

Utilising the sport of lifesaving to establish a “community base” within lifesaving organisations – the essentials, a model, the process and the benefits

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Background

Competition in lifesaving has been in existence for as long as organised lifesaving has been. It has been known purely as “competition” and not, by all participants, branded as a sport. It is now establishing itself as a identifiable “sport” within the wider sports community and therefore needs to continue to take the opportunities and benefits that sport offers.

Some of these benefits include:

- Access to a broader range of support organisations such as government the IOC etc.
- Adding perceived value to the established benefits of participating in a lifesaving movement.
- As part of the wider sports community, lifesaving sport can provide promotional and marketing exposure for the lifesaving movement overall.

Research in Australia shows that:

- The government has an expectation on sport to deliver a “greater community good” than just an opportunity to participate in the sport. Greater accountability to government is evident as the investment by government increases.
- Western Australians value sport and recreation very highly and the benefits can be narrowed down to three key areas (as identified in the Western Australian Governments 2005 research):
 - **Individual** - Life skills• Personal health and wellbeing• Creating and maintaining a social network.
 - **Family and social** - Close friendships• Strong family relationships• Improving self-worth.
 - **Community** - Creating and maintaining a safe community• Providing an opportunity for community relationships• Providing an inclusive community.

The clubs role

- Provide an “entry point” to the individual to participate in lifesaving sport.
- Provide regular access to competition.
- Provide an opportunity for basic skill and knowledge development for the lifesaver in lifesaving sport.
- Build the “capacity” of the club and the individual to compete, officiate and administrate in the sport at every level.
- Provide the exposure to the sport for its members.

The Club “Essentials”

Research shows clubs must provide:

- Structure to its activities.
- Training and competitive opportunities for its members.
- Skilled and knowledgeable coaches, officials and administrators.

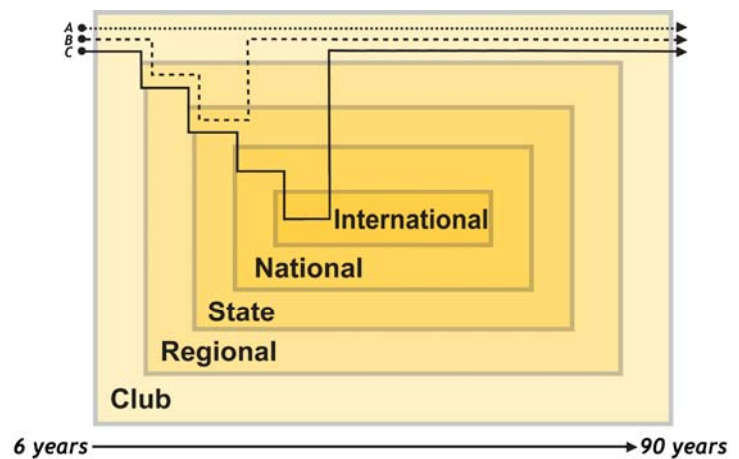
Benefits of participating in Lifesaving Sport at the club level:

- Gathering place/hub
- A sense of place
- A sense of belonging
- Opportunities for education and training
- Networks, skills and employment opportunities
- Access to traditional role models.
- Opportunity to be physically active.

A Model - Lifesaving Sport Pathways – “Cradle to the Grave”

The diagrams illustrates the pathways that would be available to an athlete in a fully developed organisation offering lifesaving sport. They range from club participation through to participation at the elite/international level.

The case studies illustrated in the diagrams show 3 people (A, B and C) entering the sport at the local club level (at about 6 years of age) and according to their wishes, talents and aspirations progressing along pathways of their choice as a lifelong activity.



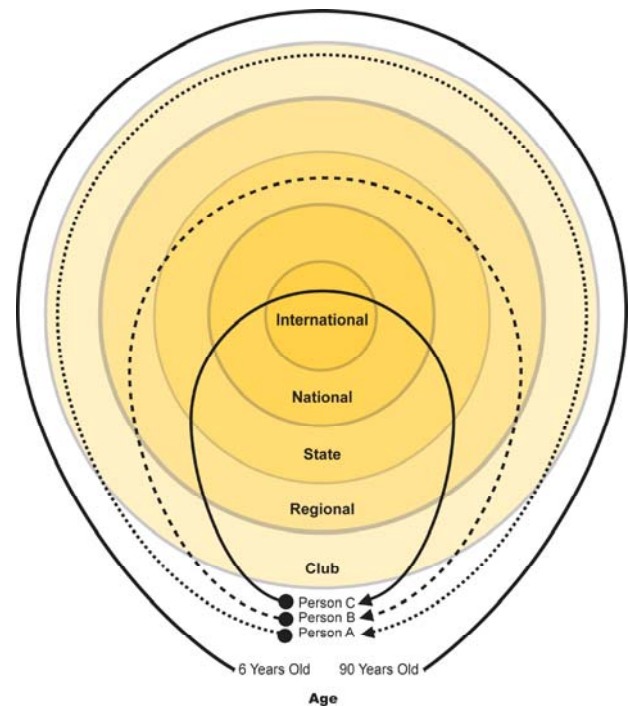
Person A (top dotted line) – this athlete enters the sport at the local club level and stays participating in the sport at the club level as a life long activity. In reality this represents the great majority of athletes in lifesaving sport. This demands critical quality services to be available at the local club level.

Person B (middle dotted line) - enters the sport at the local club level and progresses from club, to regional, to state level competition (usually at the height of their competitiveness in the mid 20’s) and then as they become less competitive they fall back into the club system to continue their participation as a life long activity.

Person C (bottom full line) - enters the sport at the local club level and progresses from club, to regional, to state, to national and then is selected to represent his country at the international level (usually at the height of their competitiveness in the mid 20’s) and then as they become less competitive they fall back into the club system to continue their participation as a life long activity.

This diagrammatical representation of pathways clearly shows the necessity for the sport to develop and resource all levels and aspects of a pathway.

Various levels of responsibility kick in at the different levels of the pathway. This is the challenge for all members of ILS wanting to develop lifesaving sport. Key partners must be found to deliver the services required at each level. Critical to the development of competition at these levels are the support structures that an organisation must develop and maintain. These support systems are in the areas of human resources and specialist systems and facilities. The development of quality coaches, officials and administrators at every level are essential human resources and the development of “centres of excellence” such as having programs in or stand alone “Sport Academies” and “Sports Institutes” that offer specialist services such as sports science at the regional, state and national levels are also regarded as essential on the long run.



Fundamentally, without a club base that offers an opportunity to participate the system will fail.

Take Home Messages

- Analyse the value lifesaving sport can bring to the individuals within your organisation and to your organisation itself.
- Think about the “partners” lifesaving sport has the potential to bring to your organisation.
- Understand the benefits lifesaving sport can deliver.
- Ensure you plan for and invest in the support systems and processes required for lifesaving sport to develop within your organisation.

References

1. Western Australian Government, “Community Perceptions Research, November 2005.
2. Other papers that contributed to the development of the concepts, trends and ideas in this presentation were:
 - Professor Fred Coalter, “The Social Benefits of Sport” – An Overview to Inform the Community Planning Process, Institute for Sports Research, University of Stirling, sportscotland Research Report no. 98, January 2005.
 - Dr Dave Goddard, “The Restructuring of Cricket in WA”, a discussion paper on the rethinking of sport development, unpublished, 1999.