TheInclusionClub

Episode 40: Sport Matters

http://theinclusionclub.com/2013/sportmatters/

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Peter Downs: Ok. Hello everybody! Peter Downs here from The Inclusion Club. I've got here with me today Jackie Lauff, Curtis Palmer from Sport Matters. I take this opportunity, while they're in town, to sit down with these guys. I've known Jackie for quite a number of years, just met Curtis today, but I'm intrigued by what Jackie is up to these days. I'm sure it's going to be quite sensational. She's a very good operator, but don't tell it to her face. Sport Matters! Jackie…

Jackie Lauff: Yes

PD: Can you just briefly explain to me what is Sport Matters, what do you do in Sport

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Matters?

JL: Yes... uhm... Sport Matters is a new organization in Australia, and I say new, but we're really in our second year now. Established in September, in 2011 and we're all about using sport for more than sport. So, we all know what an impact sport can have in people's lives. So our catch cry is “sport matters for everyone, for life”. And we talk about absolutely using sport as a tool to include and empower people with disabilities, but also we know that sport can make a difference for everybody in terms of health outcomes, education, economic development. So what we really want to see is: stronger developing outcomes using sports as a tool for social change.

PD: Ok, so you just started a year or so...

JL: Yeah.

PD: Really.

JL: Yeah.

PD: I know you work in certain parts of the world. Can you explain to me a little bit about those sorts of projects and what you do?

JL: Absolutely. You can think of us a little bit like world vision for sport.

PD: Right.

JL: So our focus is Australia, and we do have some projects in Australia coming soon, in Queensland and also in the Northern Territory, but our focus in developing countries is in the Pacific, in Asia and in Africa. Since we registered, we've been working in South Africa, in Fiji and also in Laos working on projects including people with disabilities and also including children and young people in their communities.

PD: And Curtis, you've just come in to Sport Matters!

Curtis Palmer: Yeah.

PD: Good on you!

CP: Thank you!

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PD: I think it's “Congratulations”. What's very briefly your background and what you think you bring to Sport Matters?

CP: Predominantly, I am a sportsman, so I've been to four different Paralympics Games in the past, and I was a gold medal winner in Athens. I play wheelchair rugby, and sport for me has been a massive part of my life. I broke my knee-cap in 1992 playing sport, playing rugby league, and so what sport has given me in terms of my rehab has been massive. And so, when I first heard about Sport Matters it was an opportunity for me to kind of give back what sport's given me, but in a much broader sense, you know. I am not just giving back to other people with disabilities. I am giving back to everyone. What appeals to me mostly is that these are people with a real need, people that are focusing on survival, and they don't necessarily have the right skills to push themselves forward. So, I'm so happy to be part of this organization.

PD: And so, you bring that kind of history. Before I turn to what the actual work is in these countries... What do you think Curtis? I don't know if you've been out there I am not sure. What will be some of the major challenges you think you might encounter in working in some of the countries that Jackie has already explained?

CP: I have been to quite a few third world countries in the past through previous jobs, and so I think the biggest… well there's two big things in my opinion that Sport Matters will face... is... one is the lack of resources, and the ability to afford them and in... particularly in some of these third world countries, the perception of disability is very negative and often people with disabilities are hidden away. So, getting these people out of their villages and into a program like Sport Matters will be a big challenge.

PD: And the other thing -- I have a question —don't you think will change some of those Perhaps negative attitudes towards inclusion of people with disability in those countries? What is the first sort of point when you start doing that?

CP: Just our presence is the first thing for me. It's creating awareness for people and showing the community and people that work with disabilities that, you know, the possibilities are really endless. It just depends on maybe a change of mindset and a different way of thinking about their situation.

PD: Yeah. Jack…

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JL: Well, from some of the activities we have done before and you will see in a way that you've done in the past… that sport is really powerful in highlighting and showcasing people's ability, and once people see, through sport, their attitudes, their awareness and their feelings will break down and they look at people with disabilities in a different light. From some of the work we did in South Africa, in one of the communities two hours north of Johannesburg, we had a mixture of people with disabilities and able-bodied sports coaches working with people with disabilities for the first time. They had a practical task to do, to coach a group of school children and early on in a workshop when we were preparing for this their perception was from the people with disabilities "we should let the able-bodied people speak because the children won't listen to us." which for us was quite confronting, but we obviously work-shopped that, and when it came the time to do the practical, the people with disabilities were leading, the able-bodied coaches were supportive and they worked together to lead the activities, to referee, and at the very end of that session, there was one student who said, in the discussion they had at the end: "isn't it about disabled people having the same rights as everyone else?"

PD: Bingo!

JL: Yes! They would have heard that differently if we had just walked into the room to a class and said: "Sport Matters for human rights." It's different if people experience it. And that's one of the things we love about wheelchair basketball as a tool for breaking down barriers.

PD: So, one of the keys is just doing something, get active and letting people see change happen and trying to...

I am interested in the kind of different cultures and contexts you work in because every society is different, every society has a different kind of culture, so how do you not enforce your own culture and beliefs on that society where they have their own embedded culture? But, you still want to influence attitude, you still want to have a positive experience. Is there kind of a cultural conflict, if you like, sometimes?

JL: I think that starts with your approach to development and the philosophy that you have going in. So, it's not about working with people and getting them to conform to the way that you think, but about respecting the place that people are at and seeing how you

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can utilize their strengths to make a change in their situation for the better, but a change that's in line with what they want. So, it is not about us going to the Solomon Islands next week and saying "this is how you should think, and this is what the outcome is going to be." Instead we've got an outline. We know roughly how to target the training group how to deliver, but there's an element of flexibility in that. We will use some participatory approaches, which are about finding out where people are at and together, go one step forward.

PD: So, you're kind of facilitating, within a kind of framework that you have, but you kind of facilitate the learning that comes from the group.

JL: Absolutely, and we don't know, right now, what the outcome is going to be.

PD: Yeah…

JL: And that's perfect.

PD: Yeah, because it'd be kind of wrong to think "this is what the outcome's going to be. Let's go towards that," but you don't know.

JL: Yeah, and for the same reason, we don't have a set of sports that we use in our tool kit, so depending on who you talk to, they'll tell you that their sports the one that's going to change the world.

PD: Yeah

JL: So whether it's cricket, or football or basketball, we don't care which one it is, but it's about finding out what the development needs are, and then selecting a tool or a series of tools to be able to get there.

PD: So do you have a kind of bank of your own tools and ideas that you can say "ok, next we need to do this"?

JL: Yes

PD: Is that how it works?

JL: Absolutely. But, it's more progression of getting first a need to identify what the project aims are. And I can give you an example from the work that we did in Laos last

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year, where we worked together with two local partners. One was Child Fund Laos and the other one was Laos Rugby Federation, not because we wanted to impose rugby on the community, but because they've got the skills, the staff and the reach to provide ongoing support for the youth leaders that we developed there. So that program involved football, volleyball, sepak takraw, that game where you kick...it's a kicking volleyball game with a rattan ball... They kick it over over a volleyball net. I didn't try it, but I can tell you that they're quite flexible... and also rugby. But, also a bunch of inclusive games which is not about winning or losing, which is about everyone participating, and the focus of that project was on voice, power and agency, and using sport to speak up. So, for that activity, we tailored some games that encouraged kids to use animal voices, to shout out and also finish with friendship circles where people were able to speak up and evaluate what they learned and what they got out of it, which is fantastic.

We did a tournament as part of our training, and people got to choose the sports that they wanted to do. And that's really important because for their on-going project, it's not about us saying "everyone's going to play football." They got to choose. The boys chose sepak takraw and football. The girls chose rugby, and boys and girls both played volleyball. So, it's just about empowering people to have a choice to do the sport that they want to do: choice and opportunity to participate at the level that they choose as well.

PD: So what do you think are some of the broader outcomes that Sport Matters achieves in some of these countries? Obviously It's not just about the sport outcome, there are bigger things happening here. Curtis what do you think? Some of the broader outcomes...

CP: Well yeah, that is right. I mean, the sporting side of it is great. I mean, everyone gets to have fun. It's a team environment and it's active, but you know, on a deeper level, the things that I can see happening, from our trip to the Solomon Islands, is the creation of leaders from people that didn't think that they could lead anyone. So, it's like... empowering them to come out of their shell. That's the biggest thing that I want to see coming out of the upcoming trip.

PD: I see. I see... Jack

JL: For me, it's most exciting to see people understand and really take responsibility for

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their own rights. When we talk about using sports as a tool to speak up and for people with disabilities... and they understand that, they really take on that sense of power with pride and don't have any problems about asking people for what they need and advocating for their own needs... so that's the kind of difference that I really like. And we're going to have an opportunity starting in the Solomons next week to work with our local partners and that is People with Disabilities Solomon Islands, is the local disabled people organization. Also the Solomon Islands Paralympics Committee, CBR - Community Based Rehabilitation which is linked to the Ministry of Health, and a bunch of other partners, and we'll be based at the Disability and Training Support Center, and it's going to be a huge opportunity for people to showcase through sport what their rights are.

PD: Oh yeah and all those partnerships too happening...that's a broader outcome in itself.

CP: Yeah, the goal for us really is to go in there and introduce some of these tools, and then step away so that they can learn it themselves.

PD: Yeah, leave the legacy.

JL: Absolutely. The final day of our visit to the Solomons will be a huge stakeholder forum. We'll have people like the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, along with a bunch of other national sport federations and all our community and disability partners, Save the Children is one that I didn't mention yet, but we will also be doing some targeted training for. It's quite exiting to learn about what their perspectives are about disability and what it means to include people with disabilities in sport, and which direction they'd like to go in. And in that way, we can determine how we can best support them.

PD: Brilliant. Thanks guys. Thank you very much. You'll find a link to the Sport Matters website under this video and some more information as well that you can have a look at in this particular episode. But thank to Curtis and to Jackie for sharing a bit of time with us today, and so thanks very much guys.

JL & CP: Thank you

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