



BALLARAT
FOUNDATION

IMPACT IN ACTION



Youth Support: Sport as connection



28% of youth in Ballarat feel lonely



60% of youth don't feel heard



Youth offending has increased by 36.8%



Long term mental health conditions in youth is 55% higher in Ballarat compared to Victorian average

Across Ballarat, many young people and vulnerable community members face practical and financial barriers that limit their ability to participate in sport, recreation and community life. Rising living costs, equipment expenses and transport challenges can prevent people from accessing the social connection, confidence and wellbeing that participation provides.

Through Community Impact Grants, the Ballarat Foundation supported local organisations including the Y Ballarat ReCranked program, the Ballarat Bulldogs All Abilities Football Club and VRI Delacombe Cricket Club to reduce these barriers and create more inclusive opportunities for participation.

The Challenge

For many families and individuals, the cost of participation in sport and recreation is

becoming increasingly difficult to manage. At the Ballarat Bulldogs All Abilities Football Club, league fees, insurance and registration costs were placing financial pressure on players with intellectual disabilities and their families. Some families were forced to make difficult choices between participation in football and other essential household expenses.

At VRI Delacombe Cricket Club, limited and ageing junior equipment meant some children were sharing poorly fitted protective gear or relying on outdated helmets. For some families, purchasing cricket equipment created an additional financial burden that risked limiting participation.

Meanwhile, participants in the Y Ballarat ReCranked program were often experiencing social isolation, financial hardship, unstable housing or unemployment. Limited access to

affordable and reliable transport created additional barriers to employment, services and community participation.

Without support, these barriers risked excluding people from the social, emotional and physical benefits that community participation can provide.

What changed?

Ballarat Foundation grant funding helped remove practical barriers to participation and created safer and more inclusive opportunities for connection.

Through the ReCranked program, vulnerable youth gained access to refurbished bicycles and support, helping them reconnect with work opportunities, appointments, exercise and community life. For George, a refurbished bike meant more than transport. It provided a way to reconnect with work opportunities, regain independence and participate more fully in community life. What may seem like a simple intervention became a practical pathway toward connection, confidence and greater independence. “For me this bike has given me more independence and stability”, says George. “I managed to get a job at the racing stables because of this bike”.

At the Ballarat Bulldogs All Abilities Football Club, funding helped reduce the financial burden associated with football participation for players with intellectual disabilities and their families. The support helped ensure players could continue participating in a safe and inclusive team environment without placing additional strain on already stretched household budgets.

VRI Delacombe Cricket Club used funding to purchase three complete junior cricket equipment kits and ten modern helmets with neck guards. “We were able to enrol our child in cricket for the first time without having to worry about paying the electricity bill”, stated one family. “It’s been life changing for him”.

Collectively, these projects helped ensure more people could safely and confidently participate in activities that support connection, wellbeing and belonging.

Outcomes

Foundation Outcome 1 - Reduced disadvantage in the Ballarat area

These projects reduced practical and financial barriers that limited participation in community life. Funding helped ensure children and young adults could access sport, recreation and transport opportunities regardless of their financial circumstances.

Examples of reduced disadvantage included:

- Lower participation costs for players with intellectual disabilities and their families
- Access to safe and modern cricket equipment without immediate financial burden on families
- Improved access to affordable transport for people experiencing disadvantage and social isolation
- Increased ability for vulnerable community members to participate safely and confidently in community activities

Foundation Outcome 2 - Increased community connection and cohesion

Participation in local clubs and community activities strengthened social connection, reduced isolation and increased participants’ sense of belonging.

Sporting clubs and community workshops created inclusive environments where people could:

- Build friendships and peer relationships
- Participate in shared community experiences
- Develop confidence in social settings
- Feel welcomed and included regardless of ability or financial circumstance
- Strengthen routine, engagement and connection with the broader community

These projects demonstrate how inclusive participation opportunities can strengthen community cohesion while supporting wellbeing and belonging across Ballarat.

Why this matters

These projects demonstrate that relatively small interventions can create significant impacts for people experiencing disadvantage.

For young people and vulnerable community members, participation in sport and recreation is about far more than physical activity. It provides opportunities to:

- Build friendships and social networks
- Develop confidence and self-esteem
- Reduce social isolation
- Strengthen routine and community participation
- Experience inclusion and belonging

Importantly, these projects reduced the likelihood that financial hardship or limited access to resources would prevent participation.

For families connected to the Ballarat Bulldogs All Abilities Football Club, financial support helped relieve pressure during a period of rising

living costs while ensuring players could continue participating in an inclusive and supportive environment.

For junior cricket players, access to safe and modern equipment helped remove barriers to participation while also easing financial pressure on families.

For participants in the ReCranked program, access to affordable transport supported greater independence, mobility and connection with the community.

Together, these projects highlight the important role community organisations play in creating inclusive participation opportunities that strengthen wellbeing and social connection across Ballarat.

By investing in accessible and inclusive participation opportunities, communities can strengthen belonging, resilience and wellbeing across Ballarat.

*Photo Front cover: Ballarat Bulldogs All Abilities Football Club
Rear photo: The Y Recranked team*

