, multiple studies report on the social exclusion of South Sudanese communities (for example) (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2008; Gatt, 2011; Marlowe, Harris & Lyons, 2013) as they “face a unique set of challenges as a result of their age, ethnicity, migration and direct/indirect trauma experience” (Windle cited in Griffiths, Sawikar & Muir, 2009, p. 32).

Young people in public places have always been a contentious issue (Furlong, 2013; White, 2009); regardless of whether they are presenting in a perceived anti-social way or not (Smith, 2011). However, common conceptualisations depict African-Australian young people displaying the potential for criminality or gang behaviour (Benier et al., 2020; Majavu, 2020; Shepherd et al., 2018). This construction obscures the opportunity to comprehensively understand the population, not only as resilient social agents, but also as individuals making choices in unique circumstances, based on distinct contexts and histories. Recent studies point to the possibility of African-Australian young people (such as the participants of the Black Rhinos Junior Basketball Program) described as culturally diverse and marginalised (Benier et al., 2020; Benier et al., 2018; Maher et al., 2020; Majavu, 2015, 2018, 2020; Shepherd, 2021; Shepherd et al., 2018; Shepherd & Spivak, 2020; Weber et al., 2021). Therefore, the need for culturally responsive, and tailored approaches are highlighted (Williams & Morris, 2024).

Program Locale

This project took place in the City of Greater Dandenong and City of Casey, geographical areas on the traditional lands of the Boonwurrung/Boonurong people in the south-eastern region of Naarm (Melbourne), Australia (see figure 1). These municipalities are characterised by rapidly growing culturally diverse populations with over 150 nationalities within each region, as well as being a common resettlement zones for former refugee communities (City of Greater Dandenong, 2024; City of Casey, 2014). Within these municipalities residents are more likely to experience multi-layered disadvantage including higher rates of social distress, social and health inequities, food insecurity, social isolation, and above average educational disengagement and unemployment amongst young people (City of Greater Dandenong, 2024; Tanton et al, 2021; Vinson et al., 2015).



Figure 2: Map of Greater Naarm (Melbourne) and bordering regions, featuring common resettlement zones.

Using sport as a vehicle for psychosocial well-being and community connection

Sports Based Youth Development (SBYD) programs have increased in popularity over the past two decades globally and in response to complex social and development challenges (Coakley, 2011; Coalter, 2013; Kay, 2012). SBYD programs are founded on principles of inclusion, participation and belonging (Whitley, 2019). Whitley defines SBYD as programs that 'intentionally foster development assets (e.g., values, commitment to learning, social competencies, positive identity) and surround youth with protective factors (e.g., support, relationships, experiences, resources, opportunities) that have been shown to be important facilitators of health' (Whitley, 2019, p.2). These approaches often focus on groups facing intersectional disadvantages such as young people from refugee and culturally diverse communities (Sherry et al., 2015). They are based on the global power, appeal and popularity of sport, while incorporating various elements such as life-skills, education, and capacity building elements (Holt et al., 2017).

Research on SBYD programs has found they have the capacity to enhance young participants' life-skills and enhance social, emotional and educational capabilities (Bunde-Birouste et al., 2012; Holt et al., 2017; Nathan et al., 2013; Weiss et al., 2016; Whitley et al., 2017; Whitley et al., 2018). Additionally, SBYD programs also demonstrate the capacity to positively influence social connectedness through relationships inside and outside of cultural and geographical communities (Spaaij, 2012, 2013). Several sources suggest that for African-Australian young people, social capital and self-identity can be facilitated through sport, while also providing an entry point to other services and supports (Abur, 2019; Mude & Mwanri, 2020; Nunn et al., 2022). Building on this knowledge, this project co-designed, implemented and evaluated a SBYD program for African-Australian young people and their families in the southeast region of Melbourne. The initiative aimed to foster connections among young people with their community, culture, and family, promoting health and wellbeing, reducing isolation, and offering comprehensive support and care.

UBUNTU¹

UBUNTU is an Indigenous African philosophy often explained as 'I am because you are' or 'I am because we are' and which prioritises reciprocity, mutuality, participation, and inclusion for collective wellbeing (Kuyini, 2013). As defined by Broodryk (2008, p. 17), UBUNTU is an "African worldview based on the values of intense humanness, caring, sharing, respect, compassion and associated values, ensuring a happy and qualitative community life in the spirit of family". Other authors have examined how the interconnected relationships central to UBUNTU through an individual's contributions to belonging, community, and responsibility, and reciprocity (Eze, 2008; Rankopo & Diraditsile, 2020). Afri-Aus Care was established and operates on UBUNTU principles, and all their programs are rooted in this philosophy. Therefore, UBUNTU has been a key guiding principle for the co-design, implementation and evaluation of the Black Rhinos Junior Basketball Program.

Partnerships – Afri-Aus Care and RMIT

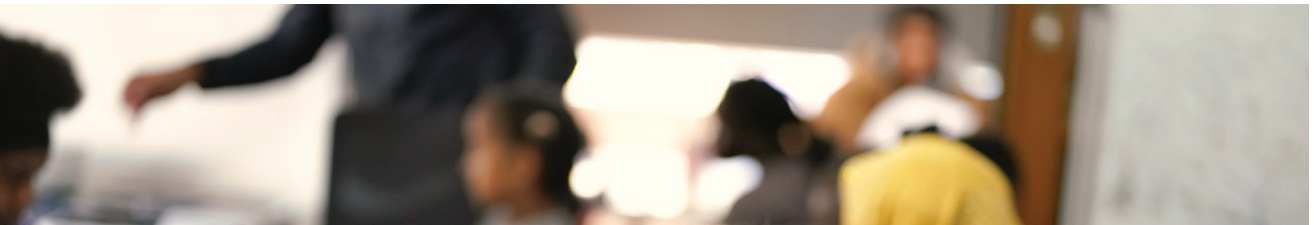
RMIT Social Work and Human Services has been in partnership with Afri-Aus Care since 2019 (Gondoza-Luka in Egan, Haralambous and O'Keeffe, 2022) which has included student placements, training and development and participation in research projects. The partnership focus has been on the delivery of Afri-Aus Care's Positive Change Model and the UBUNTU Framework within their well-established family-oriented activities connecting the families of participants with relevant services and programs. Over this time RMIT and Afri-Aus Care staff have been in discussion about this project with an emphasis towards primary prevention and the engagement of all African Australian families. The emphasis has been on how to integrate the strengths of Black Rhinos and the Afri-Aus Care programs to primary prevention with primary school aged children.

¹ Afri-Aus Care capitalises UBUNTU to differentiate their approach and application of the philosophy from other community and agency applications.



"I wouldn't use the word leader; I'd use the word 'independence.' The program has taught me to be independent and be myself... With my friends I'm not embarrassed, I don't mind saying things, I don't know how to explain it, but I'm just not ashamed...."

Junior Black Rhinos participant



"The program helps you with work, if you choose to take a different job, for example, like engineering, you will be really good at it, you will have really good knowledge about your community too, help build new buildings for the cities."

Junior Black Rhinos participant



Method

Afri-Aus Care and RMIT University successfully received funding from VicHealth to co-design, implement, evaluate and document the expansion of the existing Black Rhinos Basketball Program for primary school students in the south-eastern suburbs of Naarm. The primary objectives of the project were to develop a program that supported young people and their families to connect with Afri-Aus Care services and to enhance their physical, social and mental health and wellbeing through leadership development, community strengthening, and youth mentoring through UBUNTU.

Guided by the UBUNTU philosophy and community-based co-design (Till et al., 2022), the program was co-designed with the Afri-Aus Care community through three stages of focus groups and interviews. Co-design is an iterative process that aims to create new solutions to a common problem faced by multiple stakeholders (Sanders & Stappers, 2012) and it is increasingly popular in research and program development as an approach to engaging with culturally diverse communities (Kapuire et al., 2017; Winschiers-Theophilus et al., 2012).

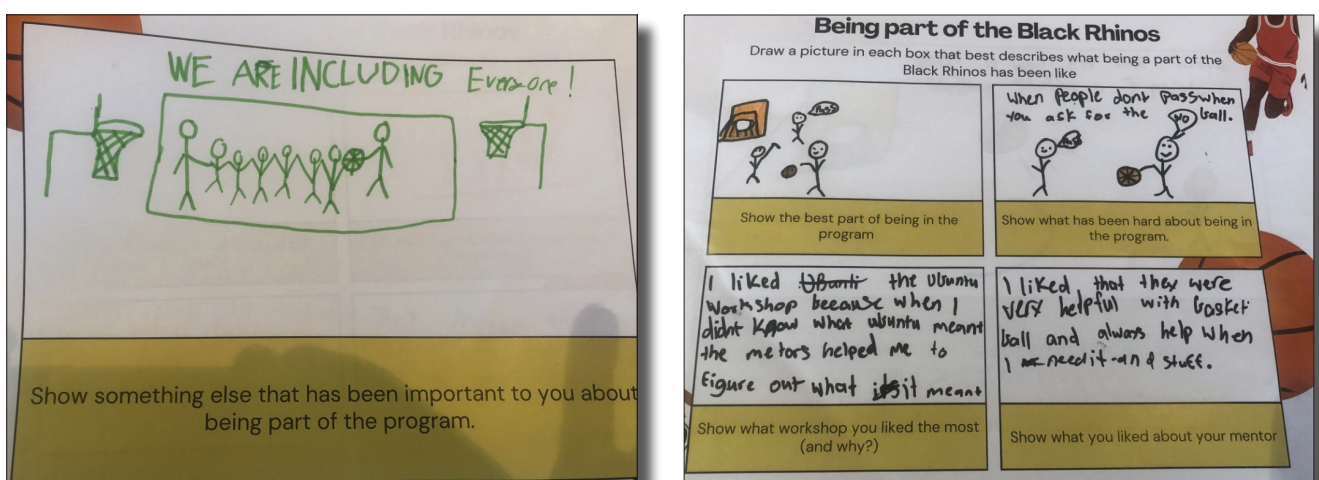
These qualitative methods developed trust with the community, explored community conceptualisations and views of key concepts and program elements, and identified program impact measures. The co-design focus groups and interviews were held in several locations in Naarm (Melbourne) between September and December 2022. Following program implementation, the impact of the program was explored through group interviews with diverse stakeholders and program beneficiaries. The interviews were held online and in person between November 2023 and May 2024.

Ethical approval was granted by the RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee (No. 2022-25696-18712). Additionally, as evaluation data was collected from students and teachers, ethical approval was granted by the Victoria Government Department of Education (No. 23-08-114).

Co-design of the expanded Program

The project utilised a series of methods to co-design and then evaluate the Black Rhinos Junior Basketball Program. The aim of the co-design phase of this project was to build a genuine partnership leading to the development of a holistic, culturally informed program, and positive community outcomes. Specifically, a community-based co-design (CBCD) (Till et al., 2022) methodology was used as it allowed for the application of co-design principles, processes, and methods, while prioritising community needs, practices, and values, most notably the UBUNTU philosophy. The UK Design Council's (2023) Double Diamond framework was adapted for the co-design of the Program. The first three phases (discover, define, and design) enabled the community, program, and research teams to determine areas of importance and inspiration for the expanded program. While some creative design methods were utilised within the interviews (including card-sorts and a charette protocol, see Appendix 1), the qualitative methods used within the co-design were influenced by the community (co-researchers) preference for storytelling, therefore focus groups and interviews prioritised narrative and open-ended discussions which helped to define key concepts and program priorities. Table 1 highlights the processes undertaken by RMIT University researchers with the Afri-Aus Care community during the co-design phase.

Recruitment of the community participants was managed by the Afri-Aus Care Project Manager. Seventeen participants were selected to represent the broad experiences and positions within the community, including men and women between 19-60 years old. Participants were selected for either their established or emerging cultural leadership, and their connection to either Afri-Aus Care or the existing Black Rhinos Basketball Program. All 17 participants are of diverse African descent, including 14 from refugee backgrounds. All participants provided their verbal and written consent to take part and were remunerated with a \$50 fuel voucher in recognition of their contributions.



Co-design data collection methods



Table 1 | Co-design process

Phases	Purpose	Who was involved
Phase 1 Discover Focus Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Establishment of relationship with co-researchers ■ University researchers and co-researchers develop shared understanding of UBUNTU philosophy and cultural protocols ■ Co-researchers reviewed, added, or refined proposed interview activities and design tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Group 1: ten community leaders/elders or parents of children who were involved in Afri-Aus Care activities. ■ Group 2: seven young people, aged 18-25, with experience of the existing Black Rhinos program, or other sports-based programs
Phase 2 Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Focus groups transcribed and thematically analyzed by research team ■ Activities and tools reviewed and modified in line with community feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ University Researchers
Phase 3 Define Exploratory Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Explored co-researcher's experiences of health and wellbeing, community and program impact measures ■ Design tools utilized if co-researcher agreed ■ Prompts questions guided discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 14 co-researchers (7 individual interviews, 2 interviews with two co-researchers and 1 interview with 3 co-researchers).
Phase 4 Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Focus groups transcribed and thematically analyzed by research team ■ Interview transcript reviewed by researchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ University Researchers and co-researchers
Phase 5 Design Workshop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Findings discussed with co-researchers ■ Researchers facilitated design charette to confirm and explore the community's 'big ideas' for program implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 15 young people and community elders/leaders with previous involvement in the program

Note | Adapted from 'A Culturally Humble Approach to Designing a Sports-Based Youth Development Program with African-Australian Community' by Goff et al., 2024

Findings of Co-design phase

The co-design focus groups and interviews resulted in identifying the key elements that should be embedded within the program, from the community's perspective.

Mental and physical health education

Participants in the co-design suggested that the program should focus on mental and physical health, however, it needed to be rooted in an understanding of cultural values and practices grounded in the UBUNTU philosophy.

Life skills development

Community members participating in the co-design suggested life skills development should be a central component of the program. Life-skills identified by participants included building confidence, leadership, language skills, emotional coping mechanisms, athletic ability, responsibility, positive behaviours, self, and community care. These skills were identified by participants as they were the main challenges experienced by young community members in relation to the emotional, physical, behavioural and social aspects of their lives. Participants stressed the importance of these learning opportunities being provided through fun and engaging activities for maximum effect.

Promoting a cohesive, safe, and inclusive community

All community member participants emphasised all program elements should be working towards building a cohesive, safe, and inclusive community. This appears to be influenced by a belief amongst participants that a safe, cohesive, and inclusive community can guard against the racism and discrimination faced by young people with their community, and lead to good health, well-being, and a sense of belonging.

Developing linkages with the wider community

The community participants believed the expanded program could facilitate linkages with the wider community, through regular events, activities and celebrations that would be open to the public. The participants felt that by regularly connecting with the wider community, there would be opportunities to share relevant local information and build social connections.

Leadership

Community participants identified that the Program should focus on developing leadership skills in young participants. Leadership skills were suggested to promote care, respect and kindness, which were identified by participants as deeply connected to the UBUNTU philosophy.

In summary the co-design phase highlighted community priorities for the new Black Rhinos Junior Basketball Program, including opportunities for building physical and mental health, community connection, life skills development, while integrating UBUNTU principles and values. Importantly, the community noted the program needed to go beyond playing basketball and focus on opportunities to develop and learn about respect, responsibility, equality, and reciprocity, and invoke a sense of connection and belonging.

Expansion of Existing Program: The Black Rhinos Basketball Program

The Black Rhinos Basketball Program is a grassroots crime prevention initiative for African-Australian youth (aged 18-30), managed by Afri-Aus Care Inc. The Black Rhinos Basketball Club has been in operation since 2017 in Melbourne, Australia (Onsando et. al, 2021). The program began as a community-led initiative to respond to the perceived increase of African youth crime in Victoria, to prevent crime, and build resilience of at-risk African-Australian young people (Onsando et. al, 2021). It has since grown into a formal Basketball club with 6 men's teams competing in the Melbourne Metropolitan Basketball League (MMBL).

The Black Rhinos program uses sport as a vehicle to connect at-risk youth and their families to culturally appropriate services facilitated through Afri-Aus Care. The program also provides young people (aged 18-30) with opportunities to connect with other community members, develop positive social skills, and supports effective reintegration of justice involved African youth back into the community (Onsando et. al, 2021; Young & Block, 2023).

Afri-Aus Care community members saw the success of the existing initiative and expressed the need for an expanded program to support youth (aged 17 and under). The community stressed the need for proactive approaches to ensure their children did not become at risk and had access to sport and other pro-social activities.

Implementation: The Black Rhinos Junior Basketball Program

Schools Program

The program officially launched on February 18, 2023, at Narre Warren South P-12 and Cranbourne Carlisle Primary School, coinciding with the start of the first school term of 2023. These schools were chosen by Afri-Aus Care as they were identified as most likely to benefit from a program supporting African-Australian young people and their families. A key component of the school programs was the introduction of three youth Mentors working between the two schools. Youth mentoring has often been used as a strategy for SBYD programs to achieve intended outcomes like those identified through the co-design process (Coalter, 2010). A deliberative strategy for introducing the Black Rhinos Junior Basketball Program was developed, involving two phases and a community program.

Phase 1: Building relationships (terms 1 and 2, 2023)

An intentional strategy for the program was for the youth Mentors to start slowly at the schools with a focus on building relationships with students, families, teachers, leaders, and other staff. This allowed for relationships and trust to be built organically with key stakeholders and allowed the mentors to assess the needs and priorities of the young people and the schools. The role of youth mentors initially was to work with African-Australian young people who had been identified by the school as potentially benefitting from a youth Mentor relationship. During this phase, the youth Mentors commenced basketball training and games during lunchtime at both schools and provided individual mentoring with a focus on building trust.

Phase 2: Intentional learning and responding to the needs of young people and their families (Terms 3 and 4, 2023, Term 1 and 2, 2024)

Once the youth Mentors had established relationships with students and school staff, various strategies were implemented in terms three and four. One example was the introduction of basketball workshops incorporating life-skills development activities. A member of the research team worked with the Mentors to develop the following workshop topics

1. Developing 'My Roster' – UBUNTU, family and TEAMWORK
2. DEFENCE – Guarding against Challenges (resilience)
3. OFFENCE – Being in the zone (Health and well-being)
4. Captain and Coach (Leadership & goal setting)



These topics were selected as they were either identified through the co-design process as a priority for learning, or the Mentors had identified the area through their work in the schools and with the young people. Activities were delivered on the basketball court using basketball activities and metaphors to prompt discussion and reflection on the above topics. Session outlines were prepared with detailed activities to support facilitation by the Mentors.

Another key development in terms three and four was the after-school homework clubs facilitated by Mentors. Prompted by Mentors' discussions with teachers and school leaders, the development of after-school homework clubs was a significant initiative aimed at enhancing student engagement and academic performance. The homework club aimed to create a supportive and fun environment where students were comfortable seeking trusted adults' support. Responding to students and teachers' needs, youth Mentors also provided in-class support which promoted student engagement and participation in class, enhancing the ability to cope with classroom challenges and distractions.

Community Program

The Black Rhinos Junior Basketball Program also commenced a community program in mid-2023. This program was independent from the school sessions and initiated at the request of Afri-Aus Care community members who were also involved as participants in the co-design stage of the project. Community members highlighted the need for a community-based program involving more young people and their families outside of the two schools.

The community program takes place every Sunday, and children and parents from the community gather at an indoor sports centre to play basketball facilitated by a youth Mentor, before returning to Afri-Aus Care. Upon return to Afri-Aus Care, other activities include a Homework Club, which involves experienced community educators and teachers volunteering their time to tutor young people with a focus on mathematics. While the children take part in basketball and the homework club, the Mamas (biological mothers, aunts or female carers of African descent) gather in the Afri-Aus Care Garden and kitchen to cook dinner for everyone present. The aim is to create opportunities for the Mamas to connect with one another, share stories, and build relationships with each other and the wider Afri-Aus Care community. The community program's objectives are reflecting the broader project which has a focus on physical and mental health, well-being, life-skills, education, leadership development and the creation of a safe, inclusive, and connected community.

Determining Impact

Impact can be measured in a variety of ways and while the research team explored existing impact tools relevant to either SBYP programs or specific cultural contexts, none offered a good fit for the specific environment in which the Black Rhinos Junior Basketball program operated. Consequently, given the original nature of the program and research, qualitative methods were used to capture and assess the program's impact for various stakeholders. Further, it was important to ensure that the methods for determining impact reflected the priorities set by the Afri-Aus Care community during the co-design phase, rather than apply a set of pre-determined measures which did not reflect the community or cultural context. The co-design phase clearly indicated the need for cultural humility, and this guided the research team in their data collection around program impact. These considerations indicated the importance of all key stakeholders being represented in impact data collection.

Recruitment

The evaluation participants were recruited through purposive sampling, representing program beneficiaries across both the school and community programs. These participants included young people participating in the school and community programs and their families (the Mamas), teachers, youth Mentors and Afri-Aus Care staff. While the participants were selected in relation to their engagement and delivery with the programs, some resided in other municipalities across Naarm including Footscray, Melton, Sunshine, North Richmond, Tarneit (Wurundjeri Woiwurrung), and Cranbourne, Pakenham, Noble Park (Southern Boonwurrung/Bunurong). Given pre-existing relationships across the research and program teams, the research team approached Youth Mentors and Afri-Aus Care staff directly to discuss their participation in the research. It was always made clear that participation was voluntary.

Impact Evaluation Data Collection

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with six teachers, comprising one in-person and five online interviews. Interviews ranged from 30-60 minutes in length. Three Afri-Aus Care Staff participated in online interviews, ranging from 40-60 minutes. Three Youth Mentors participated in a 60 minute in-person focus group.

School-based program

Three focus groups were conducted with students in the school-based program, comprising two groups of three and one group of two. The size of the groups was based on the suggestions of the youth Mentors who indicated individual interviews or large groups could be experienced as overwhelming and potentially discourage participation in the research. Youth Mentors also suggested creative methods would be most useful to engage participants, therefore various methods including open-ended discussions, card sorting, storyboards, and listing activities (Appendix 1) were utilised to ensure students had multiple ways to voice their experience of the program.

Community-based program

Two focus groups were conducted with thirty-three young people in the community program separated by their age groups (Group 1 early primary school, Group 2 upper primary school/ lower secondary school). Similar creative methods (illustrated in Appendix 1) were used, including open-ended discussions, card sorting, storyboards, and listening activities. Two focus groups involving 19 Mamas were conducted at Afri-Aus Care during a Sunday community session. Focus groups were suggested by Afri-Aus Care as a way of encouraging participation and promoting storytelling to communicate the impact of the program from their perspectives.

Data Analysis

Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework was used to guide the analysis across all stages of the program design and evaluation. This process involves a series of steps to enhance reliability and trustworthiness of findings. The process commences with familiarization, moves to coding and then several steps regarding development and finalization of themes. To enhance trustworthiness and rigour of the findings, members of the research team worked in pairs to identify themes and then met as a larger group, comparing, considering, refining and agreeing upon the final themes we present in the next section of the report. Data sets from each of the stakeholder groups were analysed individually initially and then compared and contrasted for similar themes.



Junior Rhinos Launch 2023



UBUNTU BLACK RHINOS EVENT

AN EVENT TO
CELEBRATE AFRICAN
PRIDE AND CULTURE

ACTIVITIES INCLUDE
3 ON 3 BASKETBALL TOURNAMENT,
FACE PAINTING, MUSIC, FOOD
TRUCKS AND MORE

Featuring
UNDROVTH, DJ AmAfrik,
DJ Kay Z & DJ Mexe, Disun Future,
Kofi (Drummer), Gucciboi and more



FEBRUARY 18, 2023

1 pm to 8 pm

**Junior Rhinos Launch
at 5.30 pm**

HARMONY SQUARE

Dandenong, VIC, 3175

CONTACT US

Kwacha Luka

0404293388

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Findings

We present three main findings here regarding the impact of the Black Rhinos Junior Basketball program. First, the program strengthens relationships through the intentional application of mentoring using sports-based youth-development programs. These relationships extend beyond the young person and the Mentor(s) to improved relationships between students and the school community; Mentors and the school community and the school community and families. This relational approach creates multiple positive outcomes including students being more engaged at school, having greater trust in teachers and learning new life skills. Importantly, the Mentors' work improves family engagement with the school and their child's educational experience.

The second theme of enhanced engagement in learning demonstrates the significant impact the Black Rhinos Junior Basketball Program is having in enhancing and strengthening young people's engagement in learning and education. Importantly, this enhanced engagement in learning creates confidence and builds leadership capabilities. The deliberate work of Mentors in goal setting with young people was also found to enhance students' engagement in education.

The final theme of UBUNTU, creating belonging, highlights the centrality and strength of the philosophy 'I am because you are'. The program has created multiple impacts in terms of the sense of belonging for young people and their families. This is most pronounced in the community program, but certainly we found evidence that young people feel a greater sense of belonging at school.

Finding 1: Strengthened Relationships

As a central feature of the program, mentoring is central to the facilitation and development of positive and supportive relationships with participants. These positive relationships extend beyond mentor to participant and include relationships with teachers, the wider school community, and families. In addition, we found the Mentors facilitate relationships between students/young people and students and teachers.

Youth Mentors and Students

The positive, fun and engaging approach of the youth Mentors enables relationships to form, with one teacher noting: "They've stepped into this school wide-eyed and big bright smiles and made connections with these kids. I think education's all about relationships and the relationships they've formed with students." Another teacher commented on the Mentor's engagement style:

They're larger than life figures. They walk the halls, and you can tell that the students really look up to them and when they're here they seek them out, they're excited to see them, they're excited to tell them about their week or what's happened since they were last here.

Phase one of the school program intentionally focused on building relationships, and the evaluation findings indicate this has been a successful strategy. Youth Mentors patiently take time to build trust, as described by this teacher: "They were patient enough, they gave him enough space. They found that balance to build that relationship with him, It does take a long time but they did it.' The significance of patience and trust building was reinforced by another teacher: "It's also they become trusted adults, and the students will often name them as that, as somebody that they are comfortable to talk to." An example provided by a teacher highlights the importance of trust when working with young people experiencing complex and challenging circumstances:

In that particular family there's been a few social issues with one of the girls out in the yard. So, (mentor name) and (mentor name) have been able to support her in the yard as well to make good choices. Obviously, there's the EAL language barrier; on top of that a language disorder makes it extremely difficult to read body language, to process what's going on and then get it out. So, through having a mentor around and a trusted adult in one of the Black Rhinos it's been really, really big for her where she can work through what's going on for her socially and that's on top of the academic work in the homework club. Couldn't speak more highly.

The mentors' relationship and trust building skills was also noted by Afri-Aus Care staff:

What I've observed is [the students] are considered complex but considered complex due to disadvantage that nobody's really looking at addressing... It's just like the teachers have identified that this kid is being complex and destructive, but because that's not their job or role, they're not looking for other [factors] beyond that. They're just thinking that this is a class clown or a kid that is emotionally damaged. What the Mentors do is they look deeper into some of the risk factors, some of the challenges that the child in school is going through. And [working] with the child, as well as contacting the parent and trying to address some of those needs.



Young program participants reinforced these findings, providing examples of the youth Mentors supporting them through difficult and complex situations as “I can talk to them [Mentors] about upsetting things and afterwards it makes me feel better: and another student commented “Makes me feel good that other people understand the racism and stuff, I feel safe... even if I like get into a conflict, I feel safe because (mentor name) will be talking to me and sort out the situation”.

The basis of relationship and trust flows onto students reporting new abilities to manage emotions and conflict. One student shared their positive experience:

In year seven I used to get mad over small things, cause fights... portrayed as being bad and stuff.... Helping me to focus on school, control my anger... (mentor name), he comes to my class, and talks about it and most of the time, he's usually around when stuff happens, so like, he's always trying to diffuse it, taking me for walks, control my anger... some people muck around and they do something that makes me mad, but (mentor name) says to come to him and go for walk and get some water to calm me down, come back to class and finish my work.

Another key aspect in the relationship between the Mentors and young people is shared cultural connections as reported by this Afri-Aus Care staff member:

The relationship is important because these young people, they look up to someone of their own, like they are Africans as well and they are working, and they are supporting them, and they have someone immediate that they can go and speak to. And the great thing about Mentors is they (the students) are supported positively. If they take criticism, they take it positively and also see how they can respond, instead of them responding abruptly and end up in problems.... The Mentors are second generation African people and the students are third generation. So, the second generation - they might have had it tough. So, they have the lessons to teach the younger people.

Teachers also spoke of the importance of shared cultural backgrounds between students and youth Mentors, providing something the teachers could not provide: “Sometimes they're more inclined to talk to someone of the same culture than they are to someone else as well so just helps in that way.”

The young people participating in the program reported that Mentors were role models:

“(mentor name) and (mentor name), you look up to them and understand because the stuff they do...you will see a future... inspires you to be like them and try and grow up to be like them.” Teachers also underlined the importance of youth Mentors acting as role model:

“So they've got a role model in that way that there are different options in life and you can do this as well, it doesn't have to be the other way.” While another teacher stated:

Like I said I think some of them, older siblings, aunties, uncles, cousins, getting themselves in a bit of trouble outside of school and so seeing people of the same age coming in and doing something positive like this is really showing them that that's a path they can take as well.

Youth Mentors and Teachers/School Community

In addition to building relationships with students during phase one, the Youth Mentors focused attention on relationship building with the school community including teachers and leaders. The purpose of this focus was to ensure Mentors could communicate the young people's experiences and needs to the school community and thereby expand understanding and empathy about the student's context. This youth mentor role was enacted multi-directionally and included communicating messages from teachers to students in an accessible and relevant format. This is explained by one youth mentor:

So, building a relationship with the teachers has been really great ... 'cos then you can kinda communicate about maybe some of the pain-points that they're seeing or whatever. But being able to also talk with the kids and kinda show them ... a different perspective cos you have that relationship that maybe the teachers don't necessarily have the opportunity to build, or, that the kids don't let them ... build ... you're essentially almost usually saying what the teacher's saying, it's just they (students) feel like it's more relatable, they can understand it better. And then that makes it easier for them to engage confidently in class with the teachers as well.

Youth Mentors deliberately embedding themselves within the school environment was seen as pivotal, with teachers appreciating the collaboration and partnership in creating a "united front" to support students. One teacher captured this partnership in this quote:

The relationships they've formed with students and staff in particular, that they're now on our systems and their emails are shared and their discussions and welfare of their kids that they interact with are all shared ... they're part of our staff.

Other teaching staff discussed how the in-class support provided by youth Mentors enabled collaboration with one teaching saying:

I'm like yeah, take him (student) out for a game like he's not focused, he's not in the right headspace. We're at that stage where he feels comfortable suggesting that and I'm comfortable to let him try new things and if it doesn't work we learn together. So yeah, ... definitely collaborative.

Other teachers noted that youth Mentors' involvement has changed the student-teacher relationships dynamic, seeing Mentors and teachers work together to demonstrate to young people that the teachers could be trusted too. One teacher provided the following example of a young person who had been involved in the out of home care system:

So one of my students...very much struggled to engage to start with, obviously big upheaval in life and stuff. Formed a really good connection with both (mentor name) and (mentor name), attendance improved. We'll talk to them (Mentors), they might talk to me, we can talk to each other... it's really helped her settle into school knowing that she has got support here, really helped because she obviously goes to instant distrust, so really helped her to then learn to trust me as well because seeing how positively I get along with the people she's learnt to trust too.

Youth Mentors and Families

The co-design of the program with the Afri-Aus Care community emphasised the importance of involving family members, and this requirement informed the Mentors approach. Evaluation data suggests youth Mentors have successfully built relationships with families while also linking them to the wider school environment. A school leader provided an example of the importance of establishing these relationships via youth Mentors:

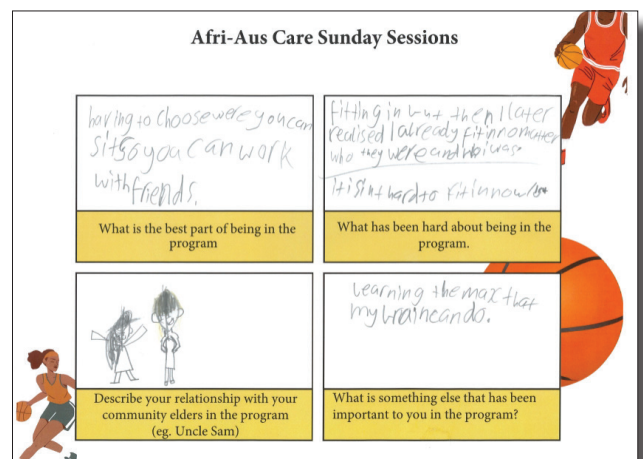
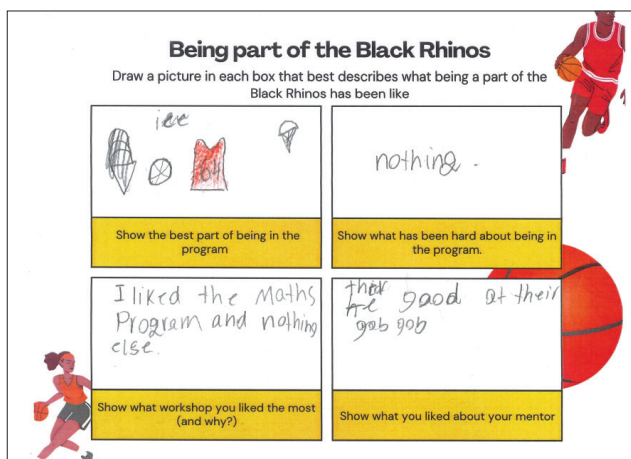
The engagement from the two specific families that we targeted for the homework club has been outstanding. What I have noticed from those programs outside of the actual impact on the students is we've got family members coming in and sitting with their student and picking things up as well. So one specific father has come in and to see his interaction with one of his boys has just been not only heartwarming but really, really powerful for the student...So the impact both student-focused but also family involvement has been fantastic.

Interviews with teachers and school leaders outlined the vital role youth Mentors played in connecting families with the school, leading to families that are more engaged with the school and their child's learning, and at times creating a relationship between families and the school for the first time:

So, the connection between home and school has gone from non-existent and extremely challenging to just the norm to see them both walk up the hallway, past my office door and into homework club on a Thursday afternoon.

Another example of family engagement was shared by a teacher:

One of the students...has a diagnosed intellectual disability.... when it comes to processing academic knowledge and new knowledge, finds it challenging and difficult and we can see some disengagement. So to have (mentor name)and (mentor name) not only work in the school but then have the families come in and the students be comfortable to learn and to potentially struggle with something in front of their parents with the support of one of the Black Rhinos Mentors is huge, it's huge.



Co-design data collection methods



Finding 2: Enhanced Engagement in Learning

The co-design phase with the Afri-Aus Care community emphasised the importance placed on education and ensuring young people's engagement at school. For the school program, having youth Mentors provide in-class support, lead the homework club, and facilitate life-skill workshops supported this engagement. Interviews with participants suggest that engagement with learning was significantly improved through involvement with the program and enabled personal development in areas such as leadership and goal setting.

Engagement in Learning and Academic Performance

All participants reported that involvement in the Black Rhinos Junior Basketball Program, through both the school and community programs, has improved young people's engagement with learning and contributed to improved academic performance. Young people consistently reported this with comments such as: "I understand lessons a lot more at school". The improvement is not limited to academic subjects with participants also gaining practical and life skills such as learning new strategies for managing their time and resources, which are crucial for both academic and personal growth.

Participants shared numerous success stories and positive experiences, reflecting the program's broad impact. "The best part of the program is learning something new alongside my peers," one student stated, emphasising the joy of shared learning experiences. This collaborative learning environment fostered a sense of camaraderie and mutual support among students.

The community program's strong focus on education through the two-hour Homework Club was highlighted with young people reporting that academic improvements were significant because of their involvement. One participant noted that "the most important thing about the program is the 'learning' part. We learn about everything here. We love learning very much, especially Math and English." Other young participants stated, "the program helps me improve grades in Math and English and now I am finding school a lot easier and manageable." Another 13-year-old boy said, "I love the education help and the way I get help from the tutors/Mentors in the program when I struggle."

Interviews with Mamas mirrored the responses of the children in relation to the impact of Homework club:

They (child) get a lot of – because if they have homework that's due next week and if they come to the Sunday program, they get help with their homework. Then going back to school, they will understand and have done their homework.

Another Mamma suggested the Homework Club was also taking pressure off her in supporting her child's education: "Especially the homework because my oldest one is just turned 13, he doesn't have anyone outside home so I'm the only one. If he comes here, he gets a lot of help, so it saves me time also." Another Mamma reinforced this by saying: "Yeah, same as like my son, he's in Year seven this year. I cannot help him much with his homework so I'm happy he joined this group and I hope they help him a lot."

One mamma said her child's teacher had noticed the significant improvement since involvement with the Homework Club:

The other thing I found from his teacher is he's good at math and that's because of the help he gets from here. So that's really good otherwise I would pay and take him to tutoring so I wouldn't afford that as being a single mum. So, coming here has helped us a lot ... At school, yeah.... His teacher said ... 'is anyone helping him at home?' I don't, it's here. So, he's really good, he's better than me even with maths. The teacher is seeing the difference. She asked me - even in his report he's good, he's ahead of where he's supposed to be.

The evaluation has identified that in addition to enhanced engagement with education and improved learning, the Black Rhinos Junior Basketball program facilitates other forms of learning. These include increased confidence and recognition of leadership abilities which are acknowledged and rewarded by the school community. These outcomes have a direct relationship to education as they improve engagement in learning. One teacher recounted a student's shift from needing rewards to stay motivated, to developing an intrinsic desire to learn and do well in school: "His whole mind shift is now he doesn't even need the reward anymore; he wants to do well". This transformation was attributed to the positive influence of having Mentors believe in him and provide consistent support. In addition to finding the program enhances engagement with learning, two other sub-themes emerge related to this broader theme. The first is the role of leadership development in young people and the second relates to the intentional and impactful use of goal setting.

Leadership Development

Leadership development was a consistent developmental outcome reported by research participants. This development of leadership skills is especially powerful for students who have been disengaged:

(A) student ... has been identified as potentially being in the leadership class for next year because of ... her ability to speak out in class and just in general. People identified her as a good leader, 'cos she already had those skills ... like the ability to not be influenced by other people, like she was a very independent person. Now, due to her achieving that goal to speak out, ... teachers are recognising her abilities more, I guess. So yeh, teachers have spoken to me about her saying that she should put her hand up for next year to maybe be maybe either sports captain or school captain.

Young people spoke to their development of leadership skills and independence and referenced a workshop facilitated by the Mentors. One student said:

I wouldn't use the word leader; I'd use the word 'independence.' The program has taught me to be independent and be myself... With my friends I'm not embarrassed, I don't mind saying things, I don't know how to explain it, but I'm just not ashamed....

Goal Setting

Youth Mentors intentionally focused on goal setting with young people in the program and this was found to have a direct impact on engagement in the classroom:

We... done a goal setting exercise with the kids ... and one of the girls ... her teacher had identified as well that she tends to be shy in class and does not like answering questions (or) putting her hands up even if she knows the answer. So that was a goal that we had set up and now that has improved, like she's definitely more involved in class discussions and stuff.

The combined impacts of goal setting and leadership development have led young people to rethink their futures, and in particular careers:

The program helps you with work, if you choose to take a – different job, for example, like engineering, you will be really good at it, you will have really good knowledge about your community too, help build new buildings for the cities.

Another young person was motivated to enact what they had seen in the Mentors when it came to their career, in saying they would like to:

Either be a teacher or do some other stuff....at most schools there is not many, like, for example black kids, black teachers they can relate to. Being a teacher, you can help them... talking about the racial thing.

The impact of the Mentors on the students' aspirations was identified by a teacher as well:

(O)ne of our students who probably tends to get in a little bit more trouble..., has actually said 'You know when I finish high school, I want to get into something like this, I want to be a mentor in schools'...and I think speaks volumes about the program as well.

Finding 3: UBUNTU creates Belonging

Earlier in this report the African philosophy of UBUNTU was introduced as a framework underpinning every aspect of the Black Rhinos Junior Basketball Program. Interviews with youth Mentors, Afri-Aus Care staff and Mammias confirmed the intentional use and impact of UBUNTU within the program. Interviews with school staff and young people however, suggested they struggled to understand and articulate core UBUNTU principles. Despite this, it was clear that UBUNTU principles play a key role in the program's delivery, helping shape a sense of belonging for young people and their families.

Youth Mentors

The importance of the youth Mentor's relationship with young people in the school program was described under Finding 1. Developing a relationship with a trusted adult, achieving educational and personal development outcomes, and having their family engage with the school has created a sense of belonging for students within the school environment.



An Afri-Aus Care staff member explained the importance of youth Mentors in embedding Ubuntu principles in their work:

What I feel is these young people - the Mentors are actually laying the foundations of UBUNTU ... so, they can communicate really well. So, UBUNTU is working. Once you just put a foundation, it's like magic, it works. Because it's about seeing yourself in other people's shoes. So, the Mentors, I think they're doing great work ... whatever they learned about what UBUNTU is, they are conveying it to the young people.

Peers

The program has helped to create a sense of belonging within the school environment by creating and strengthening relationships with peers from similar cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The need to strengthen these cultural bonds in the school environment is discussed by this school leader.

It's a very large school with a relatively low population base of African students and so the connection to culture in the school setting is quite weak, and oftentimes you'll see that a lot of the African students don't really necessarily feel like they've got a genuine voice... They're quite disjointed and so the students here tend to have a greater disconnect not only to their culture but also with each other within the school... So, you know there might be maybe one per class. Through that mentoring, you know, a lot of it is in that small group, you know, discussion work, it's resulted in those positive relationships to come into play, so 'Even though I'm not in your class, recess and lunchtime I'm spending that with you.' And...so their empowerment has grown because the confidence has grown within their group.

Young people consistently reported how the program created a sense of belonging: "There are people the same color as me; it makes me feel like I belong because they're understanding, and they go through the same problems as I have". Similarly, another young person commented "I do feel like I belong, because I see people like me, having dark skin." This shared cultural recognition and experience creates a supportive community environment where students feel understood and accepted. The program's emphasis on culture, pride and identity helps students connect with their cultural backgrounds within the school environment as explained by one young participant who commented "the program makes me show who I am" and stated that the program 'makes him "proud of his background" through a program specifically for him and his community. Other young people reported making new friends and strengthening existing friendships.

Teachers' observations support these findings and extend to include reflection on the positive impact of increased visibility and celebration of African culture within the school, resulting from the program: "This is my fifth year, so this is the first time to actually see African culture being instilled into our school".

Family

As explained earlier in the report all key stakeholders agree the program and the role of youth Mentors had created and strengthened family connections to the school environment. Young people within the school program reported that other family relationships had improved due to the program. Through the card sorting activity (Appendix 1), many young people chose the card: 'I'm getting on better with family,' and participant added: "Because of the programs, basketball...we talk, my siblings, talk more about what we do with (mentor name) and stuff. My family is happy I am not getting into trouble anymore." Another student commented "because me and my brother and sister we all go to the homework club they do every Thursday; we talk about what we do with (mentor name) and (mentor name)." The shared experience of the program deepened relationships in families as well as expanding horizons: "My 16-year-old sister is also part of the program; I have been spending more time with her. We're trying things together that we wouldn't do at home."



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Community

The community program prioritises spending time together as a community through basketball, tutoring, playing games and preparing and eating meals together. Young people attending the community program reported similar impacts to their peers in the school program and highlighted an increased sense of belonging. One young person comments: “It gives me a sense of community. Everyone needs to be part of something.”

This sense of belonging extends beyond the young people to strengthen and create relationships between the diverse Afri-Aus Care community. Afri-Aus Care staff explained that many Mamas were isolated and disconnected before connecting to the intentional community, with one staff member saying:

We’ve seen a big improvement in terms of just their engagement and their socialization. It’s a sense of connectedness for them, I think, like not only within our Somali but as the other lady said within other African communities as well. It makes them feel like they belong, it makes them feel like they’re not alone when they’re experiencing different things at school. They’re able to talk to each other about certain things so I think it’s a huge, huge improvement in terms of their mental health, their wellbeing and all of that.

The Mamas expressed gratitude for the community program, reinforcing the sense of belonging for their entire family, regardless of cultural identity. One Mamma explained that the welcoming environment and shared activities-built relationships quickly: “Other cultures, helping everyone like if someone’s cooking someone else is cleaning like everybody’s helping. It feels like you know those people years - I just met them. It’s good.” Another mamma explained that shared experiences create safety: “There’s nothing better than to be safe in a home because we all come from war countries”, while another Mamas celebrated differences “I met lots of different people, different cultures so I learn every time different culture like me and (mentor name), always we exchanging what does your culture have and is this okay”. This sense of belonging transcends all forms of difference, including religious: “We have a space if we want to pray our own prayer so there’s nothing stop us. (Afri-Aus Care staff name) provides us with a mat to pray on and whenever we need like we find space to wash so it’s very good. We communicate well.”

The community program also aims to strengthen intergenerational bonds between community members of all ages, as one Afri-Aus Care staff advised, there is so much young people can learn from their elders in regard to cultural identity and values:

We become equal. So, we know each other, we eat together, we cook together, so something very important. It’s good for our kids. This is a benefit for the future. When you teach the child - this is my background where I come from – she’s not going to forget. Without the Centre we don’t know where we can get help.

Finally, the Mamas reinforced the importance of food in bringing community together within and across generations:

It’s really important, everyone gets happy when they see food. Even our kids, as soon as they finish the homework, they’ll be running like is food ready? Like excitement, really excitement. They eat together. That is different than eating at home alone. Like excitement. When we do everything here, he likes it. Sometimes he doesn’t do it in the house but here he does it just because there’s others there.



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Discussions and recommendations

This collaborative project between Afri-Aus Care and RMIT University has responded to the need of supporting the health and wellbeing of young people and their families through a sports-based youth-development program. The co-design, implementation and evaluation of the Black Rhinos Junior Basketball Program created opportunities for African-Australian people to take ownership of the development of the Program and become more involved in community activities as the Program was embedded into both the school and community setting. In the following section, we discuss the successes evident the program, as well as the program challenges, the ongoing sustainability and staffing of the Program, and opportunities for future research. We conclude with project recommendations related to our learnings.

Program Success

The initial proposal for this VicHealth Research Impact Grant was to co-design, implement, and evaluate a sports-based youth development program for African-Australian young people and their families in the southeast region of Naarm (Melbourne). The findings suggest the project was successful in its objectives to foster connections among young people with their community, culture, and family, promoting health and wellbeing, reducing isolation, and offering comprehensive support and care.

The program reached these goals by creating and strengthening relationships at multiple levels through intentional and culturally located mentoring. The Youth Mentors established trusting and positive relationships with young people and their families. The Youth Mentors also created relationships and connections between families and the school environment. Another key relationship outcome was the Mentor's collaboration with teaching staff and representing the young people's needs. This collaboration created an impact by strengthening relationships between students and their teachers.

The findings also showed the school and community Black Rhinos Junior Basketball Programs' capacity to enhance young people's engagement in learning. Strategies such as in-class support, homework clubs, and tutoring were identified as effective measures. Additionally, the focus on personal development outcomes, such as fostering confidence, leadership skills, and goal setting, was found to positively impact students' engagement with learning.

Importantly, there is evidence that the program creates a sense of belonging for young participants through establishing relationships with Youth Mentors, while strengthening relationships with peers, family, and community. A sense of belonging was created through these relationships enhancing cultural identity. Principles of UBUNTU were found to be a key framework for the program leading to a sense of belonging for young people and their families.

Responding to Challenges

Although feedback from all stakeholders suggest the Black Rhinos Junior Basketball Program was successful in reaching its objectives, there are areas for improvement, particularly in the school program. Firstly, teachers noted that not all members of the school community were aware of the program, so communication about its objectives and outcomes should be a focus. Teachers suggest this would increase more "buy-in" from school staff and more participation from students.

The program was underpinned by UBUNTU principles used as a guiding philosophy throughout co-design and implementation phases. However, it was clear that key stakeholders such as young people and school staff struggled to articulate the meaning and philosophy of UBUNTU. Therefore, it is suggested the program and Afri-Aus Care explore ways to more effectively engage community and schools in discussions of UBUNTU principles.

Another challenge within the school environment is the racism African-Australian young people experience. The reflections from both students and Youth Mentors provide examples of overt racism and their frustrations, as expressed by one Mentor: "why does it keep happening? You only have so much power. You can only like only tell them (the student) to be the bigger person so many times." Therefore, the program has demonstrated success at individual and community levels, however, the racism experienced by young people of African descent within the larger school setting remains. The role of schools, programs such as Black Rhinos Junior Basketball Program, as well as organisations like Afri-Aus Care, in addressing racism needs further exploration and most likely increased collaboration.

The Importance of Mentor Retention

The importance of Mentor retention in the program cannot be overstated, as stable and consistent relationships between Mentors and students have been found to be the most crucial element of this program and will be essential for future success. However, Mentor retention has been hindered by resource limitations, such as having limited paid hours per week. Securing additional funding is necessary to expand these roles, potentially offering full-time and permanent positions, which would help in retaining Mentors. The program's greatest successes have been observed with Mentors who have established enduring relationships built on trust with students over time. Investing and building Youth Mentors' capacity will also support retention, including professional development opportunities that can enhance their effectiveness in supporting students. By prioritising Mentor retention and providing adequate remuneration and program resources, the Black Rhinos Junior Basketball Program can strengthen its impact and ensure sustained support for participants.



Sustaining and Expanding the Program

Sustaining the current program in both the short and long term should be a priority for all stakeholders. The program has found to have significant and positive impact for the young people and families it has worked alongside. Youth Mentors have built relationships of trust with young people and should the program not continue, it is likely that the positive outcomes achieved by young people would be in jeopardy. It would also stop future participants of the programs at these two schools and community program from accessing much needed support.

All key stakeholders have advised the need for the program outweighs its resources, with the numbers of Youth Mentors limited, current Mentors are often stretched too thinly. Interviews with teachers, school leaders, Youth Mentors and Afri-Aus Care staff all suggested greater numbers of Youth Mentors would ensure more support for African-Australian young people.

Expansion to more locations across Victoria should also be considered. The social and community issues faced by African-Australian and other culturally diverse communities are not unique to the southeastern suburbs of Melbourne. Expansion to other areas of Victoria will see the program benefit more young people, families, and communities. Sustaining and expanding the program will require the commitment and support of government, community, and philanthropic funders.

Future Research

This research has used qualitative methods to assess the impact of the program. Future research should focus on quantitative data such as school attendance and performance to test the findings of this report. Findings to date have focused on short-term outcomes in the first 12-18 months of the program's implementation. Future research should examine the longer term impacts the program has had on the lives of young people and their families. Finally, there are various elements of the Black Rhinos Junior Basketball Program spread across school and community programs. Evaluation of these elements to determine which are most effective will be important for the program's growth and development.

Recommendations

1. The Black Rhinos Junior Basketball Program is adequately resourced and funded to sustain and expand the current program.
2. The retention of Youth Mentors should be prioritised. This will be achieved by securing additional funding necessary to expand these roles, potentially offering full-time or permanent positions and professional development opportunities.
3. Afri-Aus Care and schools collaborate in addressing racism within the school environment.
4. Afri-Aus Care to explore ways to engage community and schools more effectively in discussion of Ubuntu principles.
5. Afri-Aus Care is supported to build their capabilities in research and evaluation methods to develop ongoing ownership and sustainability in future co-design initiatives, and in order to understand the impact of their services.
6. Future research is undertaken to examine school attendance and performance. Additionally, the longer-term impact of the program should also be examined.

Concluding remarks

This evaluation of the Black Rhinos Junior Basketball Program highlights that it has made significant and positive impacts on the lives of young people participating in the program, their families, teachers and broader school communities. The drive and passion of Afri-Aus Care staff, including Selba-Gondoza Luka, the CEO and Founder cannot be understated. The organisation's commitment to create and support community through activities like the Black Rhinos programs is commendable and inspirational. Much of the labour supporting this and other programs is voluntary and a reflection of the desire to support isolated and disadvantaged community members, regardless of their cultural or religious identities.

The research team from Social Work and Human Services at RMIT is privileged to have had the opportunity to undertake this work in partnership with Afri-Aus Care. Thank you for trusting us to engage with your community.



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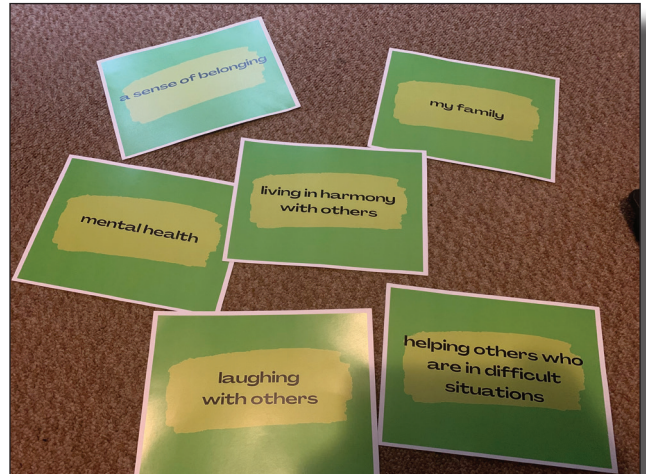
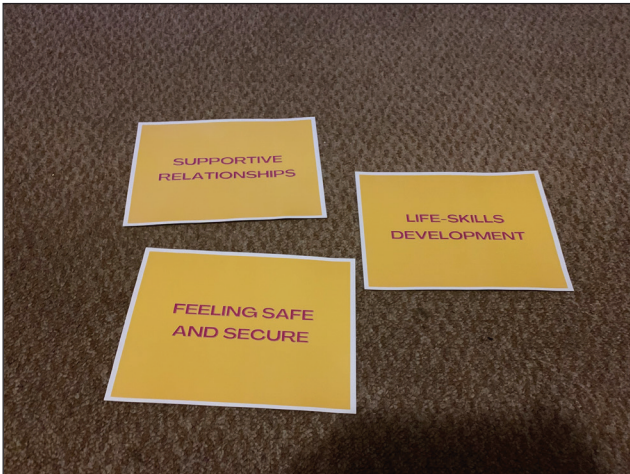
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Appendix 1:

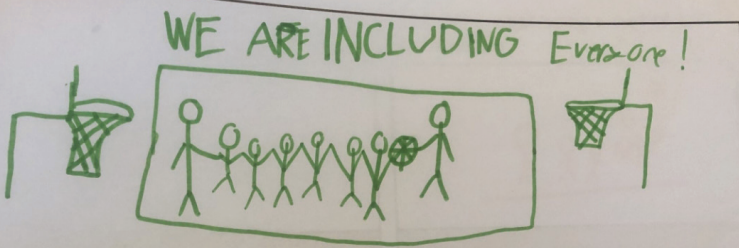
Co-Design Data

Collection Methods



Afri-Aus Care Sunday Sessions

<p>having to choose where you can sit so you can work with friends.</p> <p>What is the best part of being in the program</p>	<p>fitting in but then I later realised I already fit in among the who they were and that was it. It's not hard to fit in now.</p> <p>What has been hard about being in the program.</p>
 <p>Describe your relationship with your community elders in the program (eg. Uncle Sam)</p>	<p>learning the max that my brain can do.</p> <p>What is something else that has been important to you in the program?</p>



WE ARE INCLUDING Everyone!

Show something else that has been important to you about being part of the program.

Being part of the Black Rhinos

Draw a picture in each box that best describes what being a part of the Black Rhinos has been like



Show the best part of being in the program

nothing

Show what has been hard about being in the program.

I liked the Maths Program and nothing else.

Show what workshop you liked the most (and why?)

that are good at their job

Show what you liked about your mentor

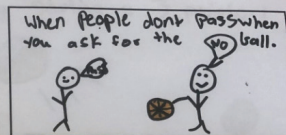


Being part of the Black Rhinos

Draw a picture in each box that best describes what being a part of the Black Rhinos has been like



Show the best part of being in the program



Show what has been hard about being in the program.

I liked ~~about~~ the Ubuntu Workshop because when I didn't know what Ubuntu meant the mentors helped me to figure out what it meant

Show what workshop you liked the most (and why?)

I liked that they were very helpful with basket ball and always help when I need it and stuff.

Show what you liked about your mentor



Being part of the Black Rhinos

Draw a picture in each box that best describes what being a part of the Black Rhinos has been like

The food and not staying home and being bored.

Show the best part of being in the program

Doing work.



Show what has been hard about being in the program.



Show what workshop you liked the most (and why?)

They help me if I struggle with something and their kind

Show what you liked about your mentor

Learning stuff I did not even know about.



Show something else that has been important to you about being part of the program.





TOPIC 4: Religion, culture and gender

How are different religions, cultural groups and genders included in the program?

"One of the parents who are from Afghanistan, I've asked them and they said "If they are playing in an open space, as long as they are not mixing with the boys." So, they allow them to come to play, as long as that court is just the girls. So, it is kind of important, because there are girls who are good at basketball."

IDEAS & SUGGESTIONS

- * Girls and boys separate teams ✓
- * Cultural appropriate clothes
- * Use sashes/armbands to differentiate teams
- Food, bringing a plate of food from home. *Cook our own food to show Ubuntu*
- * UBUNTU
 - Responsibility of others' needs, while reciprocating the respect to both parties. ✓
- KEEPING THE PROGRAM SIMPLE
- TARGETING PROGRAMS TO NEEDS AND ABILITIES OF THE CHILDREN/PARENTS. ✓

RESPECT, DON'T BE AGGRESSIVE, GOOD BEHAVIOUR ✓

What are you seeing?	What are you doing?	How are you feeling?
DIVERSITY ✓ RESPECT ✓ GOOD BEHAVIOUR ✓ LOVE, UNITY ✓ LISTENING TO COACHES AND PARENTS ✓ LET THE COACH DO THE COACHING ✓ MORE GIRLS INVOLVED ✓	RESPECT ✓ AND FUN! BEHAVE WELL RESPONSIBILITY SHARING, CARING FOR EACH OTHER CALL EACH OTHER BROTHER AND SISTER Respecting the space of the coaches MORE PARENTS INVOLVED	EXCITEMENT ✓ COMFORT ✓ FULFILMENT ✓ HAPPY Coach taking responsibility raising the child Girls are given opportunity

RMIT Classification: Trusted

TOPIC 3: Education

How are different life skills, mental health education, teamwork, communication, discrimination and nutrition training included in the program?

"I think all life skills you could learn in the setting could be incorporated as part of the training and the games. Like "How do we think we did in the game?" and then they could have a discussion about teamwork and taking responsibility as a team, and like naming emotions and what do we do with that."

IDEAS & SUGGESTIONS

- Life Skills: write, draw, read
- Mental health: coping, anger, grief
- Planning, preparing food
- Nutrition: good food, the best of fruit
- Cooking training - cleaning up
- Education for the present
 - how to deal with mental health
 - Support
 - Alcohol (education)
 - Help for money + father when could be difficult time
- Communication: asking children and behaviors, asking children if they are happy off during the activity
- Helping children
 - making
 - participating, deal with emotions
 - teamwork
 - teamwork, teamwork, teamwork
 - focus on present
- Socializing
 - social skills
 - address personal
 - new activities
 - learn not to discriminate
- Accountability
 - respect
 - discipline
 - showing respect all children
 - how children the culture, respect the culture, respect the culture

What are you seeing?	What are you doing?	How are you feeling?
children were at home listening involve them for everyone time management Parents: children listening to parents, advice - sometimes getting children doing the things you want to do people responding, take responsibility	observing listening active participating children playing children respect themselves children love each other, respect each other respect the family + the coach Mentors: training prepared	included (belonging) motivated excited children happy + excited parents are listening MENTOR: Empowered, in control wanting to give more prepared keeping emotions calm, children proud driven

TOPIC 5: Links with the wider community

How do you see the program being linked with the wider community?

"Because at the end of the day, as much as they can come to the program, they still have family outside of that and other community that they interact with. It would never be something that is happening in a vacuum in the rest of their life. Finding a way to bridge this space with the other spaces that they take up."

ALL COMMUNITY / BACKGROUND

IDEAS & SUGGESTIONS

- SPREAD THE WORD → * flyers / promotion / social media
- BRING THE COMMUNITY TOGETHER → BBQ / EVENT ✓
- SCHOOL / WORKPLACES → promote
- COMPETITION / TOURNAMENTS → Different schools / parts of the community
- CONCERT / CELEBRATION → BBQ / celebration / special event
- BIG → LAUNCH / EVENT
- SMART → FAMILY / FRIENDS
- Health + wellbeing assessment

What are you seeing?	What are you doing?	How are you feeling?
FAMILY INVOLVEMENT COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT CHILDREN FROM ALL AREAS (COMMUNITY INVOLVED) CHILDREN CHALLENGE THEMSELVES MEETING NEW PEOPLE (CULTURAL GROUPS) USES KIND OF DIFFERENT BACKGROUND	FAMILY + COMMUNITY CO TO WORK + BE INVOLVED GETTING INVOLVED VOLUNTEERING	HAPPY → THINGS TO DO CONNECTION LESS STRESS GREAT → EXCITED / PROUD - COMMUNITY

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Hard work is new needs

Bring a little skill is ok! CARE + SHARING

LOOKING FOR THEMSELVES IN OTHER AREAS - STICKING TOGETHER - UBUNTU RESPECT + LOVE + UNITY

TOPIC 2: LEADERSHIP

How are different forms of leadership (older people, young people, youth leadership) valued and created in the program?

"I guess what I see changing, it's having the community to decide on leadership and letting the community have an opportunity to talk about who they want as leaders..."

IDEAS & SUGGESTIONS

- Kids learn leadership skills
 - sharing ball around, practice allow
 - quality of leader: talk but be accepted, share for others, kindness, calm
 - Kids learn this through role playing, watching leadership role
 - motivation
 - leadership translate to social skills, other areas of life
 - top to bottom leadership:
 - coach
 - captain
 - vice captain
- Swap captain's role around
 - listening to parents / disagreement
 - parents / education leader
- Organisers
 - coaches
 - someone older

What are you seeing?	What are you doing?	How are you feeling?
Kids watching each other kids giving different things a go Sharing Listening some getting attention no technology (any team involved + design)	kids listening to the coaches "There's more to sport than winning" MUM FRIDAY good day	Encouraged - from leaders motivated



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