



Legislative Assembly for the
Australian Capital Territory

Standing Committee on Economics,
Industry and Recreation

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into barriers and opportunities for participation in community sports in the ACT

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Submitter: Team Sports 4 All (TS4A)

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Team Sports 4 All Submission to the Inquiry into Barriers and Opportunities for Participation in Community Sports in the ACT

Executive Summary

Team Sports 4 All (TS4A) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to this enquiry. We are an Australian charity that funds and supports kids from low SES households to participate in local club sport – any sport, any club. *Our submission recommends that the ACT government provides funding that – along with funding from a range of other sources – would see TS4A launch and operate in the ACT.* Our programs of support would solve the financial barrier (as well as other barriers) to sport participation for ACT's most financially disadvantaged children, and be an important component of the suite of initiatives that materialise from the current enquiry.

About TS4A & Our Purpose

TS4A believes in the power of sport – and in particular sporting clubs and their communities - to positively impact the lives of young Australians. Unfortunately, a significant number of Australian children live in households that cannot afford to fund their participation. Already disadvantaged, these children miss out on the myriad benefits of sport participation. Our purpose and focus is to solve the financial barrier to sport for these children, to provide ongoing support to them and their families, and to facilitate (through multi-year funding and support) their enduring participation in sport. Through this, we hope that their sport participation changes the trajectory of their lives (and their family's lives) and contributes to breaking the (often intergenerational) cycle of disadvantage.

While our core focus is financial disadvantage, the families we support commonly experience intersecting structural and health-related barriers to sport participation, including culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, First Nations identity, refugee or asylum-seeking status, disability, mental ill-health, alcohol and other drug dependency, housing insecurity, single parenthood, and family and domestic violence.

For a child to be eligible for support from TS4A, their parents or guardians need to hold a federal government Concession Card or Healthcare Card (as evidence of their socioeconomic disadvantage), or hold refugee status.

Our Model

When an eligible child/family is connected to TS4A for the first time, our approach involves the following:

1. Meeting with the family (and where appropriate, the child or children who wants to play sport) in order to assess their eligibility, understand the child's desired sport participation (sport/club), identify any nonfinancial barriers to participation, and to establish a trusting and supportive relationship.
2. Completing their registration with the selected club for the next available season, and paying for that registration. This can involve identifying new, flexible formats of participation (vs more formal, structured format) that are better suited to the circumstances of the family we are supporting.
3. Sourcing and providing whatever uniform, clothing, footwear or equipment the child needs for participation.
4. Solving non-financial barriers to participation (e.g. transport) in collaboration with the family, club, and any other relevant third parties.

5. Providing regular and recurring ongoing support (typically via phone calls) to the family to encourage and support continued participation, and problem solve unidentified barriers to participation that might eventuate.
6. Acting as a secondary contact point for the club, should they experience difficulties communicating with the child or family.
7. Repeating all of the above, for season after season – for as long as that child is eligible and wishes to keep playing sport (up until the age of 18)

Our approach also involves a range of partnerships and relationships with other organisations in the local community, including:

- Community Service Organisations (e.g. MARSS, Oz Child) – The families that we support are typically receiving support from one or more local community service organisations. We connect with each of these organisations, encouraging them to refer eligible families to us.
- Community Organisations – in each community in which we operate there are community organisations that represent or engage with our target cohort. TS4A connects with these in order to better broadcast the availability of our support to those who need it.
- Schools – Teachers and administrators at schools typically know the kids in their school community that want to play sport but cannot afford to. By engaging with these schools and their staff, we create opportunities for them to refer families to us.
- Clubs – We develop relationships and partnerships with all of the clubs at which TS4A funded kids play. This ensures that we know which clubs are most suitable for each child, and which clubs are most supportive of our purpose and impact.
- Sport SSO's & Leagues – Often underpinned by a formal MOU, we develop partnerships with these key stakeholders that typically involve financial support, awareness channels, and initiatives that support inexperienced participants (e.g. come-and-try sessions).
- Government – Local governments typically have programs, initiatives and supports in place for the cohorts that we support, so we partner with them to identify collaboration opportunities.
- Financial Supporters – our funding model relies on support from a range of supporters; government, philanthropists, foundations, corporates, and the general public. We engage with these to raise funds for our ongoing operation.

Our Track Record

TS4A has been operational since 2011, and is a registered DGR1 charity. We have funded and supported over 2,500 Victorian kids to play sport since inception, with over 1,100 currently playing. We have a proven, scalable model that has seen the number of kids playing sport through our funding double each year for the last 4 years. To achieve this, we have built a diverse revenue base that does not see us rely solely on any single source. A key component of our revenue profile has been government grants (mostly local and federal), and we have an exceptional track record of delivering on the outcomes documented in those grant agreements.

Not only have we been able to scale our operations to fund and support an ever-increasing number of children, but we have also achieved a strong retention/continuation rate of participation. 83% of the kids that we support continue participating in sport in the year after their initial season, and once kids have been playing sport via TS4A for 3 years, the drop out rate is below 10%.

This retention performance is underpinned by our model of regular and recurring support that we provide to each child and family. This approach enables us to anticipate, mitigate, and manage non-financial participation barriers in an effective way.

Sustainable & Enduring Participation

Our approach is that we support each child to play multiple seasons of sport. This is because we believe that the myriad benefits of sport participation are amplified when participation is enduring. We fund and support children for as long as they want to play – up to the age of 18 (or until the family can self-fund or are no longer eligible).

Our support differs significantly from voucher programs that have existed for some time in a number of Australian states, in that:

- We cover the entire cost of sport participation, not just a portion of it.
- The vast majority (98%+) of the children that we support are non-participants in sport prior to our intervention.
- We focus on participation in team sports, because team sport brings the powerful associated community-connection benefits that individual/solo activity doesn't.
- Families do not need to navigate systems and processes to access our support.
- We provide direct, ongoing support to families, which contributes meaningfully to their wellbeing and enduring participation.
- Because we engage directly with families, we can accurately monitor and measure the impact of our support.

Unlike some one-off, sport-focussed programs developed for disadvantaged cohorts, our program is focussed on sustainable and enduring sport participation. While sport sampling initiatives and sport boot-camps for disadvantaged participants are undoubtedly beneficial, they typically leave participants with no pathway to enduring participation and/or club and season involvement.

TS4A in ACT

The ABS data from the 2021 Census shows that there are just over 5,000 children living in Low Income Welfare Dependent (LIWD) households in the ACT. While this classification (LIWD) is not the prerequisite for support from TS4A, the data point is a suitable proxy for the size of the target cohort. When factoring this 5,000+ to account for age (5-18yo) and for the average rate of sport participation for the general population, we estimate that there are approximately 800-1,000 children in the ACT who would like to play sport but cannot because of financial barriers. These are the children and families that TS4A would seek to support in the ACT.

Consistent with TS4A's approach to funding in Victoria, our ACT operations would be funded by a combination of sources. Complementing funding from the ACT government, we would raise funds from a range of different avenues, including philanthropy (e.g. Snow Foundation, Hands Across Canberra), TS4A fundraising events, federal government grants (e.g. Play Well, Play our Way, etc.), 'retail' community fundraising, corporate grants and sponsorship, and in-kind contributions from sport SSO's and sport clubs.

The expense base of our proposed ACT operations would comprise three primary categories – season subscriptions for kids playing sport, uniforms/clothing/equipment/footwear for TS4A funded kids, and a salary for a program manager. For each of these, TS4A has a proven (per our

Victorian operations) low-cost approach that means we deliver our impact in a value-for-money, optimised manner:

- Season Subscriptions – Kids funded by TS4A are charged to us at a lower rate than for the general population. This is achieved through NSO/SSO capitation fee waive agreements and through discounts from clubs (our approach involves developing deep relationship with cubs and encouraging them to provide fee discounts to us).
- Uniforms/clothing/equipment/footwear – we generate a substantial quantity of donations of these, which means we rarely need to purchase them.
- Staff Resources – our staffing model is a combination of paid and volunteer staff. This keeps our salary overhead at a modest level. Our ACT operations would be led by a salary manager, and the rest of the TS4A team would be local volunteers.

As a result of the above, TS4A is able to achieve a cost-per-child for a year of sport at a level that is materially below that of the general population.

TS4A has already begun to research the ACT market and connect with key stakeholders. We have met with senior management at number of the major sporting codes (i.e. SSO's and equivalent). All are very supportive of a proposed TS4A presence in the ACT, and believe that the impact of bringing our proven approach to the ACT would be substantial. We are aware of the organisation Every Chance to Play (ECTP), and its program in the ACT. Their purpose is considerably aligned to that of TS4A, and we applaud their work. Through feedback we have received from various ACT stakeholders, we understand the impact and effectiveness of ECTP has been limited by a lack of resources. Should TS4A commence operations in ACT, then we would seek to collaborate with ECTP. Should the government funding previously made available to ECTP be repurposed to funding TS4A operations in ACT, then we would actively seek to partner with ECTP to identify how best for TS4A to provide continuity to the people, participants, and stakeholders already engaged with ECTP.

We note from the enquiry's website that most submissions already received have raised cost of participation as a material barrier to participation, and many have suggested some program of funded fee relief for financially disadvantaged would-be participants.
