

Reclink Australia has donated footballs for refugee families in Bendigo.

Reclink founder Peter Cullen AM visited Bendigo Community Health Services' central site to deliver the footballs to our Settlement Services team.

Mr Cullen was in Bendigo to meet with BCHS, welfare agencies, community groups and Victoria Police to create a Bendigo football team and Reclink Australia presence in the city.

Reclink Australia was born through an understanding that recreation could save lives.

"Boredom is a terrible emotion and can be deadly. Not meaning the normal boredom we experience, but having no goals, no vision and no sense of the future," Mr Cullen said.

"A scenario I witnessed over and over again was that boredom led to frustration, frustration led to drug use, drug use deteriorated to crime and crime to prison.

"I soon realised that more needed to be done to help our disadvantaged Australians, not in an office environment but on the streets, at the source of the problems people were experiencing.

"It was in those early years of working on the street that I quickly understood the power of involving people through the informality of recreation, where individuals could get involved, enjoy each other's company, be part of a sporting team and use recreation as a vehicle to rebuild trust, rebuild lives and help young people reconnect once more with the community."

Mr Cullen said Reclink Australia started with a simple 'kick to kick' at the Peanut Farm Reserve in St Kilda on a sunny Sunday afternoon.

"This simple activity had a transformational effect on the lives of individuals that played that day and a transformational experience for me in taking the decision to make this my life's work."

That 'kick to kick' in the park has now grown to a national organisation partnering with more than 360 other organisations to deliver hundreds of sport, recreation and arts participation opportunities to thousands of disadvantaged Australians.

The words of those Reclink Australia serves brings perspective to the organisation's achievement.

"It keeps me alive really. It's opened a door inside me and it's given me my spirit back," said one participant.

"It's taken away my suicidal feelings and I feel welcomed – a part of community and valued," said another.

"What do I get out of it? Life!" was another view.

Mr Cullen said welfare agencies and community groups played an enormous role in the success of Reclink Australia.

"Our aim is to include or involve people who either haven't participated or have a lot of barriers to participation. Very often trauma can lead to more trauma if people hit the streets that becomes a lot of barriers to being a part of any structure... their own family, work or being a part of a recreational club.

"Reclink meets people on their own turf.

"Agencies who support Reclink are asked to work co-operatively when they become members to be able to share resources such as the local footy team we're putting tougher.

“We knock on the doors of all the different community groups – whether it’s Rotary or the police. A number of welfare agencies, retired people, community volunteers, the AFL are supporting us with one of their staff.

“We can create a higher quality project by getting agencies or the community at large to work together under this Reclink model.”

SUPPORT RECLINK AUSTRALIA

If you are interested in supporting Reclink Australia contact Peter Cullen via email at peter.cullen@reclink.org or calling 0421 442 340.

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